THE FOURTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCISCANS AND THEIR CRITICS

I. The Order's Growth and Character

Historians of the Franciscan Order have written about the period between the mid-fourteenth and the early fifteenth centuries as an adjunct to two peripheral themes: the rise of the Observants and the Great Schism. Conscious of the parallel development of the Observants, some have seen in Conventual history little beyond the decadence and decline that inevitably precede a reform movement.[1] Those who have studied the Franciscan involvement in the schism, on the other hand, have either overlooked the Order's internal history entirely or have subordinated it to the broader subject of Minorite participation in church history.[2] Writing on Conventual history after 1350, J. R. H. Moorman, David Knowles, A. G. Little and

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[1] Riccardo Pratesi, for example, in "Francesco Micheli del Padovano, di Firenze, teologo ed umanista francescano del sec. XV," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 47 and 48 (1954 and 1955), refers to the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries as an era of "slackness" and "decadence" in the Order, and points to the insubordination, strife and violence of the friars, along with their ambition for offices, as evidence of this.

[2] In a pair of complementary articles, "Die avignonesische Obedienz der Mendikanterorden zür Zeit des grossen Schismas," in *Quellen und Forschungen aus dem Gebiete der Geschichte*, I and II, and "Die avignonesische Obedienz im Franziskanerorden zür Zeit des grossen abendländischen Schismas," in *Franziskanische Studien*, I (1914), 165–192, 312–327 and 479–490, Konrad Eubel edited and commented on documents illustrating the history of the Clementine friars during the schism. Otto Hüttebräuker, *Der Minoritenorden zür Zeit des Grossen Schismas* (Berlin, 1893), is limited to an appreciation of structural changes in the Order and a survey of benefits conferred on the Minorites by the Urbanist and Clementine popes. However, he does recognize in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries "the most important and far-reaching period in the Order's history after the early thirteenth century," and concludes that, because of the even closer ties with the papacy created during the schism, the Franciscan Order consciously underwent a tremendous revitalization and advance, which assured its predominant position in the fifteenth century.

others gave an important emphasis to the anti-mendicant literature of the period. And, although they make allowances for exaggeration in degree in the works of the friars' critics, they largely accept their allegations in kind. Too often the abundant anti-mendicant literature of these years has been used to prove flagrant laxness among the Conventuals by historians who have then argued that this corruption itself accounts for the copious writings against the friars.

Moorman repeats the accusations in the critical treatises largely without comment, despite his acquaintance with much of the documentary evidence from within the Order.[3] Knowles points to the "spirit of the age" as one cause of the fourteenth-century criticism of the mendicants, and notes that historians' dark view of the period after 1350 has been influenced by their estimates of the psychological and demographic effects of the plague of 1348–49.[4] The assumption of an inevitable link between falling population and spiritual decline has distorted the interpretation of fourteenth-century history.

In *Studies in English Franciscan History*, A. G. Little was ambivalent in his use of the satirical and polemical literature against the friars, now acknowledging its validity, now adopting a skeptical attitude toward it.[5] In an important article on the mendicant-clerical disputes of the fourteenth century, Père Hugolin Lippens shed new light on anti-mendicant criticism. Stressing the clergy's reliance on custom and that of the mendicants on written law, he showed that jurisdictional clashes and written polemic between the two groups were all but inevitable.[6] By contrast, G. M. Trevelyan, who wrote a good deal about the friars in his *England in the Age of Wyclif*, was only too happy to use the claims of Wyclif and other opponents of the friars to make a case against them, and freely admitted his reliance on the critical literature:

> In the attempt that I have made in this chapter to give some representation of the state and influence of the Church at the end of the fourteenth century, I have relied very much, as will

[3] J. R. H. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order from its Origin to the Year 1517* (Oxford, 1968).

[4] David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, Vol. II (Cambridge, England, 1955).

[5] A. G. Little, *Studies in English Franciscan History* (Manchester, 1917).

[6] H. Lippens, "Le droit nouveau des Mendiants en conflit avec le droit coutumier du clergé séculier du concile de Vienne à celui de Trente," in AFH, 47 (1954), 241–292.

> be seen by the authorities quoted, on the consensus of opinion of satirists and other writers of the period. I have indeed as far as possible trusted to the documents of more official and responsible persons, but it is impossible to get much idea of the actual influence of an institution from official documents, for they only represent what the institution is meant to be and not what it is.[7]

It will be argued here that certain kinds of "official documents" can provide at least as much information about an institution, if not more, than satirical writings, and that the fourteenth-century statutes of the Franciscans say a great deal both about the Order's influence and about its internal condition.

In a 1953 article in *Speculum*, Arnold Williams argued that the anti-mendicant literature was formulaic rather than original, based on a pattern of criticism established by William of St. Amour a hundred years earlier.[8] Chaucer's friar in *The Canterbury Tales* and his excoriation of the mendicants in the Summoner's Tale and elsewhere were, Williams claimed, not drawn from Chaucer's own experience at all and therefore cannot be cited as a reflection of the friars' behavior in his day.[9] Even if Williams' evidence were convincing, the material presented below from contemporary statutes and from critics within the Order would show that Chaucer's characters were based on fact. Unfortunately, the article's credibility is weakened by numerous inaccuracies and by the author's apparently cursory knowledge of Wyclif, whose arguments often parallel those in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Aubrey Gwynn and L. L. Hammerich have done important work on Richard FitzRalph, but Gwynn was primarily interested in his biography and sermon technique, and Hammerich in his personality and activities at the curia.[10] Neither attempted to place him

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[7] George Macaulay Trevelyan, *England in the Age of Wyclif* (London, 1899), pp. 105–106.

[8] Arnold Williams, "Chaucer and the Friars," in *Speculum*, 28 (1953), 499–513.

[9] G. R. Owst, in *Preaching in Medieval England* (Cambridge, England, 1926) and *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge, England, 1933), pointed out that a century or more of pulpit commonplaces lie behind Wyclif and Langland, and that the characters in *The Canterbury Tales* drew on traditional sermon-types as their models. But this hardly means that Chaucer or Langland failed to draw on their own experience.

[10] Aubrey Gwynn, "Richard FitzRalph, Archbishop of Armagh," in *Studies, An Irish Quarterly Review*, 22 (1933), 389–405 and 591–607; 23 (1934), 395–411;

within the broad context of anti-mendicant polemic that extended chronologically throughout the fourteenth century and into the fifteenth, and geographically to nearly all parts of Europe.

The secondary literature on Franciscan history after 1350 largely reflects the conclusions of Wyclif, FitzRalph and other opponents of the mendicants; it describes the second half of the century as a relatively obscure and undistinguished period in the Order's history marked by wide deviation from the example of Francis.

The writings on which this conclusion is based were not uniform in genre, structure or intent. Their tone ranged from the affable ridicule of popular songs and poems to the bitter ranting of Wyclif's polemical treatises. In general, however, this literature falls into two categories. One includes polemical works written by learned clerics, often academicians, intended to oppose the mendicants on theoretical grounds. The other includes the wide variety of popular works which amused readers or hearers by pointing to mendicant hypocrisy.

The anti-mendicant controversy, unlike other contemporary controversies (the anti-feminist argument, for example), was not really a debate. It was overwhelmingly one-sided. While the friars had their defenders — Roger Conway and Bartholomew of Bolsenheim among the learned, the Dominican Daw Topias among the more popular — few replies to the anti-mendicant writers were circulated. Bartholomew's response to FitzRalph answered only the archbishop's theoretical arguments about mendicancy; unlike Armagh, he did not draw arguments from his own experience or from the behavior of his mendicant colleagues. Late fourteenth-century friars wrote no apologies on the model of Bonaventure's *Quare Fratres Minores Praedicent et Confessiones Audiant* of the thirteenth century.

Other kinds of evidence, however, can be set against the anti-mendicant writings. The fourteenth-century Minorites had critics within the Order as well as outside it; their accusations carry considerable weight. Papal bulls and decrees, and especially the Consti-

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24 (1935), 558–572; 25 (1936), 81–96 and 28 (1937), 50–67; and "The Sermon-Diary of Richard FitzRalph, Archbishop of Armagh," in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 44, Section C, No. 1 (Dublin, 1937), 1–57. L. L. Hammerich, *The Beginning of Strife between Richard Fitzralph and the Mendicants, Det Kgl. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab., Historisk-filologiske Meddelelser*, 26, 3 (Copenhagen, 1938); A. G. Little, *The Grey Friars in Oxford* (Oxford, 1892); Knowles, op. cit.; and R. L. Poole, "Richard Fitzralph," in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, VII (London, 1887–1890), pp. 194–198, all supplement Gwynn and Hammerich significantly.

tutions and general, provincial and convent statutes of the Franciscans provide a rich complement to the more familiar works of contemporary critics. This material from within the Order (and no attempt is made here to survey it all) often validates and frequently compounds many of the allegations made by critics outside the Order. Less predictably, however, it reveals at the same time the Order's great institutional strength, and the vast resources of popular reverence it commanded.

There were five principal dimensions of fourteenth-century criticism of the mendicant orders: 1) the excessive numbers of friars, 2) their deceit and hypocrisy, 3) their abuse of the vow of poverty, 4) their usurpation of the privileges of secular clerks, and 5) their eccentric defense of their own orders and harsh treatment of each other. Although it is often difficult to separate these interrelated points of criticism, only the first two will be discussed here; the final three will form the subject of a subsequent article.

"...as thikke as motes in a sonne-beem"

Chaucer's reference to the abundance of friars [11] is echoed often in the anti-mendicant literature. In 1384, Wyclif surveyed the priestly office from its first institution to his own time, and found that, whereas Christ had brought in sufficient priests, now there were too many of them. In post-apostolic times monks had appeared, then canons, then friars, and "Who mai denye that ne this noumbre of thes officeris is now to myche?" [12] Comparing the differences between the Franciscans and Christ, he noted that Jesus had twelve disciples, but "these founed freris rekken nevere how mony their have." [13] In his *Vox Clamantis* Gower admitted he didn't know "whether it is a sign of favor or doom for these friars, but all the world abounds with them." [14] David Knowles has suggested that Wyclif and others

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[11] The mendicants' critics wrote about friars in general; references to a specific Order are rare. However, it is often evident that they had the Franciscans in mind, and the Franciscans did outnumber other mendicants. I have tried to use the term "friar" only where it echoes their equally imprecise usage.

[12] John Wyclif, *De Ecclesia et Membris Ejus*, in *Select Works of John Wyclif*, Vol. III: *Miscellaneous Works*, ed. Thomas Arnold (Oxford, 1871), p. 346. The editor dates this treatise 1384. A similar argument appears in *De Blasphemia, Contra Fratres*, in Arnold, op. cit., p. 418.

[13] *De Blasphemia, Contra Fratres*, in Arnold, pp. 415-416.

[14] *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, ed. Eric W. Stockton (Seattle,

thought there were more friars than there actually were because the mendicants, especially the Franciscans and Carmelites, showed "a remarkable bouyancy" in membership after the plague years.[15] The friars' critics attributed this "bouyancy" to another mendicant vice: "stealing" children to fill their depleted ranks. Gower compared the friars to fowlers, who lure unsuspecting birds into their nets; boys, he wrote, were lured into the Order with "sonorous words." [16] The anonymous author of "Jacke Upland's" long poem against the friars asked

> Why steal ye mens children
> for to make hem of your sect,
> sith that theft is against Gods hests,
> and sith your sect is not perfect?
> Yee know not whether the rule that yee bind him to
> be best for him or worst.[17]

Wyclif wrote that the friars "bigile yonge children to here veyn religion, sweryng that it is the bests";[18] the author of the anti-mendicant *Fifty Heresies and Errors of Friars* made a similar accusation, claiming that the friars "drawen childre fro Cristis reli-

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1962), p. 182; Stockton's translation. Elsewhere Gower refers to the "throng of friars" which "overflows the mendicant order," and adds "Just as you cannot count the acorns on a spreading oak tree, so you cannot reckon the numbers of friars." (*Major Latin Works*, pp. 183 and 188). Langland in *Piers Plowman* remarked that all religious Orders prescribe fixed limits for their monks and nuns – all, that is, except the friars, whose numbers were increasing beyond all reckoning. (B text, ed. Walter W. Skeat [London, 1869], XX, pp. 262–65 and p. 379. See also C text, XXII, pp. 264–72.)

[15] Knowles, op. cit., p. 262. He is of course referring to England, but so was Wyclif.

[16] *Vox Clamantis*, in *Major Latin Works*, p. 189. The Latin is:

"Ut vocat ad laqueos volucrem dum fistulat auceps,
Sic trahit infantes fratris abvore sonus:
Ut laqueatur avis laqueorum nescia fraudis
Sic puer in fratrem fraude latente cadit." (*The Complete Latin Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay [Oxford, 1902], IV, 193.)

[17] *Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History, Composed during the Period from the Accession of Edward III to that of Richard III*, Vol. II, ed. Thomas Wright, Rolls Series, Vol. XIV, ii (London, 1861), p. 22.

[18] *On the Leaven of the Pharisees*, in *The Early English Works of Wyclif Hitherto Unprinted*, ed. F. D. Matthew (Early English Text Society, 1880), No. 74, p. 8.

gioun into hor private ordir by ypocrisie, leesingis, and steelynge." [19]

The Franciscans encountered boys most frequently at the universities, and the charge of stealing young students was common. (These may well have been the "poor men's children" frequently mentioned in the anti-mendicant literature. In stealing them, it was said, the friars were guilty of a worse crime than that of stealing an ox.) [20] Many such students were mere children — fourteen was the normal age to begin college studies in this period — who had not the experience or discretion to choose a vocation wisely. Furthermore, the friars' critics claimed, once in the Order, young professed were not permitted to leave it for any reason:

> Also frieris seyn, if a mon be oones professid to hor religioun, he may nevere leeve hit and be savid, thot he be novere so unable therto, for al tyme of his lif. And so thei wil nede hym to lyve in suche a staate everemore, to whiche God makes hym evere unable, and so nede hym to be dampned.[21]

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[19] *Fifty Heresies and Errors of Friars*, in Arnold, op. cit., p. 373. Similar accusation is made in Wyclif's *De Blasphemia, Contra Fratres*, Arnold, pp. 380–381, 416. *Fifty Heresies* may have been written by Wyclif or by one of his followers (Arnold, p. 366). It would be tempting to argue on behalf of Wyclif's authorship from the similarities in phraseology, terminology and the repetition of examples that occur in this treatise and in others that are certainly his. However, such similarities recur constantly throughout this literature; certain words and phrases were clearly commonplaces, as were a number of stock examples of friars' misbehavior. The claim that the friars forced children into their Order despite its imperfections — or because they erroneously believed it to be perfect — for example, occur not only in the two works cited above but also in the popular poem cited in note 17 above and elsewhere.

The charge of stealing children conflicts with other evidence. The Franciscans seem to have been unusually scrupulous about whom they admitted into their Order in the fourteenth century. Novices were examined with care, and in some areas at least, the entry of lay novices was prohibited. *Archivo Ibero-Americano*, 7 (1917), 363.

Interestingly enough, English monks of all orders petitioned Rome for at least twenty years after 1349 asking that the age of ordination be lowered, so that more monks could be ordained to fill the ranks depleted by plague. Knowles, *Religious Orders*, II, 11–12.

[20] Wyclif, *De Ecclesia et Membris Ejus*, in Arnold, op. cit., p. 348. Elsewhere, in the reply to Daw Topias' defense of the friars, it is an axe. Wright, *Political Poems*, II, p. 84.

[21] Wyclif, *Fifty Heresies and Errors of Friars*, in Arnold, op. cit., p. 369.

The friars' apparent ubiquity was heightened, in the eyes of their critics, by the size and extravagance of their buildings, whose "gaye wyndowes and colours and peyntyngis and bybwynrie" attracted the curious to worship on holy days and distracted them from thinking about their sins. Their convents were costly, and the friars thought of them as their own, forgetting that Jesus was sheltered only in other people's houses, and always in plain homes of the common people.[22]

> Also freris bylden mony grete churchis and costily waste housis, and cloystris as hit were castels, and that withoute nede, wherethorw parische churchis and comyne weyes ben payred, and in mony places undone... Byfore that freris comen in ther were churchis ynowe. What skil is hit now to make so myche cost in new byldyng, and lete olde parische churchis falle donne? [23]

FitzRalph accused the friars of erecting churches that were finer than cathedrals, ornamented more splendidly than those of great prelates; their belfries, he said, were extravagantly expensive, and armed knights could fight with their lances upright in the halls of their great double cloisters.[24]

In *Piers Plowman*, the friars are accused of squandering their begging income on costly buildings;[25] in another place, though, Langland admits that the friars' churches are subsidized by popular donations.[26] Gower imagined mendicant convents to be lavish indeed:

> ...an extensive structure, a house supported by a thousand marble columns, with decorations high on the walls. It is resplendent with various pictures and every elegance. Every cell in which a worthless friar dwells is beautiful, decked with many kinds of rich carving.... No king in power has any more magnificent chambers than theirs for himself.[27]

A church built for the friars, he wrote, "towers above all others," with folding doors, elaborate porticoes, and so many halls and bed chambers you would think it was a labyrinth.[28]

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[22] Wyclif, *De Blasphemia, Contra Fratres*, in Arnold, op. cit., p. 415. See also *On the Leaven of the Pharisees*, in Matthew, op. cit., p. 8.

[23] Wyclif, *Fifty Heresies and Errors of Friars*, in Arnold, op. cit., p. 380.

[24] Gwynn, in *Studies*, 28 (1937), 59.

[25] *Piers Plowman*, B text, ed. Skeat, XV, 322, p. 272.

[26] Ibid., XIV, 198–199, p. 246.

[27] *Major Latin Works*, ed. Stockton, pp. 192–193.

[28] Ibid. A contemporary poem claims that the friars' houses, built with

That the Franciscan Order was large in the late fourteenth century is undeniable; one estimate has placed the number of Franciscans in 1384 at between thirty and forty thousand, and new houses were still being founded.[29] To take only one example, the London convent of the Grey Friars seems to have kept a complement of at least a hundred brothers throughout the fourteenth century.[30] The friars

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lavish donations, seem to go up more quickly than any monastery of a possessionate order, or any royal or episcopal building. Either the friars are thieves, he concludes, or counterfeiters. Wright, *Political Poems*, I, p. 255.

[29] Heribert Holzapfel, *Handbuch der Geschichte des Franziskanerordens* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1909), pp. 142–145. Elsewhere, Holzapfel suggested that, because the number of friars decreased by two-thirds after the plague while the number of new foundations *increased*, the greatly increased wealth of those friars who survived led to the increased criticism of the friars after 1350. (Ibid., p. 66.) Hüttebräuker, op. cit., estimated that in the late fourteenth century the number of Franciscan houses throughout Europe was about 1400, of which half were in Italy. Bartholomew of Pisa, writing probably in the late 1380's, listed 1,531 convents (omitting some vicariates) in his *De Conformitate* (*Analecta Franciscana*, IV, fructus 8, 178–336 and fructus 11, 503–558). Ubald d'Alençon, "Statistique franciscaine de 1385," in *Etudes Franciscaines*, 10 (1903), 95–97, concluded from a Bodleian manuscript that there were closer to 2,288, including the Second and Third Orders. G. Golubovich, *Biblioteca Bio-bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente Francescano*, II (Florence, 1913), 250–260, using the same manuscript (Bodl. Miscell. Canon. n. 525, fols. 240v–41v), counted 2,225. Compiled from a number of manuscripts, Golubovich's statistics show steady and marked growth in the numbers of Franciscan convents between 1334 and 1385; however, the manuscript evidence is incomplete, and says nothing of the numbers of friars or Clares or tertiaries in each house. (The Third Order Secular is not included in these figures; its size and great importance for fourteenth-century Minorite history are discussed below.)

Richard Emery, *The Friars in Medieval France* (London and New York, 1962) has estimated the number of friar convents in France, basing his figures primarily on wills; while he found that fewer Franciscan convents were being founded between 1351 and 1450, this is difficult to interpret, both because there is no reliable way to determine the number of friars in each convent and because new foundations predictably declined after a certain saturation point had been reached. Knowles' figures for England (op. cit., pp. 255–262), based on donations of benefactors made on a per capita basis and on records of the poll taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1380–81, provide a much more accurate estimate of Minorite population. The Franciscans' number followed the general population pattern for England, with a peak around 1300, a slight and then a great decline (close to 50%) after 1348–9, then a steady increase until about 1422, to a point some 25–35% higher than the 1350 level. See also Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales* (London, 1953), p. 363 and passim.

[30] Gwynn, in *Studies*, 28 (1937), 53.

were not only numerous but highly visible. Richard Emery has written that mendicant houses in France were

> ...so located that no inhabitant of France lived more than thirty miles from some mendicant convent; the vast majority of Frenchmen must have lived within a day's walking distance of at least two such houses. These are the geographical facts behind the ubiquitousness [sic] of the medieval friar; he became almost at once a familiar figure everywhere.[30a]

If the overall numbers of friars were high, in the eyes of their critics the proportion of *masters* within the Franciscan Order approached superfluity. A list of convents and their officers drawn up at the Provincial Chapter of Tuscany held in 1394 attests to the abundance of masters in that province at least; every convent, even the smallest, had a master who read the Sentences in the convent school. Even convents too small to need a *vicarius* invariably had a lector; some larger houses had more than one.[31]

A paragraph in the 1373 Statutes of the General Chapter of Toulouse indicated that many Franciscans were seeking higher grades of academic degrees in the ever-increasing universities. In these statutes, Gregory XI warned the friars against the temptation to follow the *cursus* leading to higher degrees, fearing that the Order would be ridiculed because of the multiplication of kinds and levels of degrees held by friars, and he prohibited them from pursuing higher degrees in Italian universities.[32] In the same statutes, the number of lectors in the convent and convent school of Toulouse was limited to one, and mendicants were forbidden to teach in the University of Toulouse.[33] Clearly the number of masters exceeded the number of positions open to them.

If the Franciscans didn't literally "steal children" to increase their numbers, they did nevertheless attempt to persuade them, often at a very young age, to join the Order voluntarily. Before 1317,

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[30a] Emery, op. cit., pp. 4–5.

[31] P. Benvenutus Bughetti, O.F.M., "Tabulae Capitulares Provinciae Tusciae O.M.," in AFH, 10 (1917), 413–497. Little, *Studies in English Franciscan History* (Manchester, 1917), p. 164, notes that having a lecturer for each house was also the Dominican ideal.

[32] Giuseppe Abate, "Costituzioni inedite dei frati minori del XIV Secolo," in *Miscellanea francescana*, 29, No. 6 (Nov.–Dec., 1929), 174.

[33] Ibid., 175.

boys were not allowed to profess at younger than eighteen; in that year it was reduced to fourteen, and we hear of boys who had made their professions at eleven or twelve.[34] (In this same period the Dominicans were admitting boys of ten.)[35] Roger Bacon denounced "the boys of the two student Orders," who, making their profession too early in life, learned a great deal yet remained ignorant.[36] It has often been assumed that lowering the entry age invariably represented an attempt to fill an Order's diminishing ranks. This seems to have been true of the Preachers, whose numbers were declining in this period.[37] That the Franciscans sought to facilitate the entry of university students into the Order seems clear; whether they were desperate to replenish their declining numbers is more difficult to judge. Certainly university officials thought so, and tried to protect students against indiscriminate recruitment. At Oxford, the friars were prohibited in 1358 from receiving novices who were less than eighteen years old, and guilty Orders were to forfeit their right to deliver or hear lectures for an entire year; Cambridge instituted similar restrictions.[38]

The fifteenth-century Observant preacher Johann Brugman, in his vitriolic *Speculum Imperfectionis Fratrum Minorum*, was severely critical of Franciscan masters of novices, accusing them of the most flagrant vice, and recommending that they be abolished.[39] If his

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[34] Guillaume Mollat, "Exodes de l'Ordre des frères mineurs au XIVème siècle," AFH, 60 (1967), 213–215.

[35] E. Delaruelle et al., *L'Eglise au temps du Grand Schisme et de la crise conciliaire, Histoire de l'Eglise*, 14, I (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1962), 1067.

[36] Quoted in Little, *Grey Friars in Oxford*, p. 42.

[37] The provincial chapter of the Dominicans held at Ulm in 1400 declared that "leading convents are deficient in numbers." Bened.-Maria Reichert, "Akten des Provinzialkapitel des Dominikanerprovinz Teutonia aus den Jahren 1398, 1400, 1401, 1402," in *Römische Quartalschrift*, 11 (1897), 303.

[38] Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, II, 155. The universities appealed again to Parliament in 1366 to lend force to their decrees, which were being ignored by the friars, but their petition was rejected. A similar attempt in 1402 failed again, although a law passed in the same year prohibited any youth from being received into a religious Order until after he had passed his fourteenth year and had the consent of his parents or guardians. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, p. 353; Gower, *Vox Clamantis*, ed. H. O. Coxe (London, 1850), p. xxviii. Hammerich, op. cit., p. 46 notes that Spanish Minorite convents were "obliged to admit young and unfit persons" after 1348.

[39] Hieronymus Goyens, O.F.M., "*Speculum Imperfectionis Fratrum Minorum* Compactum per Venerabilem et Religiosum P. F. Iohannem Brugman, O.F.M.," AFH, 2 (1909), 620.

comments contain a measure of truth, their insufficiently trained young novices may have drawn down criticism on the whole Order. But the fourteenth-century Minorites themselves were aware of the problems created by young friars. Unfit novices were to be summarily expelled once their crimes became known.[40] Novices' companions were secretly questioned about the candidate's behavior and character a month before his profession.[41] A passage in the Farinerian constitutions [42] forbids accepting novices who have been members of other Orders. If the Franciscans were anxious to increase their numbers, and were having difficulty recruiting novices, such a prohibition would have been illogical.

This passage suggests that "apostates" — novices or professed religious who left their Orders to enter another Order, or to live as laymen — may have posed a common problem to the fourteenth-century religious community, not merely to the mendicants.

For Franciscans, leaving the Order was not a simple matter, and entailed some humiliation. Under Nicholas IV's Constitution *In vestri ordinis Regula* of 1286, a Minorite had to obtain permission from his superior to leave, and was prohibited from acquiring benefices or holding office in his new Order. For a brief period, Benedict XII added the requirement of papal permission, in *Regularem vitam* of 1335, but his successors ceased to require this.

Two things are striking about those mendicants who did leave the Order in the second half of the fourteenth century. One is that many of them cited the extreme *austerity* of the Franciscan life (not, as contemporary critics suggest, its extreme luxury and corruption) as their reason for wanting to join another Order (usually the Benedictine). Or, alternatively, they cited the unjust persecution to which friars were subjected — a detail which takes on validity in the context of the widespread prejudice and persecution of mendicants discussed below.[43] The other is that, although many were unduly influenced by other people in their decision to join the Fran-

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[40] Delorme, "Documenta saec. XIV Provinciae SF Umbriae," AFH, 5 (1912), 542.

[41] Ordinations of a provincial chapter held in 1343, in AFH, 5 (1912), 532.

[42] "Statuta Generalia Ordinis Edita in Capitulo Generali an. 1354 Assisii Celebrato, Communiter Farineriana Appellata," AFH, 35 (1942), 92.

[43] Holzapfel, op. cit., p. 81 suggested that the claim of austerity was a euphemistic formula, disguising simple lack of fervor (*Unlust*) for the Franciscan life as originally envisioned.

ciscans, this pressure seems to have come most often not from Minorites anxious to recruit them but from parents, friends or tutors.[44]

Troublesome bretheren who turned apostate were sometimes brought back and transferred to other custodies or provinces, and they were to be accepted back into the Order if they wished to be.[45] Perhaps because of the notoriety an apostate could cause, the fourteenth-century Franciscans too often resorted to the unfortunate expedient of imprisoning (and excommunicating) apostates. However, too little attention has been paid to the fact that some apostates did return to the Order — apparently in numbers significant enough to warrant legislation in contemporary statutes. In addition to the Cahorsin passage mentioned above, statutes made for the convent of Lyons in 1375 stipulated that apostates who left the Order "thoughtlessly and without scandal" as children or adolescents could not only return to the Order but, with a dispensation, be promoted to high office within it.[46]

Where their critics accused the friars of extravagance in building, the large number of great Franciscan churches built during the fourteenth century give abundant support to their criticism. Guardians were warned against running up onerous debts in building costs,[47] and we know that, for example, Greyfriars in London, enlarged in the fourteenth century, measured $300' \times 90'$, and had marble pillars and floors and thirty-six stained glass windows — not unlike the friary church Gower described.[48] However, far from representing mendicant alienation from the people, these churches were a monumental witness to their spiritual alliance with them. While it is true that nobility and royalty endowed and subsidized Franciscan churches, burghers and common people also contributed. Greyfriars, the most cherished burial place for the English nobility, was paid for only in part by noble and royal donations. Only a few of its ornamental windows were paid for by wealthy benefactors; the rest were

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[44] Mollat, op. cit., pp. 214–215.

[45] Bihl, "Constitutiones Generales Edita in Capitulis Generalibus Caturci An. 1337 et Lugduni An. 1351 Celebrata," AFH, 30 (1938), 144.

[46] Athanasius Lopez and Lucius M. a Nuñez, O.F.M., "Descriptio Codicum Franciscalium Bibliothecae Ecclesiae Primatialis Toletanae," *Archivo Ibero-Americano*, 7 (1917), 266.

[47] AFH, 30 (1938), 133.

[48] Little, *Studies*, p. 75.

given by London citizens or guilds, and by "small subscribers." [49] Popular devotion to friars' churches came in part from the fact that they were functional as well as splendid, built to shelter the mendicant preacher and the crowds that came to hear him. So strong was this popular attachment that efforts made in the thirteenth century to destroy a Minorite stone cloister at Southhampton met with considerable resistance from the townspeople.[50]

Blame for extravagance in building, then, seems to have rested as much with the friars' loyal supporters, great and small, as with the religious themselves. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that the Minorites did not always betray their Rule in using what was given to them.

In 1368, Martial de Baux granted an annuity to the Franciscans of Limoges. Since under their Rule they were not allowed to keep it, they sold it to their Cardinal Protector, Nicholas of Bessa, Cardinal Deacon of Santa Maria in Via Lata, as a private person. In return he gave them sixty *livres*, which was enough for them to repair and rebuild their cloister, and to found a hospital dedicated to Saint Gerald.[51]

There is no reason to believe this an isolated or unusual example. Yet it counterbalances the image of conspicuous extravagance presented in the anti-mendicant literature, and suggests that, although they envisioned ambitious building projects, the Minorites were capable of using donations in much the same ways as their thirteenth-century predecessors did. If the Franciscans of the fourteenth century were different in number and wealth, they were not entirely different in kind.

"...ther shal no saule have rowme in helle
Of frers ther is suche throng"

An anonymous poem claimed that, if a man were to kill his entire family, he could confess to a friar and be forgiven for less than the price of a pair of shoes.[52] Anti-mendicant writers constantly

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., pp. 62–63.

[51] Ferdinand-Marie Delorme, "Les Cordeliers dans le Limousin aux XIII^{e}–XV^{e} siècle," in AFH, 33 (1940), 117–118.

[52] Wright, *Political Poems*, I, p. 266. Another poem in the same collection echoes this:

asserted that the friar's own sins lead believers into error, and they would surely be condemned along with those they led astray. "Soothing the sinner in his sin," [53] the friars brought false security to unsuspecting believers, and enriched themselves at the same time.[54]

In a memorable passage in *Piers Plowman*, a friar offers Lady Lucre absolution from sexual sins in return for a load of wheat. The fact that he offers this, "speaking," in J. F. Goodridge's translation, "in the dulcet undertones of the confession-box," is not insignificant. He went on to ask her for a contribution to help his fellow friars put in a stained glass window, in return for having her name engraved on it, and thus being assured of heaven. She agrees, on condition that he not punish sexual sinners too harshly, and promises to contribute handsomely to the decoration of the friars' church, adding that "evry segge shal seyn I am a sustre of youre hous." [55]

Confession and soliciting contributions were understandably linked in the case of the mendicants; hearing confessions, begging and preaching were their primary functions outside the cloister. Both their critics and the friars themselves on occasion doubtless confused the donation with payment for a religious service. Chaucer pointed

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"...for six pens er thai fayle,
Sle thi fadre, and jape thi modre,
and thai [the friars] wyl the assoile."

"On the Minorite Friars," Wright, II, p. 270.

[53] The phrase occurs in a bill of grievances drawn up by the clergy of Canturbury in 1356, cited in Gwynn in *Studies*, 26 (1937), 51.

[54] In *Piers Plowman*, Langland accused the friars of "feasting on men's sins," profiting from the money wealthy patrons left to them for absolution. (B text, ed. Skeat, XIII, 40–45, p. 212)

W. A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, England, 1955), pp. 205 ff, describes a treatise called *Memoriae Presbiterorum*, written by an English canonist at Avignon in 1344, in which the author accuses the mendicants of giving facile absolution to wartime plunderers in return for a portion of the plunder, and of imposing overly light penances on magnates. But complaints of this sort were by no means new in the fourteenth century; in the mid-thirteenth Matthew Paris complained that the presence of itinerant mendicant confessors encouraged people to sin with impunity, knowing they could confess to a friar whom they would never see again. *Matthew Paris's English History*, trans. J. A. Giles, 2 (London, 1853), 138–139.

[55] *Piers Plowman*, B Text, ed. Skeat (*Early English Text Society*), III, 35–63, pp. 33–35.

out that, for the friar, light penance brought a large donation; for the contributor, a large gift assuaged his conscience.[56]

But if in the eyes of the anti-mendicant writers facile penance created false assurance, letters of fraternity constituted an even worse deception. Fourteenth-century friars granted to benefactors of their Orders letters which allowed them to share in the good deeds of the religious community both while they lived and after their deaths. But to their critics, these letters were just another example of the mendicants' exploitation of popular gullibility, since they were not given away freely to everyone, but only to those from whom contributions had been elicited, or were expected. That these letters were a hoax seemed obvious from the fact that the friars *themselves* were ignorant of their own merits: "Also, these freris wot not whether thei shal be saved, or whether thei ben now viserde devels, as Schariot [Judas Iscariot] was...." If they should prove to be unworthy of heaven themselves, then they would be forcing their *confratres* to share their damnation, and "hit were no kyndenesse thus to venyme hor gift." [57] Worst of all, through these "letters of bretherhed" they taught the people to put their trust in a piece of parchment sealed with lies rather than in God's help and their own virtuous lives.[58]

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[56] *Canterbury Tales*, in *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, Second Edition (Boston, 1957), General Prologue, lines 221–232, p. 19.

"Ful swetely herde he [friar Huberd] confessioun,
And plesaunt was his absolucioun:
He was an esy man to yeve penaunce,
Ther as he wiste to have a good pitaunce.
For unto a povre ordre for to yive
Is signe that a man is wel yshryvne;
For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt,
He wiste that a man was repentaunt;
For many a man so hard is of his herte,
He may nat wepe, althogh hym soore smerte.
Therfore in stede of wepynge and preyeres
Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres."

[57] Wyclif, *De Blasphemia, Contra Fratres*, in Thomas Arnold, ed., *Select English Works of John Wyclif*, III (Oxford, 1871), 421. Wyclif claimed these letters were, in effect, sold rather than granted freely.

[58] Wyclif, *Fifty Heresies and Errors of Friars*, in Arnold, op. cit., p. 377. Piers warned against trusting in trentals, pardons, or letters of fraternity. *Piers Plowman*, B Text, ed. Skeat (London, 1869), VII, 191–194, p. 121. A contemporary poet asked the friars why, if these letters were so efficacious, they didn't grant them to everyone, out of charity. Wright, op. cit., II, p. 21.

The friars' habits, too, were believed to be efficacious in preserving their

Although evidence from within the Order puts some of the friars' behavior in a different light, it often corroborated these accusations of the friars' enemies. Direct or implied criticism from the Minorites themselves was often even more damning than the complaints of outsiders. The Observant Johann Brugman, for example, accused Minorite confessors of giving absolution with thoughtless abandon, and of assigning indiscreet or even scandalous penances, while they themselves kept company with usurers, panderers and adulterers.[59]

That numerous letters of fraternity were granted by the Franciscans and other friars in the late fourteenth century is undeniable, although the vast majority of extant letters come from the fifteenth century. However, the character and significance of these letters differed from the way the friars' critics described them.[60] Letters or documents of this kind, granting participation in the merits of a religious community and, in some cases, promising to their possessors a monastic burial, had been known in the West for centuries. Originally used to cement alliances between entire monastic communities, they had been adopted by the mendicant Orders to reward benefactors, and as a means of stimulating contributions to supplement their begging income. Although letters granted to important benefactors were unique, blank forms were often used for less important persons; names were added as needed. Letters of fraternity were adopted during this period by guilds, hospitals and other institutions and were used as a form of subscription through which donors could underwrite their building projects or other activities. (More of the

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wearers from damnation. Burial in a mendicant habit (a privilege granted to those who possessed letters of fraternity) became the focus of popular superstition, and critics of the mendicants accused them of exploiting this superstition for their own gain. Wright, I, 256 and II, 21, 32.

[59] Iohannes Brugman, O.F.M., *Speculum Imperfectionis Fratrum Minorum*, in AFH, 2 (1909), 621.

[60] The following is derived in large part from Rev. Prebendary Clark-Maxwell, "Some Letters of Confraternity," in *Archaeologia or Miscellaneous Tracts relating to Antiquity*, 75 (1926), 19–59, and 79 (1929), 179–216; P. Hugolino Lippens, "De Litteris Confraternitatis apud Fratres Minores ab Ordinis Initio ad Annum 1517," AFH, 32 (1939), 49–88; Lippens' article "Le droit nouveau" mentioned above, AFH, 47 (1954), 241–292; and A. G. Little, "Franciscan Letters of Fraternity," *The Bodleian Library Record*, 5 (1954–6), 13–25.

Examples of these letters are in AFH, 20 (1927), 222–223, AFH, 23 (1930), 242–245, AFH, 26 (1933), 231–233. The small amount of work done on the important topic of letters of fraternity has been concentrated on the form, phraseology and numbers of extant letters rather than on their role in popular piety.

extant letters of fraternity or affiliation were issued by these bodies than by any single monastic or mendicant Order.)

Letters of fraternity issued by religious Orders served a variety of purposes; as a marketable commodity, they could be used to pay debts, and simply to identify their owners. Fraternity in one Order did not preclude a similar affiliation with another. Men and women often held letters in several Orders and might still choose to be buried in the cemetery of an Order with which they had no affiliation whatever. This multiple affiliation, and the surprisingly small number of *confratres* and *consorores* who actually received Franciscan burial in England, led Little to doubt whether people set much store by letters of fraternity.[61] But the continual discovery of more and more of these letters, the frequency with which they were cited by contemporary critics, and their importance as a source of mendicant–clerical controversy suggest that they were important to their possessors. Repeated papal authorization for granting them seems to lend weight to this conclusion.[62]

The deceit the friars practiced on the people in general through letters of fraternity was, so their critics claimed, a mirror of their conduct with individuals. Sometimes feigning knowledge of medicine and skill in treating women's complexions and "prevyte," [63] some-

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[61] A. G. Little, "Franciscan Letters of Fraternity," pp. 19–20.

[62] Lippens, "De Litteris Confraternitatis," p. 51. This authorization was first made in an early fourteenth century bull whose text is lost, *Beneficia sanctorum*. Later bulls confirmed and amplified the friars' privileges in receiving *confratres* and *consorores* into their orders.

[63] Wyclif, *On the Leaven of the Pharisees*, in *The English Works of Wyclif Hitherto Unprinted*, ed. F. D. Matthew (London, 1880), Early English Text Society, Vol. 74, p. 10. Petrus de Lutra, "Liga Fratrum," in *Unbekannte Kirchenpolitische Streitschriften*, ed. R. Scholz (Rome, 1914), Vol. II, pp. 44–45. In *Piers Plowman*, Friar Flatter appears as a doctor, and Peace tells of how he knew a friar–doctor once, "at a courte pere I dwelt, /And [the friar] was my lordes leche and my ladyes bothe. /And at pe last pis limitour, po my lorde was out, /He salued so owre wommen til somme were with childe!" B Text, ed. Skeat (London, 1869), XX, 342–345, p. 383. The friar often claimed to be a doctor — in *Piers Plowman* he is referred to as "Doctor Friar Flatter, Physician and Surgeon." In *Studies in English Franciscan History*, p. 79, A. G. Little refers to fifteenth–century Franciscans who accepted fees for their medical skill. The Minorite constitutions prohibited the friars from practicing medicine, and from studying it. The convent statutes of Leon of 1375 cautioned that the Franciscans were not revered when they tried to pursue an art of which they were ignorant, and added that considerable scandal had resulted from friars' attempts to practice medicine. *Archivo Ibero–Americano*, 7 (1917), 266.

times under pretext of hearing confessions,[64] or simply lying in wait "in feldis alone or gardyns," the friars engaged in seduction and other forms of "gostily lechorie." [65] Sometimes they gained entrance by peddling pins, girdles, spices, or even furs and lap-dogs.[66]

The Regensburg canon Konrad of Megenberg accused the mendicants of prevaricating and of using the confessional as a cloak for sin.[67] All women were in danger, but women tertiaries were a particular target of mendicant vice.[68] The Premonstratensian Petrus de Lutra emphasized the "pestiferous connection" between the religious and the tertiaries; taking advantage of their gullibility, the friars taught them false doctrines, seduced them, and even offered them the Eucharist during interdicts.[69]

Gower's wry description of the lecherous friar was particularly scathing:

> Venit ad lectum quando maritus abest :
> Sic absente viro temerarius intrat adulter
> Frater, et alterius propriat acta sibi...
> Sponsi defectus suplet devocio fratris,
> Et genus amplificans atria plena facit.
> Verberat iste vepres, voluerem capit alter; et iste
> Seminat in fundum, set metet alter agrum...
> O pietas fratris, que circuit et iuvat omnes,
> Et gerit alterius sic pacienter onus:
> O qui non animas tantum, sed corpora nostra,
> In sudore suo sanctificare venit.[70]

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[64] Gower, "*Mirour de l'Omme*," in Macaulay, op. cit., 1376–1379.

[65] Wyclif, *On the Leaven of the Pharisees*, in Matthew, op. cit., p. 12. *Fifty Heresies and Errors of Friars*, in Arnold, op cit., p. 399. See also Wright, op. cit., II, 44, 49.

[66] *On the Leaven of the Pharisees*, pp. 12, 42. Gower, *Vox Clamantis*, p. 189. Wright, II, 264, 265. "Thai dele with purses, pynnes and knyves, With girdles and gloves, for wenches and wyves..."

[67] Konrad von Megenberg, *Lacrima Ecclesiae*, in Hermann Meyer, "Lacrima Ecclesiae. Neue Forschungen zu den Schriften Konrads von Megenberg," *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde*, 39 (1914), 491.

[68] Wyclif, *On the Leaven of the Pharisees*, p. 6.

[69] Petrus de Lutra (Peter von Kaiserslautern), *Liga Fratrum*, ed. R. Scholz, in *Unbekannte Kirchenpolitische Streitschriften*, II, 44–45, 62.

[70] Gower, *Vox Clamantis*, in Macaulay, op. cit., pp. 189–190. This theme is common in the anti-mendicant literature of this period, e.g. Wright, *Political Poems and Songs*, Vol. I, p. 266:

> "Were I a man that hous helde,
> If any woman with me dwelde,
> Ther is no frer, bot he were gelde,

In another passage Gower laments that friars are not made like bees, which lose their stings once they've been used.[71]

According to their critics, the friars persuaded women to cooperate in their "fornycacioun and avoutrie" by arguing that "it is lesse synne to treaspase with hem than with othere weddid men." [72] When not directly involved themselves, the friars encouraged others in adultery (just as they "meddled in marriage") and even accepted money for doing so.[73] There are also occasional accusations of homosexuality.[74]

Within the Order, explicit indictments of Minorites for sexual impropriety were not uncommon. A paragraph in the Umbrian statutes of 1342 prohibiting long conversations in the women's convents between friars and Clares, typical of many similar passages,[75] reflects an attempt to prevent suspicious liaisons. Brugman was both explicit and prolix on the subject of mendicant sex, accusing members

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Shuld com within my wones.
For may he til a woman synne,
In priveyte, he wyl not blynne,..."

Elsewhere friars are accused of turning their ornate dwellings into havens for "horedome." Wright, I, 264, 270.

[71] "Inter apes statuit natura, quod esse notandum
Sentio, quo poterit frater habere notam;
Nam si pungat apis, pungenti culpa repugnat,
Amplius ut stimulum non habet ipse suum;
Postque domi latebras tenet, et non evolat ultra
Floribus ut campi mellificare queat:
O Deus, in simili forma si frater adulter
Perderet inflatum dum stimularet acum,
Amplius ut flores non colliget in muliere,
Nec vagus a domibus pergat in orbe suis,
Causa cessante, quia tunc cessaret ab ipsis
Effectus, quo nunc plura pericla latent."

Vox Clamantis, IV, 877–888, in *The Complete Latin Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, p 233.

[72] Wyclif, *On the Leaven of the Pharisees*, p. 6.

[73] Ibid., pp. 6, 20; see also FitzRalph in A. Gwynn, *Studies*, 26 (1937), 51. The English satirist who called himself "Jack Upland" claimed that the friars gained considerable money from involving themselves in marriages and divorces (Wright, II, 68). Wyclif, in *De Ecclesia*, p. 348 concurs, adding that in making these arrangements the friars frequently deceived both parties.

[74] Wyclif, *Fifty Heresies*, p. 399, *On the Leaven*, p. 6, and Wright, II, 49.

[75] F. Delorme, "Documenta Saeculi XIV Provinciae Umbriae," AFH, 5 (1912) 535.

of his Order (in this instance, former Conventuals who had become Observants) of fornicating openly and begetting children.[76] Franciscan confessors, he wrote, not only paid a good deal of attention to the fleshly sins of penitents but sought to indulge in these pleasures themselves; by their excesses they encouraged women to cuckold their husbands and men to make fools of their wives.[77]

Criticism of this sort may have been encouraged by the fact that, as Richard FitzRalph implied, Franciscans not infrequently served as confessors to women and not to their husbands. A passage in *Unusquisque* argued that giving confessional privileges to the friars disturbed the normal distribution of the sacraments. In particular, it led to husbands' and wives' confession to different priests. "Quos ergo deus coniunxit," he concluded, "homo non separet. Cum igitur separatur confessio viri et uxoris, unius coniuncti separatur confessio, quod fieri constat illis esse nocivum, quia satis est notorium, quod unus sciens utriusque morbum congruencius posset eis mederi quam duo." [78]

Although they were expected to go out in the world and minister to the people, all too often the mendicants remained cloistered, declared their critics, harboring the rich but forgetting about the poor. "Yif thei han grete waste houses for to recyven lordis and ladies, ye to soiorne among hem daies and yeries, and other riche men nyyt and day, and helpen not pore nedi men with hereberwe [harbor] in so grete placis as kyngis paleis, hou recyue thei pore men to herberwe?" [79] They do go out to visit the rich when they are sick, or

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[76] Brugman, op. cit., p. 616.

[77] Ibid., pp. 620–621.

[78] The text is edited in Hammerich, op. cit., pp. 64–66. Although this passage says nothing of *which* spouse adhered to the mendicant confessor, the general affinity between the friars — particularly the Franciscans — and women so sharply emphasized in this literature suggests that it was the wife. According to Knighton, for example, the friars helped to finance the papal crusade into Flanders in 1383 largely by soliciting gifts from women. While all English kings from Henry III to Richard II had Dominican confessors, their queens preferred the Franciscans. *Cambridge Medieval History*, 6 (New York and Cambridge, England, 1929), 749.

[79] *On the Leaven*, p. 14. An anonymous poem of 1382, "On the Council of London," described the different receptions given the rich and poor:

> Si dives in patria quisquis infirmetur,
> Illuc frater properans et currens monetur;
> Et statim cum venerit infirmo loquetur,
> Ut cadaver mortuum fratribus donetur.

in prison, and "gon gladly and faste to lordis housis and ladies that ben gloriously araied," but fail to heed the poor man's requests for help, refusing "to come in pore mennus houses for stynk and othere filthe." [80] The friars shunned burial of the poor as unprofitable,[81] and Chaucer's friar Huberd avoided beggars because their company held no advantage for him.[82]

Time and again in the anti-mendicant literature the friars are rebuked for courting the favor of the rich; Gower described them as chameleon-like, assuming now one guise, now another.[83] A satirical poem from the Rhineland described the friars as

> Advocati, medici et procuratores,
> Tutores et iudices sunt et curatores,
> Voluntatis ultimae sunt ordinatores,
> Fidei commissarii et executores,
> Cunctorum contractuum sunt mediatores.[84]

> With an O and an I, ore petunt ista,
> Dum cor et memoria simul sunt in cista.
> Quod si pauper adiens fratres infirmetur,
> Et petat ut inter hos sepulturae detur,
> Gardianus absens est, statim respondetur,
> Et sic satis breviter pauper excludetur.
> With an O and an I, quilibet est negans,
> Quod quis ibi veniat nisi dans vel legans.

Wright, I, 257. See also *Fifty Heresies and Errors of Friars*, p. 368 and Wright, I, 22.

[80] *On the Leaven of the Pharisees*, pp. 14, 15, 17. *Piers Plowman* warns against "false brethren" who preach mortification but practice gluttony, and have no pity for the poor. B Text, ed. Skeat (London, 1869), XIII, 25–79, pp. 211–214.

[81] Richard FitzRalph (in Hammerich, op. cit., p. 678) accused the mendicants of inattention to the sacraments; burials they welcomed because of the fees which accompanied them, but burial of the poor was neglected. Jack Upland (Wright, II, 22–23, 33) chastised the friars for refusing to bury the poor, who, since they were more holy than the rich, deserve it more. See also *Vox Clamantis*, ed Macaulay, 183

[82] Prologue, *Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robinson, lines 240–248, p. 19.

[83] Gower, *Vox Clamantis*, ed. Macaulay, p. 189.

[84] Koch, *Die frühesten Niederlassungen der Minoriten im Rheingebiete* (Leipzig, 1881), p. 114. Chaucer's friar was very helpful as a mediator during "love-days" — days appointed for settlement of disputes out of court. *Canterbury Tales*, in *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, Second Edition (Boston, 1957), General Prologue, line 258, p. 19.

Wyclif described how they brought trinkets and little cakes and fruit into aristocratic houses, hoping to wheedle larger gifts from their occupants.[85] Friar Huberd made it a great point to be entertaining; he played instruments, his eyes dancing, "took the prize" in ballad singing, and even affected a lisp to make his speech sweeter.[86] By such flattery of the great, the anti-mendicant writers insisted, the friars allied themselves with lords who represented tyranny, extortion and vice.[87] Refusing to hear any but the confessions of the rich, they sought worldly offices in the lords' courts, as stewards, kitchen clerks, counsellors, or even chamberlains.[88] And no court was closed to the friar who was master of theology.[89]

But even this ill-advised loyalty was short-lived. Once an influential man lost his wealth or power, the friars would leave him. "So long as fortune is your friend," Lust-of-the-Eyes says in *Piers Plowman*, "the friars will always love you," but the formerly rich were invariably scorned when they could give no more.[90]

All these practices — giving facile penance and letters of fraternity, seduction and cultivation of the rich — together constituted the friars' worst offense: they were hypocrites. The contrast, their critics claimed, between the friars' doctrines and their actual behavior was everywhere apparent. The clergy of Canterbury accused them of begging for alms while riding in state, with horses and trappings surpassing those of the greatest prelates in England.[91] Claiming in their

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[85] *On the Leaven*, p. 12. Chaucer's friar wooed young women by bringing them little favors. Prologue, *Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robinson, lines 233–234.

[86] Prologue, *Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robinson, lines 236–237, 264–268. In *On the Leaven*, p. 9, Wyclif refers to the friars' "songs or knacking and harping, dancing" to "geten the stynkyng love of damyselis."

[87] Gwynn, op. cit., p. 51. *Fifty Heresies and Errors of Friars*, in Arnold, op. cit., p. 387.

[88] Wright, *Political Poems and Songs*, Vol. II, p. 22. Gower, *Vox Clamantis*, ed. Macaulay, op. cit., p. 188.

[89] *Vox Clamantis*, ed. Macaulay, p. 189.

[90] *Piers Plowman*, B Text, ed. Skeat (*Early English Text Society*, London, 1869), p. 170. *Vox Clamantis*, ed. Macaulay, p. 184.

[91] Gwynn, *Studies*, 26 (1937), 51. In the convent statutes of Leon, the Franciscans were prohibited from keeping horses or grooms. *Archivo Ibero-Americano*, 7 (1917), 262. In *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, pp. 210–212, Owst noted that friars arrived to deliver their sermons on horseback, dressed in gaudy robes. Chaucer's friar favored dainty food and impressive dress. *Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robinson, lines 259–263, 1839–1845. FitzRalph also accused the friars of wearing costly clothes. Williams, op. cit., p. 508, citing BM ms. Lansdowne, fol. 131v.

sermons to condemn the use of money, they heaped up riches in private. Fine linen soothed their flesh under their rough outer garments, and their honeyed words fell from tongues that dripped poison. In short, whatever virtues Francis sought to institute in his holy Order, these friars did their best to vitiate,[92] and thus fell into the worst possible sin. Wyclif wrote:

> Ypocrisie is a fals feynyng of holynes whan it is not in trewthe bifore god, and so ypocrisie is fully contrarie to crist, that is trewthe as the gospel techthe, and it is comunly the moste perylous synne of alle. For comunly an ypocrite doth nevere verrey penaunce, for trist that he has in his owen holy feyned lif and for likyng of veyne glorie and for wynnynge of worldly goodis; and ypocrites ben most cursed bifore al other theves, for thei ben theves of goodis of grace and dysceyven other men in goodis of fortune or goodis of kynde, and as a thing is betere so the mysusyng ther-of is more dampnable, as lyncolne and other clerkis proven; and therfore crist in the gospel cursid so ofte ypocritis more than othere synful men." [93]

These accusations of the friars' critics — neglect of the poor, cultivating the rich and giving them hospitality within their cloisters, and hypocritical behavior — all parallel criticisms raised from within the Order.

The fourteenth century was marked by a significant change in the Franciscan life. One dimension of this change was the Minorites' abandoning their itinerant mission and with it, most likely, some measure of their dedication to the poor. The Constitutions of this period repeatedly enjoined the Minorites against going outside the convent except in a small number of restricted instances. The 1331 General Constitutions of Perpignan forbade the friars from going into cities more than once a week; young brothers could go only once a month.[94] (A prohibition against keeping secular clothes in their cells suggests that some Minorites were accustomed to going outside the convent incognito.[95]) Travel, even from one Franciscan house to

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[92] *Vox Clamantis*, ed. Macaulay, pp. 187, 195.

[93] *On the Leaven*, pp. 3–4. See also Wright, I, pp. 253–263, II, p. 264, and Mayer, op. cit., p. 491.

[94] P. Saturninus Mencherini, O.F.M., "Constitutiones Generales Ordinis Fratrum Minorum a Cap. Perpiniani Anno 1331 Celebrato Editae," AFH, 2 (1909), 289–290.

[95] General Constitutions of Lyons, II, ii, AFH, 30 (1938), 160.

another, had become a formal procedure, regulated by official authorization; letters from superiors had to be carried by all travellers, who were not always hospitably welcomed.[96] During the Schism, journeys of mendicants from Clementine to Urbanite provinces, or the reverse, came under particular official scrutiny.[97]

The growing tendency to neglect the poor is reflected in the *Ordinationes* of Benedict XII. There the ministers, custodians and guardians of the order were told to compel all Franciscans, *etiam notabiles*, to hear the confessions of poor men and women as well as rich.[98]

The Franciscans' relations with royalty and with noble families had undeniably become close by the fourteenth century. Minorite confessors were in residence at many courts; some performed a number of functions. One "friar John Welle," chaplain to John of Gaunt, went to Rome on his behalf at least once, and procured bulls for him on at least two other occasions.[99] The English kings were generous to the Franciscans, and had apartments at Greyfriars, York. It was commonplace in this period for Franciscan convents to provide lodgings for nobles and for secular prelates.[100]

No writer outside the order was as merciless in exposing Mino-

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[96] General Constitutions of Naples, 22, 24 in Giuseppe Abate, "Costituzioni Inedite dei Frati Minori," MF, 29 (1929), 171.

[97] Statutes of the Paris Chapter of 1382 called by Angelo of Spoleto, in *Archivo Ibero-Americano*, 7 (1917), 251.

[98] AFH, 30 (1938), 372.

[99] Little, *Studies in English Franciscan History*, pp. 85, 91. The close connection between the French kings and the Dominicans is well known; that English rulers were accustomed to have both Dominican and Franciscan confessors has been mentioned above. Eminent mendicant papal confessors included the Dominican Raymond of Peñafort, confessor of Gregory IX, and the Franciscan confessor and biographer of Innocent IV, Nicholas de Carbio. Noble loyalty was not infrequently divided among several Orders; Guillaume de Nangis noted that on his death the Count of Valois' body was buried at the Dominican cemetery in Paris, his heart at the Franciscan. *Chronique latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, ed. H. Géraud, II (Paris, 1843), 65.

Friars often travelled on behalf of their wealthy patrons; the accusation of "Rome-running" which occurs so frequently in the fourteenth-century statutes was doubtless brought on in part by these services. Abuse of this practice occasioned a warning in the *Memorialia* of the 1354 Chapter General at Assisi that any Minorite travelling to the curia on behalf of prelates or princes must carry testimonial letters. AFH, 35 (1942), 221.

[100] Ibid., pp. 39 and 75–76.

rite hypocrisy as Brugman. While they preached about vice and virtue, rewards and punishment, the Franciscans' own behavior was contemptible, he charged. They were arrogant, presumptuous, willful, dissolute, gluttonous, rabble-rousing, egotistical and slanderous. They got drunk in the company of scholars, and generally vitiated by example what they taught in their sermons.[101] The priests of his own order, he wrote, were porcine where they should have been angelic, and the guardians were even worse.

> ...Quid enim prodest quod ministri seu vicarii alte clamant in conventibus, si gardiani et praesidentes nolunt manutenere quod per illos salubriter et industriose in visitationibus practicatum est, et in capitulis proclamatum exstat adversus defectus fratrum seu conventuum? Pestis autem et ruina totius Ordinis radicaliter procedit ab huiusmodi casibus et accidentibus oppositis, quae sequuntur, utpote si directe vel indirecte insteterit implicite vel explicite pro officio, tanquam honorem consequendo, si ad hoc fratres obsequio, munusculo, recreatione, solatio vel promissione, blandimento, adulacione vel altera practica simili induxerit, si zelum Dei et disciplinam Ordinis ante oculos non posuerit, si libertatem et consolationem propriam, commodumve quaesierit, si fatuellis iuvenibus et remissis fratribus largam licentiam dederit, si timore depositionis ab offitio de illicito licitum gloriabundus fecerit, si acceptor personarum fuerit, si dissolutus animo saltem et immaturus in opere exstiterit, si communitatem refectorii, dormitorii, chori, intrare dissimulaverit; si debiles, infirmos et tristes consolari renuerit; si crudelem et impetuosum se ostenderit; si devotionem, recollectionem, orationem contemnens, se et fratres suos ad opera exteriora, tanquam mechanicos et negotiatores, indiscrete effundi permiserit;... Si amicos antiquos, quasi nihil boni fecissent conventui aut Ordini, superbia et arroganti fronte contempserint et consolari ac visitare in rationabilibus non curaverint; si cum curatis passim bella, dissensiones suscitaverint; si Officium divinum manutenere neglexerint et ad ipsum primi recurrere et ultimi manere iuxta posse non studuerint... Si mulierculas et suspectas tanquam venenum non abhorreant; si ambiciose tortuosa in officio sectati fuerint, et ad hoc fratres zelatores et probos amoveri a loco diffamacionibus procuraverint; si in passionibus passivis a praelato in eum factis, instar basilisci fulminando, impatientissime se habendo, claves conventus et sigilla praelato suo obiciendo, irregulariter se habuerint; si in visitatione aut depositione nomina visitantium sibi studiose revelari studuerint; si revelantes huiusmodi capituli secreta, tanquam latro latronem et complex complicem sacramentaliter, cum non liceat, absol-

[101] Brugman, op. cit., p. 621.

> verint; si fratribus cum visitantibus vel deponentibus cum, comminatorie, exprobratorie, timorem, terrorem et persecutionem incusserint: audeo dicere, quod si talia contigerint, illic sol tendit ad occasum, religio ad interitum, conventus ad ruinam, sanctitas ad suspendium, observantia in favillam redigitur [102]

Brugman's violent and sweeping critique touched on virtually every area of anti-mendicant criticism. Of course, his theme was the corruption of the Observants of the early fifteenth century, not the Conventuals of the late fourteenth. But there are enough references in his *Speculum Imperfectionis* to the "other orders" and to the Conventuals to suggest that his criticisms were applicable to the most numerous segment of the Order in the late fourteenth century.

One of Brugman's themes was the violence of his fellow friars, an accusation commonly made by anti-mendicant writers. Of their fighting and "other bodili harmes," Wyclif wrote, "tungis suffisen not to telle." [103] If prospective Minorites present themselves at the convent armed with clubs and other weapons, it was said, then they would be more quickly and reverently received into the Order.[104] Where they were not directly involved, the friars fomented violence, according to their opponents. They helped to bring about the deaths of priests that taught the truth and exposed mendicant hypocrisy; they encouraged peaceable men to "take vengeance openly" against one another, and to sue one another in the courts.[105]

Mendicant influence could move entire lands to battle. When early in the 1380's Urban VI preached a crusade against Flemish supporters of his rival at Avignon, the preaching friars were instrumental in recruiting and financing the fighting men that subsequently invaded Flanders in 1383 (led by Henry Despencer, Bishop of Norwich, who crushed the peasant revolt in Norfolk). Wyclif blamed the entire expedition on the friars. Mendicants were sometimes to be found on

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[102] Ibid., pp. 623-625.

[103] *De Ecclesia et Membris Ejus*, p. 349. The large number of Franciscans who held inquisitorial positions — and who therefore had the right to carry weapons — may account for these accusations to some extent. Henry Charles Lea, *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1954), p. 78.

[104] Brugman, op. cit., p. 615.

[105] *On the Leaven*, p. 16; *De Ecclesia et Membris Ejus*, p. 348. Some blamed the Peasant Revolt of 1381 on the friars. *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, ed. Shirley (London, 1858); *Chronicon Angliae, auctore Monacho... S. Albani*, ed. Maunde Thompson, Rolls Series (London, 1874), 312.

the battlefield, now as confessor to soldiers, now as soldiers themselves.[106]

The statutes of this period give ample evidence from within the Order of the violence of the fourteenth-century Franciscans. In the Constitutions of Cahors they were prohibited from carrying arms and attacking each other with swords; this prohibition was repeated in later statutes as well, including the great Farinerian collection of 1354. There the injunction against violent attack forbids striking, throwing stones or other missiles and carrying or possessing swords or mutilating seculars, and even hiring assassins.

> ...Si vero manum levaverit vel aliquid ad percutiendum acceperit contra fratrem, ei probationis capucium tribus mensibus imponatur per alterum praedictorum. Si autem non graviter percusserit, vel ad percutiendum graviter lapidem vel aliud proiecerit, vel gladium aut aliquid aliud eduxerit, et qui etiam arma offensionis portaverit vel in cella vel alibi retinuerit, poena carceris puniatur. Quodsi aliquis frater fratrem alium vel saecularem enormiter vulneraverit vel mutilaverit, vel alicui venenum dederit, perpetuo carceri mancipetur. Et eidem poenae subiaceat, qui haec eadem vel similia per alium fieri fecerit vel procuraverit, vel ad huiusmodi facienda inventus fuerit machinari.[107]

Convent statutes from Leon dated 1375 provided that if fighting occurred within the convent and a friar was wounded, his attacker was to be imprisoned and tortured until he revealed the true circumstances of the attack.[108]

The Minorites seemed excessively violent even in a violent age, particularly when their privileges were threatened. When the clergy of Saint Stephens in Prague demanded the *quarta* due them from a burial in a Minorite cemetery, the friars refused; the priests of the cathedral pronounced their excommunication in the presence of the entire parish. In retaliation, the Minorites armed themselves, gathered together their supporters, and burst into the sanctuary. A bloody battle ensued. The people were horrified, and the Ordinary, John Drazik, attempted to have the Franciscans expelled from Bohemia,

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[106] *De Ecclesia et Membris Ejus*, p. 348; *Fifty Heresies and Errors of Friars*, p. 386. In *Piers Plowman*, B Text ed. Skeat (London, 1869), XV, 118–121, p. 261, the remark is made that priests were accustomed to wear short-swords and to carry daggers and sheath-knives.

[107] AFH, 35 (1942), 186.

[108] *Archivo Ibero-Americano*, 7 (1917), 268.

but the mendicant conservator was able to smooth things over and the sentence of excommunication was lifted.[109] This happened in 1334, but similar disputes between the friars and secular clergy and among the friars themselves occurred throughout the century, some of which make critical passages in the anti-mendicant literature pale by comparison.

Criticism of the friars was not without justification, nor was it limited to non-mendicant opponents. The most serious focus of this criticism — friar appropriation of the functions of secular priests, and the disputes which resulted — will be discussed in a subsequent article.

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[109] Lippens, "Le droit nouveau," p. 259.