

Religion and Crisis: A Case Study of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic Church as seen through Three  
Chronicles

Both the Jacquerie and the Black Death were moments of extreme upheaval for residents of medieval France. Although differing greatly in nature, duration, and resolution, each impacted the lives and social order of medieval French society to such an extent that both terms carry great social significance even today and even beyond the borders of both modern and medieval France<sup>1</sup>. While devastating to the populations of the time, these two crisis situations provide historians today with an opportunity to examine how different levels and types of authority expressed themselves—or did not express themselves—in an effort to contain, control, and correct damages sustained in these crises. Such a study could go in almost infinite directions, but I confine myself here to the discussion of how varied levels of ecclesiastic authority were perceived and portrayed as reacting to these two situations, using three of France’s well-known Chronicles: la *Chronique (dite) de Jean de Venette*, la *Chronique de Jean Froissart*, and la *Chronique de Jean le Bel*. Each of these Chronicles provides a unique perspective on the events of the period<sup>2</sup> and, while their biases may vary<sup>3</sup>, both their similarities and differences give insight into how ecclesiastic involvement was interpreted in the fourteenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> Braude notes that “Although short-lived, lasting only about a month, its [the Jacquerie’s] significance was such that since that time [1358] its name, *La Jacquerie*, has been given all large-scale peasant uprisings” (188). The lasting significance of the term “Black Death”, which signifies a disease that, of course, impacted a much larger area than just France, can be observed simply by walking through a bookstore.

<sup>2</sup> While it is true that Froissart’s Chronicle follows Jean le Bel’s quite closely, it is not precisely the same, and the adjustments made provide insight into his own particular perspective.

<sup>3</sup> Vericour notes that Froissart “yielded to the passions of parties and castes whose interests he had espoused” (301), implying strongly that he favored the nobility within his Chronicle, while Beaune, editor of the modern edition of la *Chronique dite de Jean de Venette* used in this study, notes that “Le récit de notre chronique [la *Chronique dite de Jean de Venette*] est nettement moins hostile que celui de Jean le Bel (II, p. 255-260) ou de Froissart (V, p. 99-102)” (416). Beaune also notes that the chronicler of la *Chronique dite de Jean de Venette* was the first chronicler, at least in France, “à avoir pour héros de simples paysans” (9).

The oldest of the three Chronicles is that of Jean de Venette<sup>4</sup>, written in all probability by a monk of humble origins who nevertheless managed to ascend in his order to a position that allowed him access to particular texts, such as the *Lilium regnans*, which would have been off-limits to a ‘simple Brother’, as he frequently called himself (Beaune 14-15). Jean de Venette shows a calculated care in nominally distancing himself from many of the opinions he expresses in his Chronicle, a trait evident right from the prologue, where he uses prophecies to summarize the events of the Chronicle, expressing uncertainty as to the meanings of the prophecies he records<sup>5</sup>. Such professions of ignorance almost always accompany his presaging of events; his frequent use of astronomical phenomena as signals of specific imminent calamities is coupled with his insistence that he is not an astronomer<sup>6</sup>. This emphatic denial of authority—his claiming to be a simple Brother with no expertise in astronomy, while simultaneously shielding his work, through his use of Latin, from a greater, lay audience that could bestow authority or condemnation upon him—is partially contradicted by his repeated insistence that “Je les [les événements] narrerai véridiquement comme je les ai vus et entendus” (Beaune 71). In this way, he claims all that he recounts to be unquestionably true but leaves his readers to pass their own moral judgments—which, if his claim to unquestionable veracity is believed, must ultimately align with his own opinions. Although Jean de Venette is certainly not the only medieval historian to employ such tactics, it sets him apart from Jean le Bel and Jean Froissart, suggesting

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<sup>4</sup> Although the author of this Chronicle will be referred to in this study simply as “Jean de Venette”, this is not to discount the possibility that the author’s name was, in fact, something different.

<sup>5</sup> Beaune notes also that Jean de Venette’s decision to write in Latin, instead of the more widely understood French, indicates above all else a conscious act of self-protection: “L’humble frère va écrire la chronique la plus audacieuse et la plus contestataire de son temps. Et le latin permet de tout dire ou presque, sans avoir rien à craindre. Les tribunaux ecclésiastiques ne s’inquiéteront guère, si l’un des leurs critique vigoureusement les laïcs. Après tout, n’est-ce pas la vocation des clercs que de dénoncer et corriger les péchés du peuple ? C’est le pouvoir princier qu’il faut désormais craindre” (8). This attitude towards choice of language is in no way dissimilar to the chronicler’s tendency to distance himself from prophecies and to deny expertise on astrological matters, even while framing these two components as sure and clear portents of the events he subsequently describes.

<sup>6</sup> The star over Paris in the August preceding the first wave of Black Death in France is just one of many, many examples.

not only that the purpose behind Jean de Venette's chronicle was different from theirs, but also that he recognized the conflict between his own strong opinions and those of (at the very least) lay authority. This degree of clearly-expressed self-awareness is continuously evident through his presentation of events and is to be kept in mind when analyzing the subtext of his accounts, particularly in moments of high political tension<sup>7</sup>.

Having already alluded both to famine and plague through recorded prophecies, Jean de Venette opens his section detailing the Black Death itself by noting the presence of a star over Paris in the preceding August, stating that

S'il s'agissait d'une comète ou d'un autre phénomène formé d'exhalaisons d'air et par la suite dissoute sous forme de vapeurs, je laisse aux astronomes le soin d'en décider. Mais il est bien possible que ce fut le présage de la peste<sup>8</sup> qui allait venir bientôt à Paris et dans toute la France, comme ailleurs. Cette même année [...] ainsi que l'année suivante, il y eut une telle mortalité d'hommes et de femmes, plutôt les jeunes que les vieux, que l'on pouvait à peine les ensevelir [...]. Il y eut durant ces deux années 1348 et 1349 un nombre de victimes tel qu'on ne l'avait jamais entendu dire, ni vu, ni lu dans les temps passés (Beaune 111).

After a brief but detailed description of what the disease might look like and how it might spread<sup>9</sup>, he provides brief but significant testimony as to how various components of the Church responded to the advent of the great mortality, with one glaring exception.

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<sup>7</sup> The most salient examples are beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>8</sup> Here is a fine example of how Jean de Venette professes inexpertise, then quickly supplies his own assessment, couched in terms such as "possible", that later becomes ratified by 'unequivocal' eye-witness evidence.

Of the local priests, he says “les prêtres frappés de crainte s’éloignaient” (Beaune 111), emphasizing his unspoken condemnation of this action by immediately afterwards noting that “quelques religieux, plus courageux, administraient les sacrements” (*Ibid*). Beaune suggests that these two comments indicate a degree of rivalry and disdain among those diversely integrated into Church structure, a deduction that is not at all unreasonable<sup>10</sup>. However, Jean de Venette’s lines also reveal either (or both) a lack of concern for local unity or a lack of effectiveness in enforcing such unity during a mortality crisis on the part of higher levels of ecclesiastic hierarchy. It is of course possible that the deaths at the court of Avignon<sup>11</sup> and the physical seclusion of the Pope may have contributed to a lack of morale, which then manifested in the “prêtres frappés de crainte”. However, while Clement VI may have “secluded himself in his apartment” and remained “largely confined to his quarters where he sat between large fires, kindled to purify the air”, he did remain “in Avignon or nearby Valence”, even though “many fled the city”, organizing relief efforts both secular and lay, going so far as to sanction the examination of cadavers “in the hope of finding the cause of the disease” (Deaux 100). While a closer examination would be necessary to determine what effect such papal activities had on local efforts much further north<sup>12</sup>, it is clear that, at least from Jean de Venette’s point of view, papal activity had little impact on whether or not local churchmen proceeded as normal with their duties; he makes no mention of papal condemnation of derelict priests. Nor does he note

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<sup>9</sup> In addition to describing how it was thought to travel among people, Jean de Venette later describes how it “commença chez les mécréants” then spread through Christendom (Beaune 111-113). This attention to the disease’s path, both within individual Christian communities as well as on a more global scale, is reflected in neither Jean le Bel’s nor Jean Froissart’s account of the Black Death.

<sup>10</sup> She claims that Jean de Venette “[n’est] pas fâché de pointer les défaillances de ses concurrents, les clercs séculiers. Lui a probablement continué à prêcher et à confesser” (387).

<sup>11</sup> Beaune recounts how “Il y eut sept morts dans le Sacré Collège, soit le quart des cardinaux. De meilleures conditions d’hygiène et la possibilité de gagner les campagnes expliquent la moindre mortalité des élites” (388). Deaux is in agreement, noting that “The staff of the papal court was reduced by a quarter” and that “many fled the city” (388).

<sup>12</sup> Jean de Venette writes from a Paris-centric perspective.

any papal commendation regarding “les saintes sœurs de l’Hôtel-Dieu, [qui] ne craignant pas la mort, soignaient jusqu’au bout les patients avec la plus grande douceur et humilité, sans tenir compte de l’horreur de la maladie” (Beaune 111).

Jean de Venette, does, however, underline “que l’encadrement clérical a tenu malgré les pertes” (Beaune 388) and mentions shortly after critiquing the priests and praising the Sisters a particular papal action :

Et nul ne trépassait sans s’être confessé et avoir reçu le saint viatique ; et qui plus est, pour le bien des mourants, en beaucoup de cités et châteaux notre Saint Père le pape Clément fit donner par ses confesseurs aux moribonds absolution totale de peine et de châtements. Ils en mouraient plus volontiers, laissant à l’Église et aux religieux quantité d’héritages et de biens temporels, car ils avaient vu partir avant eux leurs héritiers, leurs proches et leurs enfants<sup>13</sup>. (Beaune 113).

Here again the distance Jean de Venette puts between papal and local efforts is salient: “et qui plus est” does not join the statements “et nul ne trépassait sans s’être confessé et avoir reçu le saint viatique ” and “ notre Saint Père le pape Clément fit donner par ses confesseurs aux moribonds absolution totale de peine et de châtements ”, but rather divides them by suggesting a *lack* of causal relationship. Clement VI’s declaration that confessors in many locations were to give total absolution had no impact on the quantity of confessors actively continuing in their

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<sup>13</sup> Beaune notes that “Les frères en particulier reçurent de nombreux legs” (388); while a more detailed analysis of the figures left to different religious groups is necessary in order to make a definitive statement, it seems, at the very least, possible that such donations were more closely linked to the attention of certain orders rather than to the general absolution issued by Clement VI. If this is the case, Jean de Venette’s lack of direct emphasis on this point, which could further reinforce the central role of certain groups over others, would be worth analyzing with an eye to internal relations and politics among the various ecclesiastic hierarchies.

duties, but simply gave further instructions to those who had already decided to continue practicing as they had before the arrival of the plague. Such a division between theory and reality is further emphasized by “laissant à l’Église et aux religieux” which, while not negating the inherent interrelatedness of “l’Église” and “religieux” makes clear that, for the dying (and for Jean de Venette), there was a distinct difference between the two.

The chronicler does, however, recognize the impact of a different papal measure on the movements not of members of the ecclesiastic hierarchy, but on those of the laity. In his account of the year 1350, Jean de Venette begins by noting that:

En l’année 1350, notre Saint Père le pape Clément VI, désirant le salut de toutes les âmes, décida que les indulgences plénières, qui jusque-là étaient accordées tous les cent ans dans la sainte ville de Rome en l’honneur de l’Incarnation de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, le seraient désormais tous les cinquante ans [...] En cette année 1350, le Saint-Père concéda donc des indulgences plénières à tous les vrais pénitents qui voudraient faire pèlerinage à Rome et visiter les tombeaux des saints apôtres Pierre et Paul et d’autres saints. Une foule de pèlerins des deux sexes participa à ce pèlerinage au cours de l’année malgré la grande mortalité qui venait d’avoir lieu et infectait encore certaines parties du monde. (Beaune 123)

While he does not claim a direct connection between the plague and these indulgences—in fact, he indicates that the epidemic was, to some extent, diminishing, as it “infectait *encore* certaines parties du monde”<sup>14</sup>—the inference that there was at least a loose connection is not entirely

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<sup>14</sup> He also notes earlier that the “mortalité dura dans le royaume la plus grande partie des années 1348 et 1349” (115) again implying, by omission, that the danger of the plague had somewhat, if not greatly, abated by 1350.

unreasonable<sup>15</sup>. In either case, this passage clearly indicates Jean de Venette's acceptance that a papal decree had the potential to influence the activities of large groups of people, even with the risk of plague still present. This acknowledgement makes the absence of any such noted influence over the "prêtres frappés de crainte" all the more notable.

A lack of mention by Jean de Venette does not, of course, necessarily correspond to a lack of effort on the part of the Pope. In describing the violent popular reaction against the Jews, based on a (not-well-founded, according to Jean de Venette) suspicion that the Jews were poisoning the wells<sup>16</sup>, the chronicler makes no note of the papal measures taken to counteract such activities, even though "Clément VI interdit le 4 juillet et le 26 septembre de s'en prendre aux Juifs" and "Ceux d'Avignon furent efficacement protégés" (Beaune 389). The expression of papal authority, then, was clear and effective within the confines of Avignon; but beyond that city, at least near Paris, the Pope's inability to utilize his authority to achieve concrete results is just as clear; to Jean de Venette, his effective role was so insignificant that his interdiction did not even merit mentioning.

While this is the most dramatic dismissal of the effectiveness of papal authority in managing the Black Death crisis situation, the chronicler also questions it more subtly at another point, when discussing the flagellants who travelled in self-declared penance at the time of the plague. While Jean de Venette notes that Clement VI "interdit et fit interdire les flagellants" under pain of excommunication (Beaune 119), he mentions the Pope's actions only after describing the king of France's reaction:

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<sup>15</sup> More specific investigation would be necessary in order to declare a connection with greater certainty.

<sup>16</sup> Jean de Venette's note that "On trouva aussi beaucoup de mauvais chrétiens qui, eux aussi, empoisonnaient les puits" is very interesting, especially as it is followed immediately by "Mais ces intoxications, à supposer qu'elles aient existé, n'auraient pas pu produire une telle peste ni tuer autant de peuple" (Beaune 113). Perhaps these two lines, in addition to pointing out the disconnect between the purported cause and effect, serve as a double dismissal of the allegations cast against the Jews: not only were the wells likely not poisoned (sentence two), even if they had been, some Christians would have been poisoning them, too (sentence one).

Ils [Les flagellants] ne vinrent pas jusqu'à Paris et ne pénétrèrent pas non plus dans le royaume, car le roi de France Philippe le leur interdit, sur le conseil des maîtres en théologie de l'université de Paris. Ceux-ci affirmaient que cette nouvelle secte était créée contre Dieu, contre notre sainte-mère l'Église et contraire au salut des âmes de tous ceux qui y participaient, et c'était vrai comme on le vit bientôt. En effet, notre Saint Père le pape, pleinement informé de la sottise de ce nouveau rite—lequel était contraire à tout droit—par les maîtres parisiens qui lui avaient envoyé respectueusement des messagers, interdit et fit interdire les flagellants. Sous peine d'anathème il leur défendit de continuer ces pénitences publiques qu'ils avaient présomptueusement décidées d'eux-mêmes. Cette interdiction était d'autant plus justifiée que les flagellants, poussés par quelques prêtres et religieux stupides, soutenaient des opinions erronées et mauvaises [...] Comme leur sottise venait d'eux-mêmes et non de Dieu, leurs secte et rite furent en peu de temps réduits à néant. Ils demandèrent l'absolution à leurs prêtres et acceptèrent de reconnaître avec humilité leurs erreurs. (Beaune 117-119)

This passage is revealing in a number of ways. Perhaps most strikingly, although it further details the stance of the Pope, it clearly places the king of France in the most prominent position of authority, particularly through the impression that the king was the first to act against the spreading flagellation. In reality, Clement VI issued a bull on the matter the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 1359—just 24 days after receiving the recommendation of condemnation from the University of Paris theologians—while King Phillip did not respond with legislation until February 15, 1350, several months after the theologians had reached their conclusions (Beaune 390-391).



Furthermore, Jean de Venette makes clear that the reason the flagellants did not succeed in covering more territory was because of the actions of King Phillip (“car le roi de France Philippe le leur interdit”), not because of the interdiction of Pope Clement. In fact, the organization of the passage, which furnishes no chronological notes to indicate otherwise, assigns the king and the Pope to very different roles in handling the situation. The king is portrayed as having stopped the flagellations from occurring (“Ils ne vinrent pas jusqu’à Paris et ne pénétrèrent pas non plus dans le royaume”—in other words, the king *prevented* flagellation in various parts of his kingdom), while the Pope is portrayed as simply having stopped the flagellation from continuing (“Sous peine d’anathème il leur défendit de continuer ces pénitences publiques”). In other words, the king is given an active, preventative, aggressive role, while the Pope is relegated to a passive, responsive, defensive role. The king is represented as having tangible power over the territorial boundaries of the practice of flagellation, of having the power to actively prevent disorder, while the Pope is depicted as simply reestablishing order that he had previously lost. In short, the king’s actions are portrayed both as more effective and as more energetic than the Pope’s, effectively showing the limits of the latter’s power through the exercise of the former’s.

Of course, this is not precisely how events unfolded—as just one example, already mentioned, it was Clement VI who issued the first interdiction against the flagellants, not Phillip VI. Nevertheless, Jean de Venette’s interpretation of the events provides a clue as to how the role of the Church was internalized by the public at that particular moment. Although the papal reaction may have been swift, it was clearly not viewed as backed by an authority that could cause serious damage. This is not to say that excommunication was taken lightly—but rather that, perhaps, in a moment of such great distress, the Church’s teachings as individually interpreted were held as a greater security even than the mandatory liturgical proceedings. If this

was so, it is certainly not a reaction to disregard, as it would have grievously thrown into question the Church's ability to maintain not physical control—that was the job of the secular branch, the king, in this instance—but theological, liturgical, and doctrinal control of the people of Christendom when faced with a lethal crisis not stemming from political dispute.

The organization of the passage also portrays the Pope as completely dependent on the theologians from the University of Paris, who not only informed him of the situation and their assessment of it, but also were the ones through whom the Pope's condemnation—his authority—was expressed back in Paris. Of course, the priests and other members of the ecclesiastic hierarchy would by necessity also have been involved in effecting the condemnation by not permitting flagellants to take communion, but it is telling that, to Jean de Venette, Clement VI's direct communication was to the University theologians in particular. Additionally, while rogue priests, monks, and other members at various levels of the ecclesiastic hierarchy were not uncommon, it is significant that the "prêtres et religieux stupides" seem, at least to Jean de Venette, not to have received any punishment worth noting. The question mark over their reintegration is an important one—if they were reintegrated after repenting, why? Did a shortage of priests due to the ravages of the Black Death make this necessary? Or did they hold enough sway over their local parish(es) that not permitting them to become reintegrated was not a feasible option? If the latter were the case, it would underline a distinct lack of papal control over local situations, from actions to appointments. Of course, a degree of delegation is expected; what is to be determined is how much of that delegation appeared to have been true delegation as opposed to a loss (or a lack, if never had) of control.

Jean le Bel, in his account of the plague, also notes a distinct lack of enthusiasm from the priests to administer sacraments to the infected: "l'ung le prenoit [la peste] de l'aulture, par quoy

poys de gens osoient aidier ne visiter les maladies; et à paine se pouoit on confesser, car à paine trouvoit on prestre qui le voulsist faire” (Viard 233)<sup>17</sup>. However, he does not continue onwards in his discussion to the effect of painting a picture of papal impotency. In fact, he does rather the opposite. In describing the persecution of the Jews—which he does with as much disdain as Jean de Venette—he ties the massacre not only to a reaction to the devastating spread of the Black Death, but also to the activity of the flagellants<sup>18</sup>, stating that:

En ce temps que ces flageleurs aloient, avint une grande merveille qu’ on ne doibt mie oublier, car qunat on vit que ceste mortalité et pestilence ne cessoit point pour penitance que on feist, une renommée et voix issi dehors, et dist on que celle mortalité venoit des Juifs et que les Juifs avoient jetté venins et poisons es puis et es fontaines par l’universel monde, pour empoisonner toute crestienté, pour avoir la seignourie et l’avoir de tout le monde, par quoy chascun, grand et petit, fust si animé sur eulx qu’ilz furent tous ars et mis à mort es marches où les flagelleurs aloient par les seigneurs et les justices des lieux, et aloient morir tous dansans et chantans aussy joyusement comme s’ilz alassent aux noces, et si ne se vouloient crestienner, ne peres ne meres, et ne vouloient souffrir leurs enfans rechevoir batesme pour priere que on leur sceust dire ; ains disoient qu’ilz avoient trouvé en

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<sup>17</sup> A footnote suggests, however, that “A Paris et à Saint-Denis, d’après les *Grandes Chroniques*, t. V, p. 486, il n’en fut pas de même, car, disent-elles « jasoit ce qu’il se mourussent ainsi habondamment, toutes voies avoient ils confession et leur autres sacremens. » Voy. aussi ce que dit le Continuateur de Guillaume de Nangis du dévouement des sœurs de l’Hôtel-Dieu de Paris (*G. de Nangis*, éd. Géraud, t. II, p. 212) ” (Viard 233). Such accounts would accord with Jean de Venette’s praise for these same Sisters, as well as his claim that “nul ne trépassait sans s’être confessé et avoir reçu le saint viatique” ; these accounts, therefore, do not inherently deny the presence of reticent priests. The point of this study, moreover, is not to determine what the ‘true’ (in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century sense of ‘factual’) situation was, but rather to look at how it was perceived, remembered, and retold.

<sup>18</sup> Zink supports this reading: “[...According to Jean le Bel...] the accusations against the Jews are, like the flagellants, a consequence of the plague [...] But the accusations against the Jews are propagated by the flagellants and therefore are also a consequence of their presence” (272)

leurs livres de prophetes que tantost que celle secte de flagelleurs courroit par le monde, toute juderie seroit destruite par feu [...] (Viard 225-226)

By connecting the flagellant activity with the massacre of Jews, Jean le Bel amplifies the importance of whoever stops the flagellants because, in stopping them, that person or institution would also contribute to stopping the deplorable massacres. This role he assigns to the Pope, saying that:

Ceste grande affliction [des flagellants] se converti en orgueil et en presumption, et se le pape ne les eust contrains par griefves sentences, ils eussent peu mettre au derrain sainte Esglise à destruction, et commenchoient jà à destourber le service et les offices de sainte Esglise, et couloient aucuns maintenir par leur sotie que leurs chansons et leurs serymonies estoient plus dignes que celles de l'Esglise, siques on se doubtoit que celle folie tant ne multipliait qu'elle ne mist au bas l'Esglise, et tueroient prestres et clerics pour convoitise d'avoir leurs bidns et leurs benefices. (Viard 225)

Emphasis is placed on the potential damage the flagellants could have caused and this paragraph immediately precedes the previously cited one describing the damage they allegedly *did* contribute as regards the Jews. Unlike in the *Chronique dite de Jean de Venette*, here the lack of abundant references to the Pope underlines, rather than diminishes, the significance of his role. Jean le Bel attributes to the Pope and the Pope alone—in his account, there is no French king who successfully stops the spread of flagellant activity—not only the cessation of the flagellants' misguided self-imposed penance, not only the rescuing of the Jews, but also the saving of the

Church itself, along with all of its flock and servants. The Pope's role is active, heroic, and decisive.

Froissart<sup>19</sup> similarly puts the flagellants at the center of his description of the Black Death and its consequences. He, however, has a different view of them:

Moult de belles paix se fissent, les penans alans entre les hommes, tant que de cas d'ocisions liquel estoient avenu et desquels cas en devant on ne pooit venir à paix, mais par le moyen de l'afaire des penans, on en venoit à paix. (Froissart 389)

According to Zink (273-274), this edition of Froissart's *Chronicle* is less generous than previous editions, in which he quotes Froissart (in English translation) as having claimed of the flagellants and their activities: "And these penances caused many men to repent and die beautiful deaths, something which previously could not be accomplished by any means at all" (Zink 273). In previous editions, Zink continues, Froissart did not provide an explanation for the Pope's hostility towards the flagellants and the "French king's enmity seems dictated [in Froissart] by an excessive submission to the Pope" (273). This latter point remains, adjusted so as not to include an explicit reference to the king of France<sup>20</sup>, in the edition examined here:

mais point [les flagellants] n'entrèrent ens ou roialme de France, car papes

Innocens qui pour ce temps resgnoit et qui en Avignon se tenoit, et li cardinal

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<sup>19</sup> Zink (271) is just one of many near-unanimous voices to note that Froissart took great inspiration from Jean le Bel's *Chronicle* when composing his own.

<sup>20</sup> Zink cites an earlier version as having said, "The king forbade it due to the pope's correction and prohibition" (273). In the version examined here, the king of France is explicitly referenced further on, but with less subservient wording: "[...] quant on vei que li papes et li rois de France lor estoit contraires et rebelles, et ne passèrent point oultre Hainnau [...]" (Froissart 399).

considérèrent cel afaire et alèrent au-devant trop fort, et proposèrent à l'encontre de ces penans que pénitance publique et prise de li-meismes<sup>21</sup> n'estoit pas licite [...] (Froissart 398).

Despite the Pope's condemnation of them, Froissart's positive portrayal of the flagellants continues in relation to their involvement with the attacks on the Jews:

[...] the link between the flagellants and the persecutions of the Jews is emphasized very little: it is purely a question of concomitance ("At that time..."); the Jews' prophecies, according to Froissart, meant it to be just this way. (Zink 273)

Froissart describes in detail neither the attacks nor the precise accusations levelled against the Jewry, but rather simply lists their protectors: "li papes, li rois d'Espagne, li rois d'Arragon et li rois de Navare" (Froissart 399); according to Zink, in previous editions, Froissart had listed only the Pope as protector of the Jews (274).

The modifications to which Zink attests certainly reflect a changing imagination of the Pope's role in the events surrounding the Black Death. What seems to remain constant, however, is Froissart's fixation on the Pope alone. Jean de Venette discussed in relative detail the actions of various members of the ecclesiastic hierarchy; Froissart does not provide even Jean le Bel's single-line description of the priests' fearful behavior. Rather, he is focused exclusively on the role of the Pope, who appears as the sole ecclesiastic figure in the chapter. The Pope is also the dominant figure, even in the final edition under examination. While initially it seems he was

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<sup>21</sup> This is the inserted rationale that Zink mentions for the condemnation of the flagellants.

assigned the role as sole protector of the Jewry, even when others are listed, it is the Pope who comes first. He is also the only person in the entire chapter to be cited by name; while Jean de Venette mentioned both “Philippe” and “Clément”, Froissart notes only “Innocens”<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, regardless of the edition, the Pope is given almost exclusive credit<sup>23</sup> for the cessation of the spread of flagellants in France, something very much denied him by Jean de Venette.

If the discussion of Jean de Venette’s description of ecclesiastical involvement in the management of the social fallout caused by the Black Death has been much longer than that of Jean le Bel or of Froissart, it is due to the fact that Jean de Venette’s interests as a chronicler lead him to provide many more details on the local scale; furthermore, his determination to narrate “véridiquement [les événements] comme [il] les [a] vus et entendus” both limits and hones the scope of his discussion. Regardless of the differences among the chroniclers’ intentions and the Chronicles they subsequently composed, certain points of agreement do emerge, from which general perceptions of the Church’s varied roles might be deduced. That chroniclers as different as Jean de Venette and Jean le Bel both take time to note the impact that was felt from the derelict priests is evidence that final sacraments were much more than ceremony; if it was not an impact felt acutely and painfully, it would likely not have been mentioned by both chroniclers in nearly the same way. Similarly, neither mentions any sort of punishment or disciplinary action meted out to those priests who chose not to fulfill their duties, suggesting that, if any sort of punishment was imposed, it was not felt sufficient enough either by Jean de Venette or by Jean le

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<sup>22</sup> It would seem this is in reference to Innocent VI who succeeded Clement VI In 1352; why Innocent instead of Clement is being considered is very much worthy of investigation to better understand how each Pope was interpreted as well as to understand possible shifts in papal power and/or in memory.

<sup>23</sup> The mention of “li cardinal” in “car papes Innocens [...] et li cardinal considérerent” is extremely vague. If it is meant to indicate a particular cardinal, why is he not cited by name? If a particular cardinal is not intended, why is this phrase included?

Bel to include in their chronicles; the priests' reticence was worth mentioning but their redemption, if it occurred, was not. Whether this deduction is accurate or not, what seems clear is that at the lowest concentrated level of ecclesiastic authority (that of the parish priest), the pope's authority did not manage, whether by choice or due to impotence, to counteract the priests' frightened reaction to the danger of death. In other words, the papacy, for whatever reason, neither controlled nor contained the social consequences of the Black Death in this context.

On the issue of the flagellants, however, the Chronicles are strongly divided, a division that is likely the result of their individual biases and, again, of each chronicler's specific interests. However, it is interesting that Jean de Venette, the chronicler least aligned with the noble faction, would give the prominent role in fighting the flagellants to the king, not the Pope. Further analysis of Jean de Venette's personal role and of other documents—both lay and ecclesiastic—surrounding this issue would be invaluable in making more sense out of the conflicting perceptions surrounding the flagellants and who ultimately succeeding in controlling them<sup>24</sup>.

Interestingly, this study's analysis of the Jacquerie is markedly briefer than the analysis of the Black Death, as the Chronicles' examination of the brief but violent political catastrophe barely touch on the potential role of different levels and members of the Church. Jean de Venette limits his discussion of any ecclesiastic elements to the destruction of monasteries and other Church buildings, and to the forced displacement of their inhabitants:

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<sup>24</sup> Each Chronicle specifically links the cessation of the flagellants' activities with a particular authority figure; for Jean de Venette, it is King Phillip, for Jean le Bel, it is the Pope (unnamed), for Jean Froissart it is Pope Innocent VI. This is a particularly intricate and significant issue regarding ecclesiastic authority in the wake of a crisis because the flagellants' activities in many ways created at least one other crisis—they were, if briefly, schismatic; the papacy might more easily ignore the massive and undeniable health crisis than the direct challenge to the Church's efficacy in managing that crisis.



En effet tant les villages que les monastères situés en dehors des murailles [...] étaient frappés de graves dommages inconvénients, par leurs amis comme par leurs ennemis. Chacun volait leurs biens et il n'y avait personne qui prît en quoi que ce soit leur défense. C'est pourquoi nombreux étaient ceux—laïcs, moines et religieuses—qui étaient chassés et forcés de se réfugier en ville. Même les dames de Montmartre durent quitter leur convent ; et pour faire bref, il n'y avait plus aucun monastère, si proche fût-il de Paris, qui par peur des brigands ne fût forcé de se réfugier en ville ou dans une forteresse. Les monastères furent délaissés [...]

(Beaune 173-5)

The defense of a church at Luçon is mentioned (Beaune 175), but the role of the lay versus the ecclesiastic in its defense is not detailed. Even more significantly, when discussing the resolution of the conflict—both the trap set by the king of Navarre for the captains of the Jacques and the end of the counter-Jacquerie—no member of the Church hierarchy at any level is mentioned. Beaune concurs that such an absence is notable, remarking that

C'est le roi de Navarre, et non le roi de France, qui rétablit l'ordre. La révolte l'a touché comme parangon de la noblesse. Les nobles picards ont fait appel à lui pour qu'il sauve « gentillesse ». Mais l'absence des autorités (roi de France ou Église) est ici flagrante. (417)

Jean le Bel and Jean Froissart are similarly mute on the subject of ecclesiastic mediators; the only mention of an ecclesiastic directly involved in actively and diplomatically attempting to sway the result is the bishop of Laon, depicted by Jean le Bel as anything but a mediator:

Aucuns souspechonnoient l'evesque de Laon qui estoit et fut toujours malicieux, et sur le prevost de marchans [Étienne Marcel] pour tant qu'ilz estoient d'ung secte, et d'ung accord, et du conseil du roy de Navarre (Polain 258).

Jean le Bel, a bit further on, repeats his suspicions of the bishop, adding that “Le seigneur de Coussy aussy n'amoit pas ledit evesque” (Polain 260). For his part, Froissart concurs that it was the king of Navarre who put an end to the Jacquerie (Luce 102).

In short, it appears that, as Beaune notes, the presence of any sort or level of ecclesiastic authority in an effort to resolve the brief but bloody Jacquerie was, to the eyes of the three chroniclers examined, completely absent. Perhaps Dommanget and Braude have found an explanation: “Unlike other peasant revolts, the *Jacquerie* did not attack the church” (Braude 189). If this was the motivation for a lack of involvement, it is very telling and partially explanatory of the lack of higher-level ecclesiastic management of the Black Death social fallout: except for the flagellants, none of the crises discussed specifically imperiled the Church. Across the two incidents examined, the Black Death and the Jacquerie, the only direct and decisive papal action—attested by all three chroniclers, if in different ways and assessed at different degrees of effectiveness—was in regards to those same flagellants.

However, to suggest that the role of the Church in moments of crisis was one only of self-preservation is a massive oversimplification. Jean de Venette provides examples of how different

levels of Church authority offered comfort to the distressed and (likely) squabbled amongst each other about negligence in that regard, indicating that a role as supreme comforter, both in illness and at the deathbed, was an important part of the Church's self-perception. Examination of papal documents covering the same time period would provide greater insight into how the highest level of Church authority viewed its role in both crises, and would help clear up whether a lack of efficacy or a lack of effort was the greater element at play. Examination of lay administrative and notarial documents, as well as of the same kind of documents for monasteries and other religious sectors, would also help provide a more rounded view of how the Church involved or did not involve itself in these two social crises.

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