CHAPTER FOUR

WALDENSIANS AND THE CATHOLIC POOR

Valdes and Durán

It is undoubtedly the case that while some recent historiography has enthusiastically sought to establish the connection of the Cathars with Catalonia, there has been a neglect concerning the subject of the Waldensians in the lands of the Crown of Aragon, a neglect which contrasts with the many excellent recent studies upon the Waldensians in general.1 Yet (as Jordi Ventura recognized) prior to the advent of the Franciscans and Dominicans, the first Waldensians and the reconciled Catholic Poor played a significant part in the religious history of Aragon and Catalonia. Certainly in Aragon, as internationally, they posed a greater threat to the Church than is often supposed, and, it can be argued, a far greater threat than the Cathars, since they were in the main much closer to Catholic orthodoxy and more easily able to undermine it.2 Their numbers were greater than is sometimes suggested, reflecting the influence of their founder, Valdes, and they possessed a degree of organization which appears to have outstripped that of other heretics. Moreover, within the lands of the Crown, they produced one of the more remarkable religious figures of the period of the Albigensian crusade in the person of Durán of Huesca.3 Durán gives us not only a helpful picture of the early concerns of the Waldensian movement, but also of the beliefs of other heretics, and the charges


2 See Ventura, Els hereges catalans; idem, ‘La Valdesía’, 275–317; idem, ‘Catarisme i Valdesía’, 123–34. Nobody has taken up the theme after Ventura.

brought against them by Catholics and Waldensians alike. Moreover, the fluctuating fortunes of Durán’s Catholic Poor remind us of the sometimes very thin line between heresy and orthodoxy in the early thirteenth century.

A somewhat bold attempt by Yves Dossat to place Durán’s birthplace in the Rouergue has not won approval from the specialists on the theme. Dossat’s first argument was that the name Durán was virtually unknown in Huesca and its region in the twelfth century, an argument which he himself then proceeded successfully to undermine by mentioning some well-known Duranduses, though a closer reading of the documents of the conquest of the valley of the Ebro would certainly have furnished him with many more. A second argument was that heretics were unknown throughout Aragon, and that Waldensianism, like other heresy, was confined to Catalonia, the successes of the reforming bishops of Huesca leaving no space in their documents for any mention of heresy. One could argue in response that the legislation enacted by Alfonso II in 1194 and Peter II in 1198 was first aimed at Waldensianism, and not in a specific place but throughout their realms. Equally, one could mention the letter sent by Sancha of Castile, then a nun at Sixena, to Innocent III in 1202/3, asking him how to deal with the problem of heresy. Yet what renders Dossat’s thesis especially unlikely is a letter which he altogether ignored – the telling letter, Cum dilectus filius, sent in May 1212 by Innocent III to Bishop García Gudal of Huesca (‘Oscensi episcopo’), as well as to the bishops of Barcelona and Marseille, concerning ‘Durandus de Osca’ and his followers, in which Innocent informed the bishops of their reconciliation to the church and asked for them to be protected in their dioceses. Since the

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7 J. Marquès, ‘Alfonso II el Casto y la seo de Gerona’, VII.CHCA, ii. (1962), 218–9, no. 5; Baraut, ‘Els incis de la inquisició’, 420–2, no. 2.
9 PL, ccxvi, 607; MDI, 508–9, no. 480: ‘Cum dilectus filius Durandus de Osca acolitus et socii sui a secta Waldensium per nos reconciliati sint ecclesiastice unitati, fraternitati tue per apostolica scripta mandamus, quatinus ipsos infra catholicum gregem