



The Voice of Master Leonard: New Evidence for Observant Preaching and Teaching on Crusade Indulgences from 15th-Century Austria

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Zusammenfassung: *Dieser Beitrag untersucht zwei unedierte Manuskripte aus österreichischen Sammlungen, um die komplexen Problematiken besser zu verstehen, denen sich die Kreuzzugs- und Ablassprediger im 15. Jahrhundert gegenüberstehen. Es wird der Einfluss des Dominikanerobservanten Leonard Huntpichler auf eine Reihe von drängenden Fragen für die Kreuzzugsprediger in Süddeutschland und Österreich nach dem Fall Konstantinopels dargestellt. Huntpichler ist seit langem als ein führender Theologe und Prediger seiner Generation bekannt. Die hier vorgelegten Belege für seinen möglichen Einfluss auf die Kreuzzugspredigt in den 1450er Jahren haben bisher keine Beachtung gefunden. Aber es erscheint an dieser Stelle angebracht, auf die Bedeutung der dominikanischen Observanz im Allgemeinen, auf den Platz von Figuren wie Huntpichler in dieser Landschaft und auf die Komplexität der Kreuzzugspredigten im 15. Jahrhundert zu verweisen.*

Abstract: *This article explores two unedited manuscripts from Austrian collections in order to better understand the complex issues facing preachers of crusade and of crusade indulgences in the 15th century. It argues for the influence of the Dominican Observant Leonard Huntpichler on a series of pressing questions facing crusade preachers in southern Germany and Austria after the fall of Constantinople. Huntpichler has long been known as a leading theologian and preacher of his generation. The evidence presented here for his possible influence on crusade preaching in the 1450s has not yet received attention. But it is allowed here to speak to the importance of the Dominican Observance generally, to the place of figures like Huntpichler in that landscape, and to the complexity of crusade preaching in the 15th century.*

Manuscript 37/38 in the library of the Dominicans of Vienna is a 15th-century book steeped in religious violence. Its back flyleaf is a page ripped from a Hebrew manuscript – very likely a testament to the catastrophe of 1421, when Vienna’s Jews were imprisoned, tortured, and burned alive for refusing baptism, their rich intellectual legacy reduced to a later scriptorium’s trash.¹ And the markings on its contemporary leather binding still boldly signal the book’s overall purpose. A large cross in brown ink rests over a faded contemporary inscription below: “For the crusade against the Turks.” Opening the book itself reveals a modest dossier of 97 folios, its materials dedicated exclusively to that purpose. A copy of Humbert of Romans’ *De praedicatione crucis* takes up most of its gatherings, this copy seemingly well-used; its margins are filled with frequent annotations, and four strips of parchment still remind us today that the at least one of the book’s users read it often enough to need bookmarks. A full copy of Calixtus III’s 1455 call to crusade (a republication and refinement of his predecessor Nicholas V’s call from 1453) then follows – this text in a different hand, that of a brother Vincent, and in its own gathering.²

Of particular interest here is another text, in the very back of the codex. Sometime after the spring of 1455, an anonymous copyist wrote out fifteen “notes” on indulgences in the back of our crusading handbook. The text was in fact a list of questions, each of which concerned the provisions of the 1455 crusade bull preserved earlier in the book. It is not possible to survey thoroughly the full list of questions in this short essay. But we might group them into three broad thematic areas. An opening set of questions focused on the nature of the crusade indulgence, and on the remissions of sin: Whether the indulgence absolved from guilt as well as penalty (*tam quoad culpam quam quoad penam*), for example, and whether absolution required a full confession; whether those absolved of murder needed to perform public penance; whether absolutions ought to be granted by any confessor, or according to the appropriate ecclesiastical jurisdiction; whether the plenary remission of sins that was on offer entailed a release from

¹ For an ongoing project to recover and catalogue fragments such as these, see <https://hebraica.at>, with further literature. See for example Martha Keil, Fragments as Objects: Medieval Austrian Fragments in the Jewish Museum Vienna, in: Books within Books – New Discoveries in Old Book Bindings. European Genizah: Texts and Studies 2, ed. by Andreas Lehnardt and Judith Olszowy-Schlanger (Studies in Jewish History and Culture 42), Leiden/Boston 2013, pp. 313–326, at p. 318: “Neither Hebrew nor textual literacy are required for these fragments to communicate their aesthetics, their fragility or their undeniable devastation to their viewers. Everyone can witness the traces of violence: manuscripts have been cut into pieces of various dimensions that were then scratched and folded.” For wider contexts, see Thomas Prügl, Das abwesende Bild. Juden im Wien des 15. Jahrhunderts, in: Wiens erste Moderne. Visuelle Konstruktion von Identitäten im 15. Jahrhundert, ed. by Martina Pippl, Vienna 2023, pp. 29–44, with further literature.

² Vincent’s autograph appears at the end of Calixtus III’s bull of 15 May 1455 on fol. 96v.

excommunication, interdict, and any other ecclesiastical censures.³ A second theme running through the list concerned the nature, obligations, and workings of the crusading vow. Should the vow be uttered out loud? Who might be prevented from taking it? Could someone with a legitimate impediment (someone too poor or too weak, for example) be granted a dispensation to take the vow anyway? Could only those who actively participated in the campaign receive the indulgence, or was it also open to those who offered financial support or prayed for its success?⁴ Several questions also seem to turn on the complexities of conferring indulgences on family and followers: should a poor crusader's wife and children, for the hardships they suffer in his absence, also receive a plenary remission of sin? What of the wife and children of a wealthy donor who funds one soldier?⁵

At first glance the text surveyed here seems of minor significance. Its fifteen questions are simply written out in sequence, without context, elaboration, or answers. And there was in any case, in one sense, nothing at all new to the questions themselves. Most were almost as old as crusading itself, already commonplace in canon law discussions of indulgences and crusading from the 12th and 13th centuries.⁶ Why then bother over these lines, seemingly scribbled almost as an afterthought into the last few folios of a crusading handbook? Another seemingly random text, found in a manuscript from the Benedictine abbey of Melk, on the shores of the Danube some two days' journey of foot to the west of Vienna, provides some clues.

Codex 1799 in the abbey library of Melk is a sprawling collection of some 274 folios, its gatherings filled with a striking range of materials – conciliar decrees, humanist orations, letters concerning imperial and Hungarian affairs, and more. The book also contains two dossiers of material almost exclusively devoted to crusading, each most likely copied across the 1450s and 1460s. The first collection of materials is anchored by another copy of *De praedicatione Crucis* by Humbert of Romans. Following that text is an array of materials related to preaching, crusading vows, and indulgences. Among them is an anonymous “exhortation” to those who might

³ E.g. Vienna, Dominikanerkloster, 37/38, fol. 97r: *An plenissima remissio de qua in bulla sit mentio sub se contineat absolutionem omnium peccatorum tamquam ad culpam quam quoad penam. Et si sic, an praerequiratur integra confessio omnium talium peccatorum, vel an sufficiat quod prius eadem peccata rite sit confessus?*

⁴ E.g. Vienna, Dominikanerkloster, 37/38, fol. 97v: *An iam unusquisque cruce signatum aut volens continuere ad hoc opus contra Turcos, vel ex paupertate non habens, volens nihilominus orare aliquam taxatam orationem sibi per sacerdotem impositam pro bona directione negotii possit absolvi et recipere plenissimam remissionem...*

⁵ E.g. Vienna, Dominikanerkloster, 37/38, fol. 97v: *An maritus contribuens ad hoc sanctum opus per hoc etiam uxor ius et filii et filia participant plenissimam remissionem.*

⁶ Still foundational for these discussions is James Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader*, Madison 1969, especially chs. 2, 3, and 5.

take up the cross against the Turks, much of it drawn from famous early crusading authors – above all, as the work of Valentin Portnykh has shown in such detail, the work of Humbert, along with Bernard of Clairvaux. But the old texts were now brought to life anew in a world their authors could hardly have imagined, providing Observant Benedictine preachers at Melk with texts and ideas they would have found useful in carrying out their obligations.⁷

Immediately following the crusading exhortation, and in that same spirit of utility, we then encounter the same list of questions that appear in the back of Vienna's Dominican manuscript 37/38.⁸ Here the number of questions has been reduced to twelve. But they now have answers—some of them very extensive. In standard scholastic form, the various *dubia* receive balanced responses – that based on the text of the crusade bull, for example, the indulgence did indeed confer a remission of sin *quoad culpam quoad penam*, and that its validity required no full confession, but only that the recipient be in a state of charity. As in so many other late medieval scholastic settings, we might imagine a consultant of sorts, charged with drawing up formal answers to a list of specific questions, having aired the issues with wider circles of expert colleagues.

And within those circles, however we imagine them at work, the Melk text betrays the presence of a certain Dominican, “Master Leonard.” The name first appears already in the second question, regarding whether someone guilty of murder ought to perform public penance before taking the cross: “In responding... Master Leonard, doctor of the Order of preachers, says that there is no need to enjoin any public penance, except perhaps in the case of recidivism or scandal.”⁹ Master Leonard's name then appears six more times in the brief text, as an interlocutor for nearly every one of the questions. Collectively these traces of his voice suggest his role as a trusted authority, someone whom the compiler of the text had clearly consulted directly, or from whom there had been a reliable report.

There can be no definitive proof of Master Leonard's identity from this text alone. But there is a strong circumstantial case that he was the Observant Dominican and university theologian

⁷ Valentin L. Portnykh, An Unknown Short Version of the Treatise *De predicatione sancte crucis* by Humbert of Romans, in: *Studi Medievali* 56 (2015), pp. 722–740 and Valentin L. Portnykh, Le Traité d'Humbert de Romans (OP) ‘de la prédication de la sainte croix’. Une hypothèse sur son utilisation dans les guerres saintes du XVe siècle, in: *Revue d'histoire Ecclésiastique* 109 (2014), pp. 588–624. For a catalogue of the contents of CM 1799, see especially pp. 609–616.

⁸ MS Melk, CM 1799, fols. 171r–173v.

⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 171r.

Leonard Huntlichler of Vienna. Born in the Brixental west of Innsbruck in Tirol, Huntlichler studied in Vienna in the 1420s, entered the reformed “Observant” wing of the Dominican order in 1439, became a Doctor of Theology in 1449, and taught both in Vienna’s friary and at the university for the next three decades, until his death in 1478.¹⁰ Over those decades he also served as Dean of Theology in Vienna on four occasions, and held several key leadership positions, including the office of prior. He was a prolific author whose writings treated a wide range of contemporary issues, from ecclesiology and theological disputes over the Eucharist to education, heresy and inquisition, and pastoral care.

Among those many writings, brother Leonard also compiled an extensive set of what might be called distillations of key teachings on indulgences. Sometime before 1465, he began reading from the *Summa* of his fellow Observant Dominican Antoninus of Florence, and breaking down the material he found there on indulgences into accessible treatments that preachers and confessors could use in their interactions with “simple” parishioners.¹¹ Pavel Soukup has also now shown in detail how active Huntlichler became in preparing preachers for crusading against the Hussites in the 1460s.¹² Given the nature of that work, and given Huntlichler’s broad influence precisely in the 1450s, it is difficult to imagine he had nothing to say about crusade indulgences after the fall of Constantinople, or that he had no role in fulfilling his order’s mandate to preach the Cross against Mehmed II. It seems reasonable to speculate that the “Master Leonard” of our text was brother Leonard Huntlichler.

Another bit of circumstantial evidence points somewhat more directly to the same conclusion. In the context of his pastoral work, and his work of copying and compiling, Leonard Huntlichler became – like so many of his contemporaries, scholastics, Humanists and Observant monks, nuns, and friars alike – an avid collector of books.¹³ Among his personal library was our Vienna

¹⁰ Basic overviews of Huntlichler’s life and work available in Isnard W. Frank’s article in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon* vol. 4, cols 312–316. See also Isnard W. Frank, *Der antikonkiliaristische Dominikaner Leonhard Huntlichler. Ein Beitrag zum Konziliarismus der Wiener Universität im 15. Jahrhundert*, Vienna 1976. Frank’s preliminary study of the corpus of Huntlichler’s works also remains essential: Isnard W. Frank, *Leonhard Huntlichler O. P. (Gest. 1478), Theologieprofessor und Ordensreformer in Wien*, in: *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 36 (1966), pp. 313–88.

¹¹ A collection of texts that remains unedited and unstudied. For a survey of manuscripts and further literature see Frank, *Theologieprofessor* (as n. 10), p. 375 (#37).

¹² Pavel Soukup, *Leonarda Huntlichlera Návod Ke Kázání Kříže Proti Českým Kacířům*, in: *Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Historia Universitatis Carolinae Pragensis* 56 (2016): pp. 65–80. I am grateful for Mr. Andrew Deaton’s detailed summary of the arguments of this important article.

¹³ For an overview of cultural context see Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity before Print. Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning*, Philadelphia 2009.

handbook on crusade preaching. We can never be certain precisely when or how, but at some point in the reign of Callixtus III, Huntovichler “procured” Vienna 37/38 for himself – as he noted in his distinctively large, left-leaning scribble at the bottom of the book’s table of contents.¹⁴ How might we imagine his relationship to the crusade materials compiled there, including our list of fifteen questions? There are any number of possibilities. But that the very same list of questions appears at Melk; that Huntovichler had literary and theological ties to Melk’s Observant bookmen; that Melk’s monks had been charged by the Dominican legate Henry Kalteisen in 1456 to preach the crusade that would end at Belgrade; and that the answers to those questions reference an influential “Master Leonard” – all of this speaks to the strong possibility of Huntovichler’s intellectual presence in these folios.

We can conclude this brief treatment of that possibility by reflecting on a few of the larger lessons it might suggest. Most broadly, we are reminded of the vitality of the Observant Dominicans and their emphasis on pastoral care, on applying the principles of theology to daily life and to guiding the pious practices of the laity. In that context, Master Leonard’s era witnessed eager recovery of the foundational theological and legal works of the 12th and 15th centuries, the older materials now distilled and redeployed in a new 15th-century landscape.¹⁵ But if scholars have usually studied the impact of those dynamics in the realm of pastoral care and devotion, the texts studied here reveal similar workings in the realm of crusade preaching and indulgences after 1453. Our list of questions seems a kind of “FAQ” on that pressing theme, a schema for reflection and debate that Vienna’s Dominicans (and others) subsequently fleshed out and recorded for wider circulation. Both the questions and answers reveal, at a capillary level, how reformers not only debated contemporary issues, but prepared materials that could equip wider circles of preachers to face the complexities they would encounter out in the streets and villages where they worked to recruit and raise money. That is a story usually reserved for an earlier era, the “golden age” of figures like Jacques de Vitry and Humbert of Romans. Here we see a certain vitality at work in the later period. However faltering the old machinery of crusade preaching and collecting, 15th-century Observants and their allies took the questions

¹⁴ Vienna, Dominikanerkloster, 37/38, fol. 1r: *Liber conventus Wienensis ordinis predicatorum in Austria, de cella fratris Leonardi. Procuratus scribi sub tempore cruciate, sub papatu Callisti pape*. For a discussion of Huntovichler’s hand see Frank, *Der antikonkiliaristische Dominikaner* (as n. 10), p. 63 and n. 97.

¹⁵ For a recent treatment of the works of Gerson, with further literature and context, see Christine Glaßner, *The German Ars Moriendi: Texts from the Circle of the So-Called Viennese School of Translators and Their Circulation in the Fifteenth Century*, in: *Pursuing a new order. 1: Religious Education in Late Medieval Central and Eastern Central Europe*, ed. by Julian Ecker and Pavlína Rychterová, Turnhout 2018, pp. 145–167. For wider contexts see John Van Engen, *Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth Century Church*, in: *Church History* 77 (2008), pp. 257–284, especially p. 279–80, and also Hobbins, *Authorship* (as n. 13), ch. 5.

that crusade indulgences raised as seriously as any before them, and sought as best they could to craft answers that spoke to their particular circumstance, in the wake of the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

These texts also reveal something of the human complexity of that particular historical moment, and of the place that figures like “Master Leonard” occupied within it. Papal calls to Crusade after 1453 dropped their plenary indulgences into live human environments where social realities of murder, marriage and family, poverty, religious life, excommunication, and so much more collided with the pastoral and legal complexities of the day. Nearly all of those complexities are now lost. But two compelling passages in our Melk text draw back the veil on how challenged even dedicated theologians, pastors and preachers might be in finding the answers. Should local confessors, in the name of efficiency, be granted the power to absolve all sins on the spot (here the second question), or ought there be respect for all of the proper jurisdictions, in the name of the *ordo ecclesie*? The Melk text noted that the question was “widely debated” (*late disputatum*), and Master Leonard ultimately disagreed strongly with representatives of the papacy. To obey the niceties of jurisdiction in the case of sins “reserved” for the papacy would drive potential donors and participants away. The best decisions were those that supported the ultimate goal of the crusading enterprise.¹⁶ And as to whether those who only donated or prayed in support of the crusade received a plenary indulgence or only a partial one, the questions only deepened: It seemed clear that “in cases of doubt” there should be no plenary indulgence, and in the case of financial donations, the pain of purgatory should be mitigated “according to the amount given and to the devotion of the giver.” But there was no way to legislate those amounts, and when faced with how to determine them, Master Leonard himself through up his hands: “God knows.”¹⁷

These texts are also a reminder, to note a final lesson, of the challenge of working with the sources that Master Leonard’s 15th-century world has left behind. We have investigated here only two examples from among seemingly innumerable similar miscellanies from his era, books stuffed with a bewildering range of often ephemeral texts that defy modern categories of genre,

¹⁶ CM 1799, fol. 171r: *Licet de hoc cum sua paternitate late disputatum sit, sibi tamen et magistro Leonhardo doctori ac alias videbatur contrarium, quia in hac re omnia pensari debent ut fini deserviant. Si igitur in casibus reservatis quis remitti deberet ad auctoritatem superioris, retraherentur homines a transitu et contributione etc.*

¹⁷ CM 1799, fol. 172r: *Et quantum necesse erit determinari vel per dominum legatum vel per dominum nostrum sanctissimum. Magistro Leonhardo videbatur quod quis consequeretur participum si non faceret totum, sed quantum dominus deus scit.*

authorship, and so on.¹⁸ Scholarly energy is most often, and rightly, dedicated to establishing reliable editions of so many still unedited works of known late-medieval authors. Leonard Huntpeichler is only one among them, yet another figure whose works remain buried in the manuscripts. Examples like the ones we have surveyed here suggest yet another layer to this complexity: traces of the more informal, but wider intellectual presence of an author beyond the kinds of works that draw the attention of modern editors.

* * *

Three generations and more of work have now placed Observant reform squarely at the center of the religious and cultural landscape of the 15th century. And in the last generation, the work of Sabine von Heusinger has explored, in exemplary fashion, the richness and complexity of the Observant Dominican movement. In the tradition of Isnard Frank, Kaspar Elm, and Bernhard Neidiger, much of her work has grounded the early history of that movement in close readings of unedited manuscripts, and in all of their local particulars, economic, social, and cultural contexts. That same work has both reflected and inspired a wider scholarly interest in Dominican Observant reform not only in Europe, but in North America, where it is exemplified in the work of Michael Bailey, and others.¹⁹ This brief essay offers itself as another testament to Professor von Heusinger's many years of influential scholarship, and warm collegiality, on both sides of the "big pond" that separates us.

All links have been checked on 15 September 2024.

¹⁸ *Medieval Manuscript Miscellanies*, ed. by Lucie Doležalová and Kimberly Ann Rivers, Krems 2013; *Collecting, Organizing and Transmitting Knowledge*, ed. by Sabrina Corbellini, Giovanna Murano, and Giacomo Signore, Turnhout 2018.

¹⁹ Michael D. Bailey, *Battling Demons. Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages*, University Park 2003.