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Riccoldo da Monte Croce's Mission towards the Nestorians and the Jacobites (1288–c. 1300)

*Defining Heresy and Inventing the Relationship with the Other:
From Theory To Missionary Experience*

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Abstract

In 1288 the Dominican Riccoldo da Monte Croce headed to the East, where Pope Nicolas IV and the Master General of his order had sent him on a mission to the Nestorians and Jacobites. For this mission he stayed about ten years with Nestorians, Jacobites and other Eastern Christians. The account of his sojourn in the East, entitled *Liber peregrinationis*, and the theoretical analysis he derived from it—his *Libellus ad nationes orientales*—allow us to understand how a thirteenth-century Roman Catholic missionary perceived the relationships between the Catholic Church and Oriental, non-Chalcedonian Churches, in the time of the Second Council of Lyon and shortly after the definitive loss of the Crusader states. Riccoldo's rhetoric is influenced by several elements—the pontifical definition of Christianity, Dominican missionary theories and the experience of his stay among the Nestorians and the Jacobites in Niniveh and Baghdad. Riccoldo da Monte Croce learned Arabic and Chaldean during his long residence as a Roman Catholic missionary in the East, where he gained a deep knowledge of Eastern Christians. Never did he lose or downplay, however, his identity as a mendicant friar and an apostolic missionary. In the life and the works of Riccoldo da Monte Croce, we witness the confrontation of a convinced Dominican missionary with Eastern Christians, which leads us to rethink the definition of Christianity grounded in the notions of *unitas* and *uniformitas*.

Keywords

Riccoldo da Monte Croce – Eastern Christians – Baghdad – Dominican Order

Introduction

In 1288, fourteen years after the Second Council of Lyon, and within the last few years of Frankish presence in the Holy Land, Riccoldo da Monte Croce, a Dominican from the region of Florence, went on a mission to the East at the request of Pope Nicolas IV and the Master of his order. He stayed there about ten years.¹ Thanks to his studies at various European universities and his religious education with the Dominicans, whose ranks he joined in 1267, Riccoldo had a strong scholastic background, which underlay his written works. On 18 May 1291, whilst in Baghdad, Riccoldo learned about the fall of Acre, and he saw the survivors of this event, who had been reduced to slavery, flock back to that city. Soon afterwards he wrote five letters in which he expressed his frustrations and hopes. Years later, when back in Florence, he wrote an account of his *peregrinatio*, as well as two didactic works, *Contra legem Sarracenorum* and *Libellus ad nationes orientales*, meant for the Latin missionaries who were to succeed him.² In his *Liber peregrinationis* and his *Libellus ad nationes orientales*, Riccoldo recounted his experience as a pilgrim and above all as a missionary. In the former, he treated his missionary work and his encounters with Eastern Christians, while in the latter, defined by Jean Richard as “a missionary’s handbook,” he put forward his knowledge of Nestorians, Jacobites, Jews and Tartars and concluded with five general rules for missionaries based on his experience.³

The Dominican Riccoldo da Monte Croce is thus one of the agents of the pope’s union policy, but also the author of a personal reflection on his activity as a missionary, particularly in the *Libellus*. As his mission to the Eastern nations included interactions with non-Chalcedonian Christians, his writings allow us to see how he developed his rhetoric about “otherness,” both within and outside Christianity, and this at a time when the Roman Catholic Church asserted its universality and undertook significant efforts to unify Christianity.

1 On Riccoldo’s life, see Emilio Panella, “Ricerche su Riccoldo da Monte di Croce,” *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 58 (1988): 5–85.

2 Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Libellus ad Nationes Orientales*, ed. A. Dondaine, *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 37 (1967) 119–176; Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, ed. J.-M. Mérioux, *Memorie Domenicane* 17 (1986): 60–144; Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination en Terre sainte et au Proche Orient; Lettres sur la chute de Saint-Jean d’Acre*, ed. R. Kappeler, *Textes et traductions des classiques français du Moyen Âge*, 4 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997).

3 Jean Richard, *La Papauté et les Missions d’Orient au Moyen Âge (XIII^e–XV^e siècles)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1998), 118.

Riccoldo's rhetoric is influenced by several elements—the pontifical definition of Christianity, existing Dominican missionary theories and the impact that his missionary work in Niniveh and Baghdad had on Nestorians and Jacobites.

Defining Heresy

We should first define what Riccoldo meant by the word “heretic” before dealing with the Nestorian and Jacobite heresies themselves. For the concept of heresy has several meanings—it can refer to a state of being and the ways that lead to it or to the intimate beliefs of an individual or a group and their condemnation by ecclesiastical authorities, such condemnation applying both to men as individuals and to specific beliefs. It is therefore important first to determine to what extent deviance from Roman Catholic orthodoxy was tolerated before Latin churchmen pronounced informal and formal condemnations for heresy. How much the Latin clergy permitted deviance from Roman Catholic orthodoxy varied in time and according to the individuals in question.

After first meeting the Nestorians and the Jacobites, Riccoldo da Monte Croce called them heretics and infidels, even if, as we shall see, he soon qualified such judgements. According to Roman Catholic tradition, the Jacobites were accused of miaphysitism and the Nestorians of diophysitism. In Riccoldo's account, the Nestorians' heresy and subsequent “misbelief” (*infidelitas*), derived from these theological deviances, justified his mission to evangelize them.⁴

Yet, in 1288, when Rabban Bar Sauma was an ambassador in the West, he was granted an audience by Pope Nicolas IV and celebrated a mass in his presence.⁵ On this occasion the pope and the bishops considered that the Nestorian Church had formed a formal union with the Roman Church. Arriving in Mosul the following year, Riccoldo explained that the Nestorians and

4 Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination*, 128.

5 *The Monks of Kubilai Khan, Emperor of China or The History of the Life and Travels of Rabban Sawma, Envoy and Plenipotentiary of the Mongol Khans to the Kings of Europe, and Markos who as Mar Yahbh-Allaha III Became Patriarch of the Church of the East in Asia*, trans. by E.A. Wallis Budge (London: Religious Tract Society, 1928), available online at <http://www.aina.org/books/mokk/mokk.htm> (accessed 25 June 2014). After a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with one of his students, the Nestorian monk Rabban Bar Sauma (c. 1220–1294) was sent to Europe by the Il-khan Arghun as ambassador. During his mission, he met Byzantine Emperor Andronic II Palaiologos, French King Philip the Fair, Edward I of England, and Pope Nicholas IV.

the Jacobites were heretical because they did not abide by the teachings of the Council of Chalcedon on the nature of Christ (451), and that heretofore they were considered infidels, because they had other religious beliefs.⁶

We may explain this difference between the position of the pope and that of the missionary in part by remarking that they held different conceptions of the norms of Roman Catholic union. The pope and his bishops demanded that Nestorian *catholicos* acknowledge the pope's primacy. As for Riccoldo and his companions, they opposed the heterodox clergy and the majority of Nestorian believers, whose beliefs and rites were different from the clergy's. In his chapter on Jacobites, Riccoldo wrote that his duty as a missionary was to preach, and this often took on the form of a *disputatio*, the aim of which was to destroy the errors of those to whom it was addressed, in order to ensure their salvation.⁷ Promulgated for the first time in 1245, and thereafter several times renewed, the papal bull *Cum hora undecima* actually allowed missionaries to preach before the dignitaries of the Eastern Churches, their clergy and all their believers.

The goal of such preaching was always to secure recognition of and obedience to papal authority, as we see in the attention which Church dignitaries paid to the conversion of temporal and spiritual leaders of the various Eastern nations—Jacobites and Nestorians, but also Maronites, who lived in the Lebanese mountains: "The archbishop listened to our profession of faith in Arabic, and he wrote to the pope in his own hand about the faith, as we wished, on the subject of obedience to the pope and to the holy Roman Church."⁸ Riccoldo's definition of the Nestorian and Jacobite heresies was thus based on the decisions made by the council following the Christological quarrels of the fifth century. If the majority of Latin travellers in the East merely called Nestorius and the Nestorians heretics, Riccoldo, like Jacques de Vitry, the bishop of Acre, before him, showed a more thorough knowledge of the history of the councils of Christendom, owing both to his education and to the apostolic mandate that underwrote his presence in Orient. His accurate knowledge of the Nestorian heresy can be seen in his references to Nestorius's master, Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 352–428), whom he considered the insti-

6 Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination*, 124 and 136.

7 Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination*, 126–128.

8 *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq*, trans. George-Tvrtković, 204. "Archiepiscopus tamen audiuit a nobis fidem in arabico et manu propria scripsit pape de fide ut uolumus de obedientia ad papam et ad sanctam romanam ecclesiam," Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination*, 132–134.

gator of the doctrine propagated by Nestorius.⁹ He also mentioned Eutyches as well as Macarius of Antioch and their condemnation during the Council of Chalcedon.¹⁰

Why did he point out the responsibility of some individuals, whom he held responsible for the whole community's drift towards heresy? Was this emphasis merely owing to his knowledge of the Christological debates of the first centuries of Christianity or was it part of a larger missionary strategy? At the time of his mission, his analysis remains the same: the Jacobites had been seduced, led astray by their bishops (*sed facilliter seducuntur per suos episcopos*).¹¹ The same idea can be found in his description of how Jacobites and Nestorians received his preaching. Now that the heresy has widely spread, Riccoldo no longer stigmatizes individuals, but rather the group as a whole, which appears responsible for creating divisiveness and schism by refusing to convert.¹² Deprived of the *Verbum Dei* and wrongly taught in their schismatic state—whether this precedes or follows the heretical beliefs of individuals—it is first suggested that Eastern Christians had been led astray. The missionary ascribes their heresy both to their ignorance and to the responsibility of individual seducers. As for the Nestorians, their heresy is almost a pretence since some amongst them admit to the Dominicans that they fear the rejection of their peers if they were openly to acknowledge the undoubted truth of the friars' speech. The association of schism, heresy and ignorance is neither unprecedented nor Riccoldo's own creation. In such discourse he follows Patristic and Hieronymian *topoi* in particular. This concept also appears in the *Historia*

9 "Nestorius enim et Theodorus magister eius talem sententiam de unione incarnationis protulerunt" ("Nestorius and his master Theodorus stated such a sentence about the union of the Incarnation"). Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination*, 163 (My translation). "Et inde .xxx.m. Mamistram ubi fuit episcopus Theodorus maximus hereticus qui totum euangelium sua expositione fedans dixit Virginem non peperisse Deum sed hominem iustum et templum Dei. Huius uirulentos libros inuenimus in omnes partes orientales apud Nestorinos. Nam Nestorius fuit eius sectator." ("From there we went thirty miles to Mamistra where the greatest heretic Bishop Theodore used to live, who—corrupting the entire gospel with his interpretation—said that the Virgin was not a "God-bearer" but bore a regular man and a "templum Dei." We found his poisonous books among the Nestorians throughout the East. For Nestorius was his disciple.") Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination*, 76; translated by Rita George-Tvrtković, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq. Riccoldo da Montecroce's Encounter with Islam* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 187.

10 Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Libellus ad nationes orientales*, 164.

11 Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Libellus ad nationes orientales*, 169.

12 Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination*, 130 and 154.

orientalis of the Bishop of Acre, James of Vitry, and in the *Opus tripartitum* of Humbert of Romans, the ancient master general of the Order of the Preachers.¹³

Thus, we see that the denunciation of the path leading to heresy is based on a theological-historical vision of *Christianitas* and *Ecclesia*. The Latin theologians created a myth of original unity, based on apostolic evangelization, that was later corrupted by individual heretics. This was particularly so in the case of the non-Chalcedonian Churches, associated due to their Latin name with well-identified founders: Nestorius or Jacob Baradeus. Much as the first Crusaders restored Christianity to its “original state” (*ad pristinum statum*),¹⁴ the missionaries must restore original unity to the Church by bringing Eastern Christians back into the bosom of the Roman Church, thus bolstering the Orthodox faith and reducing the effects of schism, and also ensuring the salvation of individuals long languishing in heresy. The missionary’s emphasis on the vices and virtues of the Jacobites can be read in the same way. On the one hand, those who refuse to accept the *Verbum Dei* are considered a “mob” (*turba*). They can only utter unarticulated shouts (*clamor et tumultus*). On the other hand, the most educated of them, chosen by their peers to answer their challenges (*ad respondendum*), accept, during the *disputatio* initiated by the Latin missionaries, the truth of the word communicated by the Dominicans.¹⁵ Riccoldo first presents the virtuous “Word” leading to salvation, based on reason and the Scriptures, but drawing mostly from divine grace, without which it would not exist.¹⁶ He contrasts this “Word” of truth with the misleading and

13 Jacques de Vitry, *Histoire orientale = Historia orientalis*, ed. Jean Donnadiu (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 306–308 and 320; Humbert de Romans, *Opusculum tripartitum*, 217. Brian Tierney, “Huguccio’s gloss on the words *nisi deprehendatur a fide devius*,” in Tierney *Foundation of the Conciliar Theory: the Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 248–249; Aurélien Girard and Benoît Schmitz ed., *De l’Église aux Églises: réflexions sur le schisme aux Temps modernes, Mélanges de l’École française de Rome-Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines*, 126.2 (2014), available online at <http://mefrim.revues.org/1788>.

14 “Christianismum, a nefandis tamdiu pessumdatum, in honorem debitum et pristinum relevare.” Foucher de Chartres, *Fulcheri Carnotensis historia Hierosolymitana (1095–1127)*, ed. H. Hagenmeyer (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1913), 278.

15 Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination*, 128–130.

16 “Nos autem respondimus quod iueramus causa salutis eorum.” (“We replied that we had come for their salvation.”) Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination*, 128 (translation mine). After Riccoldo’s sermon, the Jacobite admits in turn: “quem Deus misit ad nos ut non dampnemur” (“the one that God has send to save us from damnation.”) Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination*, 128 (translation mine).

heretical word, which leads to damnation.¹⁷ For Riccoldo, when heretics were most concerned with cultivating reason and piety, missionary preaching would lead to conversion to the Roman Catholic Church. The Jacobites' conversion follows the hagiographical *topos*, according to which these qualities precede their conversion. It is, therefore, their virtues that make them more susceptible to conversion. They are already Christian, in the Roman sense, without knowing it yet. The preacher's word only enables them to recognize it themselves. Rather than underlining the dogmatic or ecclesiological break between the Roman and the Eastern Churches, Riccoldo da Monte Croce prefers to stress individuals who brought their communities back to orthodoxy from heresy. He puts less emphasis on schism and heresy in order to build up an idealized original unity so as to legitimize the union policy of the papacy. This logic does not exclude the denunciation of the many mistakes made by Nestorians and Jacobites, but according to Riccoldo, such mistakes are mainly ritual and therefore pale in favour of the greater effort to unify the faith.

In the prologue to the *Libellus ad nationes orientales*, Riccoldo made it clear that their heresy did not include the whole of their beliefs, nor the way they implemented those beliefs, but rather was owed solely to their understanding of the Incarnation. For the other Eastern Churches, he did not think they were very far from the Latins.¹⁸ For the papacy the most important task was to put an end to schism and to bring the Eastern Churches back into the fold of the Roman Church, but for Riccoldo, unifying the Churches first meant unifying or reunifying faiths and thus fighting against a few persons who propagated false beliefs. It was with this point of view that he first examined the dogmatic situation of Jacobites and Nestorians.

17 "Et adjurauimus eos per sanguinem crucifixi quem maxime uenerantur ne cum tot laboribus ex sua infidelitate descenderent ad infernum" (Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination*, 128).

18 "Et quidem christiani illi non videntur multum longinqui pro eo quod legem plenam habent et integram, scilicet vestus testamentum et novum, et incarnationem Christi verbis simplicibus confitentur, sed tamen quantum ad modum incarnationis quem ponunt multum distant a nobis vero ut infra patebit." ("And the same Christians [the Nestorians and the Jacobites] don't seem to be very far from us. They abide indeed by a full and complete law, that is, the Old and the New Testaments, and confessed the Incarnation of Christ with simple words. And yet they are far from us when it comes to the modes of the Incarnation that they put forward.") Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Libellus*, 162–163 (translation mine).

Determining the Heresy or Orthodoxy of Nestorians and Jacobites

In his *Libellus ad nationes orientales*, a handwritten comment by Riccoldo, found in the margin next to the term *heretici* that was used to refer to Jacobites and Nestorians, shows his hesitation to label them heretics and his doubts about their supposedly heretical state:

Please note that here and elsewhere I call them heretics, but I am saying this as an opinion and not as a certainty. For indeed the pope has not yet decided whether the Eastern Jacobites and Nestorians are heretics, as there are arguments for and against this idea, and I am waiting for a Papal or magisterial pronouncement on this matter.¹⁹

In the account of his mission to Eastern nations, Riccoldo further explained such doubts, based on his knowledge of Nestorians and Jacobites, among whom he lived for about ten years. In addition to conciliar decisions, he based his judgment on what he saw with his own eyes, on what Nestorians and Jacobites told him, and finally, on recorded statements of the pope, who, after all, had the final word in such matters. He used both his religious knowledge and his personal experiences as a missionary in order to arrive at his own conclusions. His linguistic skills closed the gap between him and so-called “heretics,” but his interpretations of Church history and his undoubted commitment to the Roman Catholic Church compelled him to point out and to criticize Nestorian and Jacobite “errors.” In his accounts of the Eastern Churches, we remark significant tension between Riccoldo’s Roman Catholic religious *auctoritates* and his critical mind as a scholar and as a missionary.

In the account of his long *peregrinatio*, Riccoldo treats at length the religious terminology of Nestorians and of Latins about the nature of Christ and their different uses of the terms “person” and “substance.”²⁰ To do this, he drew

19 “Nota quod hic vel ubicumque appello eos hereticos, dico opinative et non certitudinaliter. Nondum enim diffinitum est per papam utrum sint heretici illi iacobini et nestoriani orientales sed sunt argumenta pro et contra et expecto determinationem papalem vel etiam magistralem” (Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Libellus ad nationes orientales*, fol. 219v).

20 At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Oliver of Paderborn made a similar observation about the Nubians, in a much shorter way and without drawing any conclusion about the mission or the learning of languages: “forsitan nomen nature equivocantes, ut secundo loco naturam pro persona accipiant” (“the use of the word nature is ambiguous, since in the second place they understand nature instead of person.”) Oliver of Paderborn, *Die Schriften des kölnen Domscholasters, späteren Bischofs von Paderborn und Kardinal-Bischofs von S. Sabina Oliverus*, Bibliothek des Literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 202 (Tübingen: Litterarischen Verein in Stuttgart, 1894), 264 (My translation).

from his knowledge of the Arabic and Chaldean languages and concluded that the Nestorians' disagreement with the Latins was purely owing to terminology that was lost in translation. According to Riccoldo, the fact that Nestorians refused to call the Virgin *theotokos* and to recognize the divine nature of Christ and the Incarnation was owing to a problem of vocabulary.²¹ His understanding and translation of theological concepts allowed him to see orthodoxy in what was once deemed heterodox rhetoric, for he learned from experience that meaning changed as ideas migrated from one language to another. For Riccoldo, therefore, language skills became instrumental in bridging the gap between missionaries and heretics. Knowing and understanding the linguistic origins of the Eastern Churches' supposedly heterodox or heretical dogmas enabled him not only to counter their prelates' arguments more efficiently but also to understand the absence of real dogmatic difference between the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Churches, whose differences, in many cases, owed mainly to linguistic or lexical problems.

Riccoldo also hesitated to label the Nestorians as "heretics" since many Nestorian *catholicos* unmistakably rejected Nestorius's teaching. Nestorian

21 "Et ne cogantur eum diuidere in duos filios dicunt esse unum *sciacx* arabicum id est una persona, et ne cogantur dicere Deum esse natum ex uirgine diuidunt eum in duo *acnum* caldeum id est supposita. Vnde ipsi omnes dicunt Christum esse unum *sciacx* et duo *acnum*, quod secundum Nestorium qui fuit Grecus, sonat una persona et duo supposita. Ipsi tamen Nestorini orientales sunt omnes Caldei et in caldeo legunt et orant. Vnde nullo modo sciunt que est differentia inter *acnum* et *sciacx*, et igitur ualde utile querere ab eis que est diffinitio *acnum* et *sciacx* et que est differentia inter *acnum* et *sciacx*. Et secundum ueritatem nulla penitus est differentia nisi quod *sciacx* est nomen arabicum et sonat idem quod persona, et *acnum* est nomen caldeum et sonat idem quod persona, et secundum hoc ipsi dicunt in arabico Christum esse unam personam et in caldeo Christum esse duas personas. Quicquid igitur dicunt de *sciacx* coguntur secundum ueritatem dicere de *acnum* et e conuerso." ("And lest they be forced to say that he is divided into two sons, they say that he is one *sciacx*, which means one person in Arabic. And lest they be forced to say that God is born of a virgin, they divide him into two *acnum*, which means two substances in Chaldean. From this they say that Christ has one *sciacx* and two *acnum*, which, following Nestorius who was a Greek, is expressed as one person and two substances. These eastern Nestorians are all Chaldeans and they pray read and pray in Chaldean. Thus they do not know the difference between *acnum* and *sciacx* and therefore it is very useful to ask them what the definition of *acnum* and *sciacx* is, and what the difference between the two is. And in truth there is no great difference, except that *sciacx* is the Arabic word for person, and *acnum* is the Chaldean word for person. As a result, when they speak in Arabic, they say that Christ is one person and when they speak in Chaldean they say that Christ is two persons.") Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination en Terre sainte*, 138–140, trans. by George-Tvrtković, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq*, 205–206.

clergyman explained to Riccoldo that the believers of his Church are not named after their alleged founder but after Jesus of Nazareth. For that matter, they were fully conscious that their being called “Nestorians” by the Latins implied heterodoxy and heresy, and they therefore rejected this term in favour of “Nazareans”: “We know that the Nestorians deny that they are the followers of Nestorius, a reputation of which they are truly ashamed, and say their name does not come from Nestorius, but from Jesus the Nazarean and want to be called *nazantarei*, that is Nazareans.”²² Here, the Dominican gave a Latinized version of the word that was actually used in the Arabic language to designate indigenous Christians: *nasrānī* (plural *nasrānā*), coined with the Arabic term that designated the town of Nazareth, *an-Nāsirah*. The missionary took into account the words of the Eastern Christians to determine their dogmatic situation—be it heretic or orthodox.

To the authority of what he had read and studied, Riccoldo added the experience of what he had seen, heard and lived. Such experience was the source of his knowledge and made for another kind of authority, one born of experience and guaranteeing the accuracy of his accounts. In the *Liber peregrinationis*, the Dominican verifies by experience what the Nestorians say about their gift of divination (*et hoc procul dubio de aliquibus per experientiam uerum esse probauimus*).²³ In the prologue and in the epilogue to the *Libellus ad nationes orientales*, Riccoldo emphasizes the authority of his experience: he gives advice to and makes rules for missionaries following him on the sole basis of his personal experience (*experientia teste; per experientiam ita esse cognovi*).²⁴ To this experience he joins his critical spirit to confirm or to contest a religious tradition or, more specifically, the reality of the Nestorian or Jacobite heresies. Emphasis on the value and on the power of authority derived from experience is not unique to this Florentine missionary, but can be found in the writings of several Latin travelers to the East, such as in those of Oliver of Paderborn or of another Dominican and contemporary of Riccoldo, Burchard of Mount Sion.

Olivier of Paderborn was the schoolmaster of the metropolitan cathedral chapter of Cologne and the most prominent preacher of the Fifth Crusade. He spent many years in the East, and was present when the crusader army besieged Damietta in Egypt (1218–1219). During his sojourn in the East, he was able to observe the beliefs of the Nestorians and he had already remarked the

22 “Sciendum est quod nestorini ex verecundia negant se esse imitatores Nestorii, et dicunt quod denominantur non a Nestorio sed a Jhesu Nazareno et volunt vocari nazantarei, id est nazareni.” (Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Libellus*, 163).

23 Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Pérégrination*, 150.

24 Riccoldo da Monte Croce, *Libellus*, 162 and 168.

divergence between the words of the Nestorians and those of Nestorius about the nature of Christ and the Virgin *theotokos*. He wrote of this matter in the *Historia Damiatina*:

We have closely examined the Nestorians, who have settled near Antakya. They have their own church there and say they believe that two natures are united in the person of Christ and confess that the Virgin is the mother of God and man and that she herself fed God and man, which Nestorius refuted. However, only God knows whether they believe this with their hearts just as they confess it with their mouths.²⁵

Oliver of Paderborn took the trouble to hear what the Nestorians had to say about their beliefs, and he made it clear that such beliefs differed significantly from Nestorius's undoubted diophysitism. Contrary to other commentators and pilgrims, Oliver did not label the Nestorians heretics. All the same, he did not question the validity of the accusations of heresy against them, but instead questioned the Nestorians' sincerity, setting their "hearts" against their "mouths." His analysis was based on the authority of reason as well as on detailed investigation, including extensive interviews with Nestorians. He highlighted the categories of *intus* and *foris* that had played a major role in medieval thought since the twelfth century, and which we find in many pilgrimage accounts as well as in the writings of James of Vitry. After his experiences in the East and his analysis of the Nestorians and of their beliefs, Oliver of Paderborn wrote that he was unable to judge to what extent the Nestorians' hearts were in accordance with their words, leaving the responsibility to God, the ultimate authority in the matter.

The same confrontation between preconceived ideas and actual observation can be found in another of Riccoldo's contemporaries—the Dominican Burchard of Mount Sion, who left on a pilgrimage in the Holy Land after the Second Council of Lyon ended and stayed there about ten years. In the account of his pilgrimage to the East, he remarked of the Eastern Christians who were not in obedience to the Roman Catholic Church and often deemed heretics:

Besides, many fear that the regions located beyond the seas are said to be inhabited by Nestorians, Jacobites, Maronites, Georgians and others,

25 Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, in *Die Schriften des kölnner Domscholasters, späteren Bischofs von Paderborn und Kardinal-Bischofs von S. Sabina Oliverus*, Bibliothek des Literatischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 202 (Tübingen: Litterarischen Verein in Stuttgart, 1894), 159–280.

who derive their names from certain heretics, who are condemned by the Church. They are consequently thought to be heretics themselves and to follow the mistakes of those after whom they are named. All this is not true (God forbid!), on the contrary they are simple men who behave with devotion.²⁶

In order to contest the accusations of heresy that tarnished Nestorians, Jacobites, Maronites and Georgians, Burchard contrasted the heretic connotation of their names with their daily behavior. He thus opposes what he had witnessed—"they are simple men who behave with devotion" (*sunt homines simplices et devote se habentes*)—to ignorant representations of them—what "is said" of them (*quod dicitur*). Burchard pointed out that the names that Latin-rite Christians gave the Eastern Christians had an impact on the latter's reputation in two ways. Firstly, they predisposed Latins to react to them with fear (*Multos preterea terret*). Second, they turned Eastern Christians almost automatically into heretics by linking them to men who had been condemned for heresy by Roman Catholic authorities: namely, Nestorius, Jacob Baradeus and Maro.

Thus, this noteworthy preacher of the Fifth Crusade, together with the two Dominican missionaries whose writings we have seen, reveals the discrepancies between the rhetoric of conciliar authorities and the reality of what they observed during their encounters with Eastern Christians. This is particularly true in the case of the Nestorians, who were the most widely vilified Eastern nation, not only because their condemnations by the councils were recorded by Isidore of Seville,²⁷ but also because the Nestorians were relatively misunderstood since they lived under Muslim rule, beyond the territories dominated or visited by the Latins.

26 "Multos preterea terret, quod dicitur, quod in partibus transmarinis habitent Nestoriani, Iacobite, Maronite, Georgiani et alii, qui a quibusdam hereticis, quos ecclesia dampnat, uocabula traxerunt, et propterea ipsi creduntur esse heretici et sequi errores illorum, a quibus isti dicti sunt. Hoc omnino non est uerum (auertat Deus!), sed sunt homines simplices et devote se habentes." Burchard of Mount Zion, *Peregrinatores medii aevi quatuor: Buchardus de Monte Sion, Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, Odoricus de Foro Julii, Wilbrandus de Oldenborg. Quorum duos nunc primum edidit duos ad fidem librorum manuscriptorum recensuit Johann Christian Moritz Laurent* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs Bibliopola, 1873), 91.

27 *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum*, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), available online at <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Isidore/home.html>, VIII, 5; *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. S.A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Unlike Riccoldo, who considered the pope as the ultimate authority on matters of heresy, Burchard betrays a different point of view, since he drew from his own authority to refute the accusations of heresy hurled against Eastern Christians, especially against the Nestorians. After pointing out the consequences of the choice of a name, Burchard compared this name and its implied heterodoxy with the behavior of actual Eastern Christians and with the answers which the Nestorian prelates gave him when asked about their attitude towards the pope. The prelates whom he interviewed said that they willingly obeyed the Roman Church, which called into question accusations of schism, if not those of heresy. As for their behavior, he labeled it “devout.” In this way he underlined the contradiction between their *habitus* and the name given to them and resolved this contradiction by giving precedence to what he saw and heard. He concluded his analysis by rejecting the accusations of heresy against the Eastern Christians. Burchard’s relatively radical views may be explained by the importance of experience as source of his knowledge in all his account and by his status as a mere pilgrim. Although a Dominican and a prominent member of his order, he was neither a missionary nor an agent of the papacy union policy and he did not have to answer to the pope or to the master of his order in such matter.²⁸ The reaction and the situation of Oliver and of Riccoldo—the first being one of the most important preachers of the Crusade who became bishop after his return from the Holy Land, and the second a missionary sent to the East by the master of his order and the pope himself—were different from Burchard’s and did not allow them to speak their minds with the same liberty. But all three were realistic and pragmatic.

*Which christianitas? Unitas aut uniformitas? Practical Solutions
for a Theoretical Problem*

Riccoldo’s definition of orthodoxy or of heresy as a matter of *fides* above all else led him to develop a tolerance for different rites, so long as the unity of the faith prevailed over liturgical diversity—a principle which he stated in the third of his five *Regulæ generales* in his *Libellus ad nationes orientales*. Drawing from his personal experience, Riccoldo offered a practical solution to a theoretical problem, following the recommendations of his order, as the second part of Humbert of Romans’s *Opusculum tripartitum* shows, which work was

28 Jonathan Rubin, “Burchard of Mount Sion’s *Descriptio Terræ Sanctæ*: A Newly Discovered Extended Version,” *Crusades* 13 (2014): 173–190.

probably written at the request of Gregory X himself, in preparation for the Second Council of Lyon (1274).²⁹

One should perhaps also understand this tolerance for the ritual diversity within the context of the evolution of papal rhetoric. When Michael VIII Palaiologos reconquered Constantinople in 1261, the question of Christian union became once again a central issue for papal authorities. At this precise time the papacy's tone became more accommodating towards the Eastern Churches. Towards the Greeks, however, pontifical rhetoric kept on insisting on the *reductio Græcorum* until the Second Council of Lyon (1274), whereas papal letters about the separated Eastern Churches no longer insisted on heresy, but rather on schism to define their situation. An example of the *reductio Græcorum* was the refusal of Clement IV (1265–1268) both to accept the proposals issued from a discussion between Greek and Latin theologians and to convene a council aimed at resolving the various theological disputes between the two Churches. Nicholas of Durazzo, the Catholic bishop of Crotona, was one proponent of such proposals for reconciliation between the Greek and Latin Churches, embodied in a document called the *scriptura*, which first saw light of day in Constantinople in 1264. Instead of taking a more conciliatory path recommended by many Latin churchmen, Clement IV instead sent Michael VIII Palaiologos a profession of faith, whose approval he demanded, and which should be countersigned by the Emperor, the Patriarch and all Orthodox bishops. For him, union was a prerequisite before any joint council, which would simply be mere ratification of prior agreements. Before 1261, letters addressed to the missionaries referred to the “infidel Eastern nations” (*infideles nationes Orientis*), but from 1263 onwards, during the pontificate of Urban IV (1261–1264), missionaries were sent to meet with the “Eastern nations who are not in communion with the Holy Roman Church” (*nationes Orientis communionem Sanctæ Romanæ Ecclesiæ non habentes*).³⁰ After the pontificate

29 See *Humberti de Romanis legendæ sancti Dominici*, ed. S. Tugwell, *Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Prædicatorum historica*, 30 (Rome: Institutum Historicum Ordinis Fratrum Prædicatorum, 2008), 407–409. The tolerance for rites that Humbert advised contrasted with the recommendations issued by Jerome of Ascoli, who was to become Nicolas IV and who also sent a dissertation to Pope Gregory X shortly before the Council of Lyon II. Gregory X had indeed sent him as a nuncio to Constantinople in 1272 in order to find Greek ambassadors for the council that was to take place in Lyon. The Franciscan merely enumerated the mistakes made by the Greeks without taking into consideration what they contributed to Christianity.

30 “Cum hora undecima sit [...] Vos igitur, quos, juxta professæ religionis officium, zelus comedit animarum, ad gentes, quæ Jesum Christum dominum non cognoscunt et ad subtractionis filios, qui sacrosanctæ Romanæ Ecclesiæ non obediunt, destinamus, [...] ad

of Gregory X (1271–1276) and the Second Council of Lyon (1274), the change of tone was confirmed during the pontificate of Nicholas IV (1288–1292). For example, in a letter dated 3 September 1288 and sent to the Dominican Preachers, Nicholas IV described Eastern Christians as “the other foreign Eastern nations who are not in communion with the Holy Roman Church.”³¹ Whereas Nicholas IV did not hesitate to use the term “pagan” (*pagani*) to designate the nations that had yet to be evangelized,³² in several letters, including one dated 13 August 1291, he described Eastern Christians with far more conciliatory words, as “the other Eastern nations who are not in communion with the Holy Roman Church.”³³

Yet, even if Humbert and Riccoldo took a stand in favor of tolerance for the diversity of Eastern rites, the former Master of the Order nonetheless believed that *varietas* was one of the main reason for which the Greeks were predisposed to schism:

illuminationem cæcæ multitudinis et exterminium haereticæ falsitatis, ad confirmandos nutantium animos et fidelium confortandos in luce sermonis et rectitudinis operis, propositum vobis iter sine offensione quorumlibet procuratis. Ut autem ministerium vestrum honoretur plenius et honorabilius impleatur, praesentium auctoritate vobis concedimus, *ut in terris quae adhuc Sedis Apostolicæ magisterio non intendunt*, proponere verbum Dei et constitutis ibidem, non obstante si aliqui sunt excommunicatione ligati, in verbis et cibo ac in aliis secure communicare et ipsos seu etiam alios converti ad unitatem christianæ fidei cupientes, recipere, baptizare et aggregare filiis Ecclesiæ sanctæ possitis.” *Acta Urbani IV*, ed. A.L. Tăutu, Pontificia Commissio ad redigendum codicem iuris ~~canonici~~ orientalis. Fontes. ser 3 (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1953), 5: 1, no. 7: Act dated 28 July 1263: “Facultates speciales legatis in Orientem missis concessæ.” I highlight in italics the passages which indicate the evolution of the pope's rhetoric.

31 “Aliarumque externarum nationum Orientis communionem sanctæ Romanæ Ecclesiæ non habentium.” Vatican City, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Reg. Vat. 44, fol. 95; *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum inde ab a. post Christum natum MCXCVIII ad a. MCCCIV*, ed. A. Potthast (Berlin: Rudolph de Decker, 1874–75), 2: 1840 (no. 22788); *Ut per litteras apostolicas...: Les lettres pontificales. Registres et lettres des papes du XIV^e siècle*, cd-rom (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), *Lettres curiales*, no. 611, “Privilegia concedit fratribus ordinis prædicatorum ad terras infidelium proficiscentibus.”

32 “Privilegia concedit fratribus Ord. Præd. Ad nationes Orientis proficiscentibus. Littera concessa Prædicatoribus super prædicationem fidei ad paganos.” *Ut per litteras apostolicas*.

33 “Aliarumque externarum nationum Orientis communionem sanctæ Romanæ Ecclesiæ non habentium,” Vatican City, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Reg. Vat. 46, fol. 171v; *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum*, ed. Potthast 2: 1903 (no. 23777), “Facultates missionariis in Oriente concessæ.”

In the first place it should be noted that since the Antiquity, there has existed between the Latin and Greek peoples a variety of positions on various subjects, such as their different liturgical rites and the practice of continence in sacred orders, to which Latin people constrained themselves to abide by, while the Greeks refused to do so. They also differed in the way the sacrament was carried out, as Greeks used fermented bread while Latins did it with matzo. Variety is the mother and beginning of all discord. That is why variety, in this domain and in other similar ones, made the Greeks more prone to discord.³⁴

Such a reflection on the *varietas* practiced by the Greeks was linked with the pontifical theory of the *Ecclesia*—it reduced the diversity of the individual Churches to the unity of the universal Church,³⁵ at whose head there must be only one leader, the supreme pontiff.³⁶

For Humbert of Romans, pluralism thus had a purely historical dimension and implied a distinction between a primitive, original Church and a

34 “Circa primum notandum est, quod inter Græcos et Latinos ab antiquo fuit multa varietas, et quoad ritus multos diversos, et quoad continentiam in sacris ordinibus, ad quam Latini se obligaverunt, Græci vero noluerunt se obligare, et quoad modum conficiendi maximum sacramentum, quia Græci conficiunt de fermentato, Latini vero de azymo. Varietas autem mater est et initium discordiæ. Et ideo hujusmodi varietas et similes, fecerunt Græcos ad discordiam promptiores.” Humbert of Romans, *Opusculum tripartitum*, in *Fasciculus rerum expetendarum et fugiendarum, proot ab Orthuino Gratino, . . . editus Coloniae anno MDXXXV in Concilii tunc indicendi usum et admonitionem. Ab innumeris mendis repurgatus . . . una cum appendice sive Tomo II scriptorum veterum . . . qui Ecclesie Romanae errores et abusus detagunt et damnant . . . opera et studio Edwardi Brown*, ed. E. Brown (London: Richard Chiswell, 1690), 213.

35 “Ad hæc omnia et similia potest dici, quod plures sunt Ecclesie, et unica: plures in particulari, sed unica in universali. Unde dicitur in symbolo: Credo unam Ecclesiam catholicam, id est, universalem . . . ita est Ecclesie plures possunt esse particulariter, et insimul sunt omnes una Ecclesia,” (“To all these arguments and other similar ones, one may reply that Churches are plural and that the Church is unique: plural in their particularity, but unique in its universality. It is thus said in the symbol: I believe in one single Catholic Church, that is to say universal [. . .] and thus particular Churches may be plural while forming one single Church.”) Humbert of Romans, *Opusculum tripartitum*, 208 (My translation).

36 “Caput IV. Ostenditur, quod Ecclesia universalis debeat habere unum, qui sit Summus Pontifex.” (“Chapter IV. Where one learns that the universal Church ought to have a leader who is the Supreme Pontiff.”) Humbert of Romans, *Opusculum tripartitum*, 209 (My translation).

modern Church.³⁷ With this in mind he acknowledged the greater antiquity of the Greeks: "Yet the Greeks preceded the Latins in Christianity" (*Præcesserunt etiam Græci Latinos in Christianitate*).³⁸ But to the Greeks' greater antiquity Humbert added their sin of "variety," which led them to depart from the righteous path followed by the Latins. The movement described by Humbert from orthodoxy to schism and from schism to heresy was similar to the one described by James of Vitry or by the pilgrims when they wrote about the Nestorians and the Jacobites.³⁹ The latter Christian communities had been led astray by heretics, Nestorius and Jacob Baradeus, who led them into heresy.

Like Riccoldo, but from a different perspective, Humbert emphasized the unity of faith which built up the unity of the *Ecclesia*, at the head of which there could only be one pontiff—the bishop of Rome.⁴⁰ Humbert analyzed the *Ecclesia orientalis* in the more general context of the theorization of the relationships between the universal Church and the individual Churches.

37 "Quia secundum successiones temporum et varietates causarum Christianitas varios status habet, sicut et puer crescendo antequam veniat ad senium habet varios status" ("because, according to the succession of times and the variety of causes, Christianity goes through different states, like a child growing up before becoming old goes through different states.") Humbert of Romans, *Opusculum tripartitum*, 1.11, 192 (My translation).

38 Humbert of Romans, *Opusculum tripartitum*, 213.

39 Jacques de Vitry, *Histoire orientale = Historia orientalis*, ed. J. Donnadieu, *Sous la règle de saint Augustin: Textes en poche*, 12 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 304–315.

40 "Caput I. In secunda parte hujus Libri, in qua agitur de schismate Græcorum, ostenditur, quod Ecclesia Dei sit unica. Ad intelligendum plenius de eis quæ scire expedit circa schisma Græcorum, notandum est primo, quod Ecclesia Christi et est et esse debet unica. Et hoc patet per auctoritatem scripturæ veteris testamenti, dicentis: Una est columba mea, perfecta mea. Item per ipsum Christum dicentem in novo testamento: Super hanc petram edificabo Ecclesiam meam. Ecclesiam dicit: non Ecclesias." ("Chapter I. In the second part of this book, which deals with the Greek schism, it is shown that the Church of God is unique. In order to fully understand what must be known about the Greek schism, one must observe first that the Church of Christ is and must be unique. This is obvious from the authority of Scripture in the Old Testament: unique is my dove, perfect is my dove. In the same way, Christ says it himself in the New Testament: on this stone I will build my Church. He said Church and not Churches.") Humbert of Romans, *Opusculum tripartitum*, 2.1, 127 (My translation). He then called on *auctoritates*—Scriptures and the Nicene Creed—and reason.

Conclusion

Because he remained faithful to the pope, Riccoldo was influenced by the pontifical theorization of a *christianitas* centered on Rome, which led him to define the Nestorians and the Jacobites as heretics whose salvation would require their conversion and their acknowledgment of the truth conveyed by Latin missionaries. Riccoldo was a Dominican preacher, so his analyses drew from the missionary ideology developed by his order, as our comparisons with Humbert of Romans's *Opusculum tripartitum* have shown. Riccoldo spent ten years in the East, got to know Eastern Christians in person and learned how to communicate with them in their languages—Arabic and Chaldean. He also knew how to display a critical attitude by confronting what he actually saw with his theological knowledge, as did one of his contemporaries, the Dominican Burchard of Mount Sion, who undertook a pilgrimage to the East a decade before Riccoldo's missionary work.⁴¹ Riccoldo's innovation lies in his willingness and ability to draw from both his theoretical learning and practical skills in order to arrive at and present a more thorough knowledge of Eastern Christian nations. His definition of experience as an authoritative source and his critical analysis of Church history goes against the image—spread especially in the nineteenth century—of the supposedly credulous Middle Ages, languishing in a gap between ancient scepticism and “modern” doubt first engendered in the Renaissance.⁴² Notwithstanding the complexity of these Dominican missionaries' thought and experiences, the pope and the Dominican Order remained for them the prime *auctoritates* in matters of orthodoxy and heresy.

Riccoldo's position—especially the importance he gave to unity in the faith and his tolerance for considerable diversity in rites—reflected both the position of his order and one particular moment in the evolution of the pontifical theorization of the *christianitas* in the context of the Second Council of Lyon (1274). The comparison with Anselm of Havelberg's *dialogi*, written in 1149, and with the pre-unitarian positions of the Council of Florence (1438–1439), are

41 Riccoldo also attached particular importance to his personal experience when writing about Muslims and mentioned it as an authoritative source for theology. His *Liber peregrinationis* included significant ambivalence, even if he asserted Christianity's superiority over Islam. See George-Tvrtković, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq*.

42 Servane Michel, Francesco Montorsi dir., *Le doute, Questes*, 23 (May 2012); Sabina Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith: Uncertainty in the Long Twelfth Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008); and Dominik Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit: Skeptische Debatten im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006).

evidence of the evolution of the Roman conception of *varietas*. In Anselm's opinion, diversity was both historical and contemporary,⁴³ whereas it was merely historical for Humbert of Romans and for Riccoldo, with the exception of the diversity of rites. Half a century later, though the Council of Florence (1438–1439) condemned the way ecclesial plurality was extended to all Eastern Churches, it could not hide “the triumph of uniformity in the guise of unity in recovered communion.”⁴⁴ The council was indeed characterized by monolithic ecclesiology as well as by its liturgical inflexibility. Indeed, at time when unity was to be celebrated, the Latins were suspicious of the rituals carried out by the Greeks, which led them to renounce the celebration that was to end the council.⁴⁵

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43 “Verum hoc corpus Ecclesiae Spiritu sancto vivificatum, et [per] diversa membra diversis temporibus et aetatibus discretum et distinctum, a primo Abel justo incœpit, et in novissimo electo consummabitur, semper unum una fide, sed multiformiter distinctum multiplici vivendi varietate.” (“This real body of the Church, vivified by the Holy Spirit, and divided and diversified into various members of various ages and from various times, started with Abel, the first Righteous and will end with the last chosen one. It will remain one in the unique faith, but diversified into various forms by the multiple variety of ways of life.”) Anselme de Havelberg, *Dialogues. Livre 1, Renouveau dans l'Église*, ed. G. Salet, Sources chrétiennes, 18 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1966), 44 (My translation).

44 Emmanuel Lanne, “Uniformité et pluralisme, les ecclésiologies en présence,” in *Christian Unity: The Council of Ferrara-Florence, 1438/39–1989*, ed. G. Alberigo, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium, 97 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1991), 353–373 (365).

45 Lanne, “Uniformité et pluralisme,” 369.