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Florian Wöller • Ueli Zahnd (eds.)

Dominican Culture, Dominican Theology

The Order of Preachers and Its Spheres of Action (1215 – ca. 1600)

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The Grabow Case
An Example of Dominican Identity at the Council of Constance

Ulrike Treusch

In April 1418, the Council of Constance had already been convening for nearly four years. During this period, the council had deposed three popes and elected a new one, Martin V. Now, with its dissolution fast approaching, the fathers of the council took up the case of a Dominican named Matthäus Grabow.[1] While the assembled clergy eventually condemned Grabow and his teachings, the Grabow case almost serves as the final note in the overall context of the council proceedings. Although the trial against him took place during the council, the final condemnation of his person and teachings came only after the council's close – Grabow died most probably in 1421 as prisoner of the Vatican in Rome. This trial, however, highlights both questions of Dominican identity and criticism of this self-image, as outlined by Pierre d'Ailly and Jean Gerson.

This article is divided into three sections: the first provides the historical context for Grabow's trial and the events leading up to it; the second outlines Grabow's theological arguments and his opponents' response to these; and the third and final section addresses the issue of Dominican culture and theology in the first half of the fifteenth century.

1. The Grabow Case: History and Course of the Trial

Matthäus Grabow (d. after May 1421) was a Dominican in the convent of Wismar in northern Germany, in the Dominican province of Saxonia.[2] His actual place of activity, however, was Groningen (in the northeast of today's Netherlands), where he worked as a lecturer of theology and, probably, as papal inquisitor.[3] As a lecturer, Grabow wrote an extensive theological tract against the new forms of semi-monastic life, which unfortunately is no longer extant.[4] Grabow himself

1 Also Grabo[n], depending on the different spellings of his name; see Wachter, Stephan, "Matthäus Grabow, ein Gegner der Brüder vom gemeinsamen Leben", in *Sankt Gabrieler Studien* 8 (1939), pp. 289–376: 323. Wachter's study is still the most detailed presentation of Grabow's case.

2 On Grabow's biography, see Barnikol, Ernst: "Grabow, Matthäus", in *Neue deutsche Biographie* VI (1964), p. 700; Kaeppeli, Thomas: "Matthaeus Grabow", in *id.*: *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevi*, vol. 3, Rome 1980, pp. 125–126; Rasch, Christian W.: "Grabow, Matthäus", in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* III (^{4}2000), p. 1241; van Slee, Jacob C.: "Grabow, Matthäus", in *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie* IX (1879), pp. 540–541; see also Wachter 1939, pp. 323–329.

3 See Wachter 1939, p. 323, note 119.

4 In the verdict against Grabow, the beginning and end of his *Tractatus* are named: "Principium autem tractatuli seu libelli huiusmodi sic incipit: Suppono primo, quod non inten-

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modestly described his tract in his *supplicatio* to Pope Martin V as "quasdam conclusiones reprobantes illorum [the semi-monastics'] vivendi modum",[5] whereas his opponents spoke of an extensive work ("grande volumen").[6] Within the documentation of his trial, however, some versions of Grabow's conclusions have been preserved.[7] Grabow argued as a Dominican monk against the new semi-monastic forms of life, in particular against the Brethren of the Common Life in the Netherlands. He accused the Brethren of living without binding vows (*extra religionem*) and thus saw their form of life as a violation of the Bible, the Christian tradition, and canon law.

His work was the beginning of a long conflict that ultimately cost Grabow his career and life, as he submitted his writing to the church authorities in Deventer. Deventer was both the place where Geert Groote had founded the Brethren of the Common Life movement, and an ongoing center of the Brethren, who were in close contact with the Augustinian canons at Windesheim near Zwolle. The Brethren of the Common Life and this congregation of canons regular were formidable opponents of Grabow and his convent.[8]

According to Grabow, the parish priest in Deventer had his text copied secretly overnight and passed the copy on to the Brethren of the Common Life, who in turn accused Grabow before the bishop of Utrecht.[9] Drawing on a

do infrascripta neque quelibet alia pertinaciter defendere, sed tantum scolastice inquirendo procedere nec aliqua ponere scienter, que sunt contra fidem etc. Et sic finit: Et aliam specificat Wil.[helmus] de Mon.[te] Lau.[dunensi], cuius habitus fuit bruni coloris, et aliam specificat o(rdo) Au(gustini), cuius inventrices seu assumptrices conscientiam peccatum reputabant, ut invenitur in glo(ssa) utriusque super dictum capitulum, et per hoc patet responsio ad decimum." The verdict and other texts from the trial are included in Keussen, Hermann: "Der Dominikaner Matthäus Grabow und die Brüder vom gemeinsamen Leben", in *Mittheilungen aus dem Stadtarchiv von Köln* 13 (1887), pp. 29–47 (verdict: p. 46); followed by *id.*: *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis haereticae pravitatis Neerlandicae*, vol. II, ed. Paul Fredericq, Ghent/'s Gravenhage 1896, pp. 397–411: 409. Excerpts from the trial texts are also printed in *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense concilium de universali ecclesiae reformatione, unione, et fide. Vol. III: de religionis et fidei momentis*, ed. Hermann von der Hardt, Frankfurt a.M./Leipzig 1698, coll. 106–121; *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, vol. 28, ed. Joannes Dom. Mansi, Venice 1785, pp. 386–394; Wattenbach, Wilhelm: "Matthaeus Grabow", in *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für Ältere Deutsche Geschichtskunde zur Beförderung einer Gesamtausgabe der Quellenschriften deutscher Geschichten des Mittelalters* 20 (1895), pp. 661–663.

5 See Keussen 1887, pp. 34–35; *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis*, vol 2, pp. 400–401.

6 Iohannes Buschius: *Chronicon Windeshemense*, ed. Karl Grube: *Des Augustinerpropstes Iohannes Busch Chronicon Windeshemense und Liber de reformatione monasteriorum* (Geschichtsquellen der Provinz Sachsen und angrenzender Gebiete 19), Halle 1886, pp. 1–375: 172. The chronicle, written between 1434 and 1464, offers a contemporary narration of the Grabow case, admittedly from a mendicant-critical perspective.

7 For the text of Grabow's *Conclusiones*, some compiled by him, others by his opponents (see below), see *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense concilium*, vol. 3, coll. 107–113; *Sacrorum conciliorum collectio*, vol. 28, coll. 386–390; Keussen 1887, pp. 37–41; *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis*, vol 2, pp. 402–405; Wachter 1939, pp. 356–358.

8 On the dispute between semi-monastics and mendicants in the Netherlands before the Grabow case, see Wachter 1939, pp. 300–322.

9 See Iohannes Buschius *Chronicon Windeshemense*, pp. 172–173; Grabow himself mentions the incident in his petition to the pope, see Keussen 1887, p. 34; *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis*, vol 2, p. 400: "unus dictas conclusiones cum suis probamentis de camera cuius-

variety of documents, including an assessment made by the Faculty of Law in Cologne (1398), which had confirmed the orthodoxy of the Brethren, the bishop of Utrecht condemned Grabow's writing.[10] Grabow, however, rejected the bishop's verdict and submitted an appeal to the pope and the Council of Constance,[11] where his case was initially ignored.

The council dealt with the restoration of unity under one pope (*causa unionis*), as well as with the *causa fidei* to ward off heresies, including the cases of John Wycliff and Jan Hus. It was only in the council's final phase, after the election of Pope Martin in November 1417, that those assembled took up the third aim of the council, an overall reform of the church (*causa reformationis*).[12]

In this year, Grabow himself came to Constance, as well as a delegation for the defense of the Dutch semi-monastics.[13] Grabow submitted his conclusions to the council, the *Conclusiones contra devotarios extra congregationem approbatam viventes*,[14] and he asked the newly elected Pope Martin V to take up his case again. Grabow's case was thus dealt with in the final phase of the council as part of the *causa reformationis*, in between measures to improve the ways of life of clergy and monks. In fact, however, the Grabow case falls under the *causa fidei*, for Grabow was arrested on suspicion of heresy and finally condemned as a heretic because of his conclusions, which explicitly invoked Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*.

In early 1418, Pierre d'Ailly and Jean Gerson were appointed as experts and appraisers in the Grabow case. Pierre d'Ailly (1350–1420), one of the most influential theologians of the council, had already played a key role in shaping the council's position in the case of Jan Hus (1370–1415).[15] In fact, d'Ailly had

dam literati, cui tradiderat examinandas, furtive rapuit."

10 See *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis*, vol 2, pp. 160–181. As early as 1397/98, the Brethren requested and received a number of letters supporting and confirming their way of life. In 1413 the Brethren even asked Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly for such a document during his visitation in the diocese of Utrecht. The cardinal declared their way of life as being in accordance with canon law: Petrus de Aliaco: *[Bevestiging van] de juridische adviezen der Keulsche rechtsgeleerden ten gunste der Broederschap (1413?)*, ed. Michael Schoengen: *Jacobus Traiecti alias de Voecht: Narratio de inchoatione domus clericorum in Zwollis* (Werken/Historisch Genootschap 3,13), Amsterdam 1908, pp. 501–511.

11 See Matthaeus Grabow: *Supplicatio*: ed. Keussen 1887, pp. 34–35; *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis*, vol 2, pp. 400–401; see Wachter 1939, pp. 328–329.

12 See Miethke, Jürgen: "Einleitung", in *Quellen zur Kirchenreform im Zeitalter der großen Konzilien des 15. Jahrhunderts. 1. Teil: Die Konzilien von Pisa (1409) und Konstanz (1414–1418)* (Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters 38a), eds. id./Lorenz Weinrich, Darmstadt 1995, pp. 1–50: 34–35. On church reform at the Council of Constance, see also Stump, Philip H.: *The Reforms of the Council of Constance (1414–1418)* (Studies in the History of Christian Thought 53), Leiden/New York/Köln 1994, with an edition of the Constance reform committee deliberations on pp. 273–414.

13 See Wachter 1939, pp. 329–336.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 352–356.

15 See Tschackert, Paul: *Peter von Ailli. Zur Geschichte des grossen abendländischen Schisma und der Reformconcilien von Pisa und Constanz*, Gotha 1877 [Reprint Amsterdam, 1968]; McGowan, John P.: *Pierre d'Ailly and the Council of Constance*, PhD dissertation (Catholic University of America), Washington DC 1936; Pascoe, Louis B.: *Church and Reform: Bishops, Theologians, and Canon Lawyers in the Thought of Pierre d'Ailly (1351–1420)* (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 105), Leiden/Boston 2004.

repeatedly argued against the mendicants during the council.[16] His former student Jean Gerson (1363–1429) was the chancellor of the University of Paris and had already made a name for himself through his writings on the *causa unionis*. In 1387, three decades before Grabow's trial, Gerson had traveled with a delegation from the University of Paris to intervene with Pope Clement VII in Avignon because of disputes with the Dominicans in Paris. Gerson, too, could be described as a critic of the mendicant tradition.[17] These two men, d'Ailly and Gerson, were now tasked with assessing Grabow's *Conclusiones*, and, as expected, ultimately condemned both Grabow's theology and the theologian himself.

2. The Theological Argumentation

2.1 Matthäus Grabow

Based on his book and the conclusions he had penned in the Netherlands, Grabow initially presented fifteen (and later eighteen) *Conclusiones* in Constance regarding the semi-monastic life, all of which were finally rejected.[18] Both versions of the conclusions were practically identical in terms of content. The first conclusion named the central point of contention:

Nullus potest licite et meritorie, immo nec veraciter oboedientiae, paupertatis et castitatis universalia consilia coniunctim extra veras religiones manendo adimplere.[19]

[16] See *Acta Concilii Constanciensis. Vol. 3: Die drei Päpste und das Konzil. Schriften zur Papstwahl*, ed. Heinrich Finke, Münster 1926, pp. 48–50; see also Brandmüller, Walter: *Das Konzil von Konstanz 1414–1418. Vol. 2: Bis zum Konzilsende* (Konziliengeschichte. Reihe A: Darstellungen), Paderborn/Munich/Vienna/Zurich 1997, pp. 200–201.

[17] See Stump 1994, pp. 245–249; Burger, Christoph: *Aedificatio, fructus, utilitas. Johannes Gerson als Professor der Theologie und Kanzler der Universität Paris* (Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie 70), Tübingen 1986, pp. 158–164; McLoughlin, Nancy: "Gerson as a Preacher in the Conflict between Mendicants and Secular Priests", in ed. Brian P. McGuire: *A Companion to Jean Gerson* (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 3), Leiden/Boston 2006, pp. 249–291: 250–251. McLoughlin argues "that Gerson's attacks against the mendicant orders demonstrate both the contested nature of Gerson's authority as a university preacher and his sincere belief that the unhindered exercise of this authority was necessary for the political and spiritual health of France and the greater Church" (*ibid.*, p. 251).

[18] Grabow initially presented fifteen conclusions in Constance (see MS Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Wien, Cod. lat. 4257, ff. 261v–262r, and Wachter 1939, pp. 354–355 on this copy). At the beginning of the trial, Grabow handed over "seven sentences and several conclusions" to the judge in his defense, a total of eighteen sentences, ed. Keussen 1887, pp. 37–41; *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis*, vol 2, pp. 402–405. Seventeen sentences are ultimately condemned, ed. Wachter 1939, pp. 356–358 (with text variations in the prints of *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense concilium*, vol. 3, coll. 106–111; *Sacrorum conciliorum collectio*, vol. 28, coll. 386–388). His opponents attribute twenty-five conclusions to Grabow (ed. *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense concilium*, vol. 3, coll. 110–113; *Sacrorum conciliorum collectio*, vol. 28, coll. 389–390), see Wachter 1939, p. 354.

[19] Matthaeus Grabow *Conclusiones*, cap. 1, ed. Wachter, p. 356.

In Grabow's view, no one was able to follow the three evangelical counsels (*consilia evangelii*) of obedience, poverty, and chastity meritoriously, or even truly, outside of the church-approved orders. Grabow thus postulates that the counsels of perfection in general can only be truly fulfilled within the orders, e.g., in the Dominican Order. The first conclusion contains his argument in a nutshell: according to him, observance of the commandments (*praecepta*) is required of all Christians, but the observance of the evangelical counsels (*consilia*) is voluntary and only a small group of people, the monastics (*religiosi)*, are committed to this observance by their vows (*vota*).

Grabow uses the term *religio vera* exclusively to refer to the monastic way of life within the traditional orders of the Christian church; more specifically, *religio vera* refers for Grabow exclusively to the monastic life as the state of perfection (*status perfectionis*), for only the monastics live the *religio* in the full sense of the word. In taking religious vows, monks and nuns voluntarily commit themselves for the duration of their lifespan to the evangelical counsels in a church-approved order, and this, Grabow argues, sharply distinguishes them from all other forms of the *vita religiosa* such as the Brethren of the Common Life or the Beguines.

In expanding on this argument, Grabow refers to Thomas Aquinas and outlines a bold thesis. He claims that if the monastics (*religiosi*) are bound to follow the evangelical counsels, the converse should also be true: no one outside of the orders should thus be allowed in his view to take a vow to adhere to the evangelical counsels, including the Brethren of the Common Life.[20] He explains this *pars pro toto* using the example of poverty and with this picks up a defining characteristic of the mendicant order.[21] He advocates the thesis that a vow of poverty cannot be obeyed and praised outside the orders:

2. Nullus potest praedictum paupertatis consilium meritorie, immo nec veraciter observare, nisi fuerit in statu spiritualis perfectionis sive verae religionis. [...]
4. Nullus potest abdicationem omnium propter Christum facere extra veram religionem manendo sine peccato mortali, quia subtraheret sibi vitam. [...]
7. Reputantes se bene facere assumendo paupertatis praedictum consilium, remanendo in statu saeculari, mortaliter peccant. [...]
10. Non effundi omnes opes simul ab his, qui volunt in statu saeculari remanere, reducitur quasi immediate ad illud praeceptum decalogi: 'Non occides' [...].
12. Proprietas temporalium rerum est statui saeculari essentialiter annexa.
13. (Dominus) papa salva auctoritate sua non potest dispensare cum saecularibus, ut omnibus in singulari careant seu nihil in singulari habeant.[22]

Referring to Thomas Aquinas,[23] Grabow argues that poverty, obedience, and chastity might be lived out in isolated cases outside the monastic life, but this

[20] For an overview of his argumentation see Wachter 1939, pp. 358–362.

[21] Cf. Matthaeus Grabow *Conclusiones*, cap. 17, ed. Wachter, p. 358: "Praedicta tria Salvatoris consilia sunt ita concatenata, ut ubi paupertas veraciter seu meritorie invenitur, oportet, quod necessario oboedientia et castitas veraciter seu meritorie inveniatur."

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 356–357.

[23] Likewise, the council fathers argued with Thomas Aquinas against Grabow, see *Magnum Oecumenicum Constantiense Concilium*, ed. Hermann von der Hardt, vol. 3, col. 308: "Et ista possunt extra Religiones viventes voto vel sine voto Deo offerre. Unde dicit Sanctus

is not generally (*simpliciter et universaliter*) possible, for, while the *religiosus* renounces possessions, the converse is true of those in the secular state: because property is an essential part of living in the world, renouncing one's property while living in the world must be deemed a mortal sin and even murder, because it would take the life of everyone entrusted to you.[24] Therefore, according to Grabow, not even the pope can dispense with the duty of those who live in the world to own and administer property. Ergo, those who encourage poverty outside of monastic life must be heretics.

Grabow's conclusions reflect his identity as a Dominican monk. Grabow reads Thomas Aquinas's remarks in the *Summa theologiae* on the evangelical counsels, the state of perfection, and the monastic vows in such a way that these serve to affirm an exclusive mendicant or even Dominican identity and to demarcate clearly between the "truly religious" and the Brethren of the Common Life and other forms of semi-monastic spirituality.

Grabow's critics disagreed with his interpretation of Thomas Aquinas. Pierre d'Ailly and Jean Gerson rejected Grabow's theses, but they, too, had a prior history with the Dominicans and the Brethren of the Common Life. Both men had previously written positive reports for the Brethren in support of their way of life, and both had sharply criticized the Dominicans as well. Therefore, neither of them was an impartial judge in this case. Pierre d'Ailly only gives a brief statement and largely dispenses with theological argumentation,[25] possibly because he had retired from the council to Avignon in 1418. Gerson deals with Grabow's conclusions, but in doing so he falls back on material that he had already written elsewhere.[26]

2.2 Pierre d'Ailly

In his brief statement, Pierre d'Ailly recommended that Grabow's case should be presented to the theologians of the council for assessment. He only addresses

Thomas, secunda secundae, Quod in seculo viventes aliquid Deo dant et aliquid sibi reservant, et secundum hoc Praelatis Ecclesiae subduntur. Regulares autem oportet totum Deo quod habent tanquam holocaustum offere." Cf. Thomas de Aquino: *Summa Theologiae* II–II, q. 186, a. 1, ed. Pietro Caramello, Turin 1948, pp. 874–876.

24 Cf. Thomas de Aquino *Summa Theologiae* II–II, q. 32, a. 6, ed. Caramello, pp. 190–191.

25 Petrus de Alliaco: *Judicium de causa fidei Matthaei Grabon, datum Commissario Cardinali, a Martino V. constituto*, in: *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense concilium*, vol. 3, coll. 112–115; see also *Sacrorum conciliorum collectio*, vol. 28, coll. 390–391.

26 Iohannes Gerson: *Judicium, seu Propositiones, de dogmatibus Matthaei Grabon in Concilio Constantiensi propositis, in causa fidei de vera Religione et perfectione […]*, in: *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense concilium*, vol. 3, coll. 114–119; also *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis*, vol 2, pp. 222–224; *Sacrorum conciliorum collectio*, vol. 28, coll. 391–394. See also *Joannis Gersonii et Petri de Alliaco testimonia pro domo fratrum de communi vita*, ed. Friedrich W.T. Schoepff: *Gerardi Zerbolti Zutphaniensis De literis sacris […] libellorum partes* (Aurora 5), Dresden 1859, pp. 34–41. Unlike the majority of researchers, Schoepff assumes that Gerson's report was written first and that Pierre d'Ailly was reacting to it. This would explain the brevity of d'Ailly's document, but the theory is not plausible, as Gerson himself writes in the *Judicium*, coll. 114–115: "respondeo, conformiter ad responsionem […] Domini Cardinalis Cameracensis. Quam responsionem in scriptis ego vidi et huic adhaereo."

Grabow's first conclusion, which, in his opinion, provides the *fundamentum* of all of the subsequent conclusions:

Propositiones sive Conclusiones, super quibus sit inquisitio, habent fundamentum primae conclusionis principale quod est erroneum, repugnans nedum rationi Theologicae et morali, sed etiam observationi primitivae Ecclesiae quae scribitur Actus [Apostolorum] 4 [4:32,34]. Ubi sic in forma dicitur: *Multitudinis autem credentium erat cor unum et anima una, nec quisquam eorum quae possideba[n]t, aliquid suum esse dicebat: sed nec quisquam egens erat inter eos.*[27]

Pierre d'Ailly states that this conclusion contradicts the theological and moral *ratio* as well as the way of life of the early church (*primitiva ecclesia*). The only biblical evidence he feels necessary to present is Acts 4, according to which the first Christians lived together and shared everything, but were not committed to the three evangelical counsels.[28] With this, d'Ailly rejects the idea that *vera religio* only exists within the approved orders: "Christiana vera est Religio etiam apud seculares."[29] The cardinal does not argue further, but proceeds directly to the judgment that Grabow's writings contain errors and false doctrine and should therefore be burned, and that the author himself should also be punished.[30]

2.3 Jean Gerson

Gerson had already read Pierre d'Ailly's assessment in April 1418 when he responded to Grabow's conclusions with six conclusions of his own and six additions (*corollaria*).[31] His more detailed and argumentative text takes up Grabow's key phrase of the "vera religio christiana". Gerson, however, provides a new definition of the term: for him, *vera religio* is the way of life that Christ alone lived to the highest and most perfect degree:

Propositio I. Sola Religio Christiana est proprie vere et authonomatice dicenda Religio, quam Christus observavit perfectissimo et summo modo. Patet prima pars: Quia extra Religionem Christianam non est salus. Secundam partem nullus potest negare Christianus. Quia sicut eam Christus docuit in Evangelio, sit et fecit quod coepit facere et docere.[32]

Unlike Grabow, Gerson no longer relates *religio* solely to the life of the monastics, but rather to Christ and by extension to Christians in general. Based on this redefinition, Gerson concludes that *religio* requires neither a vow (*votum*) nor compliance with the three counsels of perfection. As evidence, Gerson refers to Christ himself and, like Pierre d'Ailly, to the first Christians:

Propositio III. Religio Christianae potest absque voto, obligante ad consilia, perfecte, imo

27 Petrus de Alliaco *Judicium de causa fidei*, col. 114.
28 *Ibid.*
29 *Ibid.*, col. 115.
30 *Ibid.*
31 Iohannes Gerson *Judicium*, coll. 114–119.
32 *Ibid.*, coll. 115–116.

perfectissime observari. Patet de Christo, qui non legitur vovisse consilia, qui fuit tamen suae legis perfectissimus observator. Patet insuper de Apostolis et discipulis Christianis in primitiva Ecclesia, quorum multi erant uxorati, multi possessiones habuerunt, quidam in communi, quidam in proprio.[33]

Consequently, Gerson rejects an artificial *religio* (*factitia*) of the monastic orders, to which in his opinion the state of perfection in general is wrongly ascribed, as monastics often failed to demonstrate a corresponding lifestyle.[34]

Gerson differentiates between a *perfectio* that has already been acquired (*perfectio habita vel acquisita*) and a perfection that is still to be achieved (*perfectio acquirenda*) and thus takes up an argument from his *Quaestio disputata De consiliis evangelicis et statu perfectionis*.[35] According to Gerson, it is better to speak of a perfection that has yet to be acquired than of a state of perfection that has already been achieved. In conclusion, Gerson postulates that the *vera religio christiana* is also to be lived out by the pope, cardinals, and prelates as a perfection which must be practiced (*perfectio exercenda)*:

Propositio VI: Religio Christiana perfectius potest et debet observari a Papa, Cardinalibus et Praelatis, etiamsi nullo voto sint astricti ultra legem Dei [...]. Quia sunt in statu perfectionis exercendae.[36]

Gerson concludes that it is not the vows (*vota*) themselves that constitute a life in perfection, but rather that this perfection can be lived out by those at all levels of Christian life, including, for example, prelates. Even outside of an order, individuals in his view can live out the *vera christiana religio* and follow the evangelical counsels *perfectly* either via a simple vow or indeed even with no vow at all: "Secundum Corollarium. Sequitur secundo: Quod extra Religiones facticias potest aliquis, cum voto simplici et sine voto, Christianam Religionem in suis praeceptis et consiliis perfecte observare."[37]

This understanding of the *status perfectionis* as a state still to be attained can also be found in Gerson's other writings, including the *Quaestio disputata* cited above. There are content-related parallels, in some cases even almost literal echoes, between this text and Gerson's arguments against Grabow. In the *Quaestio*, Gerson likewise argues that the evangelical counsels are not necessary for the perfect life, and he defines the *status perfectionis* as a state to be achieved and pursued.[38] While the Dominicans, following Thomas Aquinas, judged the

33 *Ibid.*, col. 116.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Iohannes Gerson: *De consiliis evangelicis et statu perfectionis*, ed. Palémon Glorieux: *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, no. 88, Tournai/Rome/New York 1962, pp. 10–26. The *Quaestio* cannot be dated; it deals with the evangelical counsels as an instrument of the state of perfection (cf. Thomas de Aquino *Summa Theologie* II–II, qq. 184–189, ed. Caramello, pp. 853–923) and is probably directed against a mendicant.

36 Iohannes Gerson *Iudicium*, col. 117.

37 *Ibid.*, col. 118.

38 See Iohannes Gerson *De consiliis*, ed. Glorieux, p. 22: "status perfectionis quod est modus vivendi in quo quis obligatur ad perfectionem acquirendam vel exercendam, sive oblige-

fulfillment of the commandments (*praecepta*) only as perfect together with the observance of the evangelical counsels (*consilia*) and with permanent vows (*vota* as *obligatio perpetua*), Gerson emphasizes that the perfect fulfillment of the commandments is also possible without vows and even without the *consilia*.[39] Accordingly, Gerson does not limit the state of perfection to monastics, but believes that a prelate or priest could lead a life in Christian perfection as well.[40]

Gerson also pursues this line of argument in relation to Grabow's conclusions. Beginning with the key term *vera religio*, he sketches out his understanding of the other terms *praecepta*, *consilia*, and *vota*. It is precisely this thematic connection that Gerson had already addressed in other writings. In doing so, he only partially does justice to Grabow's theses. Although he rejects Grabow's teachings as heretical, he does so with a litany of general statements on *religio*, the *consilia evangelii*, the *vota*, and the *status perfectionis*. Gerson accuses Grabow of having a mistaken understanding of *religio* and of drawing many false conclusions from it.[41] In the very last sentence of the *Corollaria*, however, Gerson at least differentiates between Grabow as a representative of the Dominicans and *validi mendicantes*.[42]

Gerson thus convincingly judges that Grabow's conclusions are theologically untenable, but he does so by recycling thoughts from his own other (earlier) writings. Neither d'Ailly nor Gerson deals in detail with Grabow's arguments. Grabow draws heavily on Thomas Aquinas (or claims that he can do so!), but Gerson only makes a side note that Thomas would never have dreamed of how Grabow would interpret his writings.[43] As before, both Pierre d'Ailly and Jean Gerson defend the Brethren of the Common Life and condemn Grabow as a member of the mendicant order. At the same time, Gerson emphasizes that his defense of the semi-monastic life should not lead to excessive acquiescence regarding other lay religious groups like the Beguines.[44] This remark shows that the confrontation with Grabow is only one piece of the mosaic in the fundamental debate about ways of life and church reform and the conflicts between monastics and semi-monastics in the first half of the fifteenth century and especially during the Council of Constance.

tur per votum aut praelationem vel dignitatem. Dixi acquirendam propter statum religiosorum; exercendam, propter statum praelatorum[,] episcoporum et curatorum."

39 L. Abramowski offers an interpretation of the *Quaestio disputata* and addresses the question of Gerson's interpretation of Thomas Aquinas: Abramowski, Luise: "Johann Gerson, De consiliis evangelicis et statu perfectionis", in eds. *ead.*/J.F. Gerhard Goeters: *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie der Reformation. Festschrift für Ernst Bizer*, Neukirchen 1969, pp. 63–78.

40 On Gerson's view of priests and prelates see Brown, D. Catherine: *Pastor and Laity in the Theology of Jean Gerson*, Cambridge et al. 1987.

41 Iohannes Gerson *Judicium*, col. 118: "Sequitur tertio: Quod tota doctrina Fratris istius innititur stulta et insana fantasia, imo et blasphemia."

42 *Ibid.*, col. 119.

43 See *ibid.*, col. 117: "Nec est credibile quod Augustinus et sanctus Thomas hoc somniaverunt."

44 *Ibid.*, col. 119.

3. Some Conclusions

The Grabow case was discussed in public on April 3, 1418, at the Council of Constance. Thirteen theologians of outstanding reputation agreed with Gerson's assessment,[45] and the council fathers condemned Grabow's teaching.[46] Grabow remained in custody and was transferred to Italy, where the trial against him continued after the end of the council in April 1418. When he was in Florence in spring 1419, Pope Martin V handed the case over to the Patriarch of Aquileia, Louis VI of Teck (d. 1439), and Grabow was brought to Florence, probably together with the Dominican Johannes Falkenberg (ca. 1364–1429).[47] In May 1419, Grabow's book and seventeen conclusions were finally condemned by the Patriarch in Florence:

> Decernimus et declaramus: Tractatulum seu libellum et conclusiones prehensas supradictos fuisse et esse in fide et bonis moribus erroneos, scandalosos, iniuriosos, temerarios, presumptuosos piarumque aurium offensivos, hereticales et heresim sapientes, necnon ipsos ut tales dampnandos, reprobandos et abiciendos et ut [tales] cremandos fore [...].[48]

As a result, Grabow's writings were burned and he was sentenced to public retraction and banned for life from the province of Cologne and Utrecht. Despite his subsequent compliance,[49] Grabow probably remained imprisoned until his death.[50]

Aside from Grabow's tragic ending and his interpretation of the Bible and Thomas Aquinas that was problematic in the eyes of his examiners, the Grabow case sheds light on some neglected aspects of Dominican culture in the first half of the fifteenth century in the context of church reform:

(1) The case provides an example of Dominican identity in the early fifteenth century. Grabow's conclusions arose in response to disputes between the mendicant orders and the popular new spiritual and semi-monastic movements in the Netherlands and the Rhineland (province of Cologne). In this conflict, the Dominicans were struggling to gain recognition by distinguishing themselves from any form of semi-monastic life. Grabow adopts an extreme position—but

[45] *Ibid.*, col. 114: "Johannis Gersonis Judicium, seu Propositiones [...] Quibus propositionibus tredecim Doctores Maiores, quos pro tunc mundus habuit in Theologia de diversis Universitatibus, contra praedictas assertiones adhaeserunt." See also *Sacrorum conciliorum collectio*, vol. 28, col. 391; *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis*, vol 2, p. 222.

[46] There may have been other written opinions on Grabow's conclusions, cf. Brandmüller 1997, p. 206: Brandmüller mentions a manuscript by Magister Mauritius Rvačka from Prague with the title "Scriptum adversus quasdam proposiciones".

[47] Wachter 1939, pp. 340–344.

[48] *Damnatio*, May 26 or 31, 1419, ed. Keussen 1887, pp. 44–47: 45; *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis*, vol. 2, pp. 408–410: 408. Wattenbach 1895, pp. 661–663, edits a report on the condemnation.

[49] Matthaeus Grabow: *Revocatio et abjuratio praedictorum suorum articulorum et conclusionum* [after May 26, 1419], in: *Magnum oecumenicum Constantiense concilium*, vol. 3, coll. 118–121; *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis*, vol. 2, pp. 226–227; *Sacrorum conciliorum collectio*, vol. 28, col. 394.

[50] See Wachter 1939, pp. 350–351.

others shared his fundamental concern that the Dominican way of life should be recognized once again as the model of a truly Christian way of life, as the *vita apostolica*.

(2) The Grabow case is an example of Dominican efforts to regain recognition at the Council of Constance. Grabow received no public support from prominent Dominicans at the council, such as Leonard Statius or Johannes Nider. But parallel to Grabow's efforts at the council, influential Dominicans were trying to have the mendicant way of life again recognized as a *vita perfectionis*. The Dominican general Leonardo Dati, perhaps the most prominent representative of the mendicant orders, gave a sermon on October 4, 1416, in which he recognized problems within the Dominican order even as he offered a grand *apologia* in defense of the Dominican way of life.[51] His apologetic sermon stood in contrast to the efforts of others such as Dietrich of Niem (1345–1418), one of the delegates of the *natio Germanica* at the council, who advocated that the theologians of the mendicant orders be temporarily excluded from the council in order to better fulfill the council's tasks.[52]

(3) The Grabow case is also a delayed consequence of the Parisian mendicant dispute of the thirteenth century.[53] Here, Pierre d'Ailly and Jean Gerson represent the tradition of a certain hostility toward the mendicants.[54] As mentioned above, Gerson had been part of the delegation sent by the University of Paris in 1387 to address Pope Clement VII in Avignon because of vehement arguments with the Dominicans in Paris.[55] Thus, even before these judges began their assessment of Grabow's theses, the fronts had been defined. In this conflict, Grabow—despite the problematic theological nature of his theses—is also a victim of these previous conflicts, and his case provides an example of an anti-Dominican culture.

(4) Finally, the Grabow case illustrates the council's struggle for a comprehensive reform of the church. Grabow takes up the issue of poverty, of all things, as poverty had already been extensively discussed at the Council of Constance. In the context of the *causa fidei*, this point was particularly critical: John Wycliff and Jan Hus were condemned by the council for, among other things, calling on the clergy to live in poverty. Such a demand for poverty outside vowed life in the orders was considered a criticism of the property of the church. Conversely, Grabow's argument that only the monastics were allowed to live in poverty could not be supported either. In the interest of the church's renewal, the council fathers promoted the new, semi-monastic forms of spirituality that the Brethren of the Common Life embodied by voluntarily living in poverty and leading an exemplary pious life. A Dominican like Matthäus Grabow who flatly rejected

[51] Leonardus de Dati: *Sollicite servare unitatem*, in: *Acta Concilii Constanciensis*, vol. 2, pp. 705–729; Brandmüller 1997, pp. 201–202.

[52] Theodoricus de Niem: *Concilium* [end of January 1415], in: *Acta Concilii Constanciensis*, vol. 3, pp. 76–79: 79: "Item expedit, quod religiosi Mendicantes prorsus excludantur ab ista congregacione, quia cavendum est in hac parte de ipsis fratribus ordinum Mendicancium [...]."

[53] See Zimmermann, Albert, ed.: *Die Auseinandersetzungen an der Pariser Universität im XIII. Jahrhundert* (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 10), Berlin et al. 1976.

[54] See Brandmüller 1997, pp. 200–201.

[55] See above, p. 82, and Isabel Iribarren's contribution to the present volume.

these new ways of religious life stood against the reform of the church.

Ironically, in subsequent decades, sentiment shifted to be more in accordance with Grabow's attitudes toward the Brethren of the Common Life. Beginning in the 1440s, criticism began to mount against the semi-monastic movements, and the Brethren were often urged to integrate into approved orders, for example, as members of the canons regular of the Congregation of Windesheim.

That the mendicants were no longer considered to (solely) embody a life of perfection and the *vita apostolica*, however, is reflected in an anecdote from the Council of Constance. After a lecture given by two canons regular from Zwolle and Windesheim, the council fathers, inflamed with love ("in eius amorem accensi"), are said to have exclaimed, "isti sunt vere patres religiosi, quos dudum videre et audire desideravimus." Their enthusiasm was directed not at the Dominicans and the mendicants, but rather at the Brethren of the Common Life and their clerical counterparts, the canons regular of the Congregation of Windesheim.[56]

[56] This anecdote is passed down by Iohannes Buschius *Chronicon Windeshemense*, p. 356.