

FROM OTHERWORLDLY TO WORLDLY: MATERIALISM, ANOMIE,
AND THE DECLINE OF CATHARISM'S CHARISMATIC APPEAL

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INTRODUCTION

Catharism stands out among all the heretical movements of the Middle Ages not only because of its manifestly unorthodox doctrine but more importantly because it represented perhaps the greatest threat to the hegemony of the established Church in Western Christendom. The Cathars believed in a dualist cosmology that posited the existence of two coeternal gods, one good and one evil. The evil god had created everything in the visible world, and as a result the Cathars renounced virtually everything in it, including sex, foods derived from animals, and personal property.¹ The human soul, the creation of the good god, suffered by its imprisonment in the visible world and was trapped by a cycle of reincarnation. Only the Cathar sacrament of the *consolamentum* had the power to purify the spirit and allow it to return to its heavenly home. Yet the purified state produced by this sacrament was easily corrupted—by the eating of meat, sexual contact, or any sin for that matter—and so most believers waited until their deathbeds to be “perfected.” Only a select few opted to receive the sacrament while of sound mind and body, after which they were expected to live a strict life of asceticism. These spiritual elites became known as Perfects, Good Men or Women, and Good Christians—names indicative of their opposition to the Roman Church as much as their impressive apostolic piety. Few others could rival their devotion to humility, poverty, abstinence, and prayer, a fact that earned them respect even among those who did not adhere to their beliefs.² They lived an itinerant existence, relying on the goodwill of others as they traveled from village to village preaching to anyone who would hear them. Believers supported them with gifts and adored them in the hopes of being “consoled”

¹ For extensive accounts of Cathar doctrine, cosmology, ritual, and scripture see Michel Roquebert, *La religion cathare: Le Bien, le Mal et le Salut dans l'hérésie médiévale* (Paris: Perrin, 2001) and Jean Duvernoy, *Le catharisme: la religion des cathares* (Toulouse: Privat, 1979).

² Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press: 1969), 27-28.

on their deathbeds, for only perfected individuals could confer the *consolamentum* on others. Supporters thus built relationships with the Perfects in the hopes that their souls too would be made pure enough before death to escape the material world and yet another reincarnation.

The possibly Eastern origins of Catharism have long been debated.³ What is known for certain is that by the thirteenth century the heresy had become well-entrenched in Lombardy and the Languedoc, the latter of which is the focus of this thesis. Waning ecclesiastical authority and political fragmentation made northern Italy particularly receptive to heresy; similarly, the lack of central authority and weakness of feudal relationships provided fertile ground for heresy in the Languedoc.⁴ Before the Albigensian Crusade (1208-1229), the Languedoc comprised a number of independent political territories for which the dukes of Aquitaine, the counts of Toulouse, and the kings of Aragon-Catalonia frequently competed. The counts of Toulouse, however, dominated much of the region, and their city was well on its way to becoming an independent republic.⁵ The mountainous regions near the Catalan border also contained a number of smaller semi-autonomous areas which proved particularly fertile for heresy, among them the baronies of Béarn, Bigorre, Comminges and Foix. Similarly, the cities of Albi, Carcassonne, Béziers, Agde and Nîmes fell outside the dominance of the main territorial lords and were controlled by the powerful Trencavel family before the crusade. The general characteristics of the Mediterranean rural economy—the predominance of small family and communal farms, fragmented land holdings, the relative absence of serfdom and collective restraints on farming, and advanced

³ In their introduction to *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, Wakefield and Evans discuss the debate between Antoine Dondaine, who argued for direct links from Manichaeism to Bogomilism and from Bogomilism to Catharism, and Raffaello Morghen, who considered the evidence for such links to be weak. More recently, Malcolm Barber discusses such ongoing debates in Chapter One of *The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages* (Singapore: Person Education Limited, 2000).

⁴ Linda M. Paterson, *The World of the Troubadours: Medieval Occitan society, c. 1100-c. 1300*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 15. Malcolm Lambert, *The Cathars* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1998), 38.

⁵ Paterson, 1-2.

monetary circulation—all proved conducive to the sustainment of heretical sects as well.⁶ The wealth and economic development of the Languedoc allowed the Cathars, who were never a mendicant order, to support themselves through their diligence in various trades. They also enjoyed generous gifts from their benefactors, many of whom belonged to this rather autonomous nobility.

At the same time, Catharism cannot be understood as an isolated phenomenon in southern France. It was just one movement within the greater context of the cult of voluntary poverty in Western Christendom.⁷ The widespread popularity of voluntary poverty came largely as a reaction to the shift towards a “profit economy” that occurred during the Middle Ages, which resulted in an unprecedented display of wealth in Western Europe.⁸ Because the clergy often enjoyed these luxuries, the evangelical disdain for wealth was closely related to the general anticlerical sentiments of the period, which criticized clerics for being untrue to the apostolic model of the New Testament. The Gregorian Reform of the eleventh century had attempted to address much of the corruption in the Church, and monastic reform movements such as the Cluniacs, Carthusians, and Cistercians also sought to rid the Church of its excesses.⁹ Yet the repeated lapses within orthodoxy caused many to seek alternatives in lay religious movements. The Cathars emerged alongside various sects such as the Humiliati, Waldensians, and Beguines, which all shared voluntary poverty in common and drew adherents from all strata of society.¹⁰ Some members of the nobility felt compelled to heed the Gospels’ call to sell all their possessions quite literally; for the already poor, voluntary poverty provided a praiseworthy

⁶ Paterson, 120.

⁷ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). 156.

⁸ This will be discussed in greater detail in regard to Lester Little’s *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

⁹ See C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism : Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2001) for a standard work on such movements.

¹⁰ For an excellent overview of such heretical groups, see Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2002).

alternative to the ignominy of their involuntary condition. The popularity of these movements was such that by the twelfth century the voluntary poor formed a small but significant element in society, traveling from town to town and spreading their message in imitation of the apostles. In short, the Cathars were by no means the only group offering an alternative to the established Church.

Accordingly, much historical literature has discussed Catharism as a movement with fundamentally religious origins. Herbert Grundmann was among the first to situate Catharism in its religious context.¹¹ His work is now seen largely as a reaction to materialist explanations by Marxist historians such as Martin Erbstösser, who saw heresy as a vehicle of protest for social and economic grievances.¹² Though Grundmann's interpretation has since been criticized for its idealism, the religious origins of the movement have been widely acknowledged in subsequent works, including those of Jean Duvernoy, Michel Roquebert, and Malcolm Lambert. Yet in treating the decline of Catharism, the literature emphasizes the role of non-religious factors and largely ignores the possibility of internal dissolution. Historians to date have focused on the obvious and incontrovertible role of the inquisition in driving the sect underground to the point of invisibility and, before long, extinction. Walter Wakefield's interest in the repressive role of inquisition in the Languedoc proved highly influential, as both Malcolm Lambert's and Malcolm Barber's recent monographs stress the extirpation of Catharism by persecution.¹³ Others, such as James Given and John Arnold, have used Catharism to explore the unprecedented ability of medieval inquisition to exercise power over entire populations and the use of confessions to

¹¹ See Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

¹² Martin Erbstösser, *Heretics in the Middle Ages*, trans. Janet Fraser (Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 1984).

¹³ See Walter Wakefield, *Heresy, Crusade, and Inquisition in Southern France, 1100-1250* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Malcolm Lambert, *The Cathars*; and Barber, *The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages*.

promote socio-religious conformity.¹⁴ Mark Pegg has used the inquisitorial registers of Bernard de Caux and Jean de St-Pierre to question the uniformity and organization of Catharism, arguing that the prevalence of heretical beliefs and practices “known” by historians today are largely reflective of the inquisitors’ imaginations, and that in reality “Catharism” was frequently a peculiar melding of orthodoxy and heterodoxy.¹⁵ Other historians, however, notably Peter Biller and Robert Lerner, maintain that Catharism and indeed other heresies should still be viewed as coherent, alternative religions.¹⁶ In any case, recent historiography shows a strong bias towards considering heresy within the framework of dissent and repression.

However, as one French historian notes, if it was inquisition alone that made Catharism disappear, that would be “the only case where repression would have triumphed over a faith or an idea.”¹⁷ Persecution is an insufficient explanation for the disappearance of an entire ideology over the span of less than a century, especially considering that heretical contemporaries such as the Waldensians survived until the Reformation.¹⁸ Lutz Kaelber is a notable exception in the historiography, having highlighted several sociological factors in the dissolution of the sect.¹⁹ He shows how the blurring of lines between heterodoxy and orthodoxy within Catharism contributed to the decline of the heresy, contrasting it to Austrian Waldensianism, which was able to survive largely because it made a concerted effort to delineate itself from Catholicism. The Cathars’

¹⁴ See James Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society: Power, Discipline, and Resistance in Languedoc* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) and John Arnold, *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (Philadelphia, 2001).

¹⁵ See Mark Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels: The Great Inquisition of 1245-1246* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁶ See Peter Biller, “Goodbye to Waldensianism?” *Past and Present* 192 (August 2006).

¹⁷ Jean-Louis Biget, “Hérésie, politique et société en Languedoc (vers 1120-vers 1320),” in *Le Pays cathare*, ed. Jacques Berlioz (Manchecourt : Maury-Eurolivres, 2000), 49. This and all subsequent quotations from French sources are my own.

¹⁸ For comprehensive and recent studies of the Waldensian heresy, see Euan Cameron, *The Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2000) and Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent: Persecution and Survival, c.1170-c.1570*, trans. Claire Davison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁹ See Lutz Kaelber, *Schools of Asceticism: Ideology and Organization in Medieval Religious Communities* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

failure to do so relegated the sect to family lineages by the turn of the fourteenth century. Kaelber also argues that the demise of Catharism stemmed largely from a decline in interaction between the Perfects and their followers, which originally had been centered on a network of houses that “apprenticed” young individuals to receive instruction in both a craft or trade and religious matters. In a similar vein, this thesis explores other internal factors contributing to the decline of the sect, seeking to answer why Catharism succumbed to inquisitorial pressures more readily than other heresies. It first places Catharism back within its proper context as a chiefly religious movement with strong theological and spiritual appeal (rather than a manifestation of social dissent as some historians frame heresy), and then shows how the sect departed from the apostolic model that initially gave it such success. Thus, my objective is not to refute the importance of the inquisition but rather to complicate the explanation of Catharism’s ultimate failure by shifting the focus to shortcomings within the sect, both on the part of the Perfects and their community of believers.

Nevertheless, a brief history of repression bears mention here. Systematic persecution began in 1208, when Pope Innocent III called the Albigensian Crusade after his papal legate Pierre de Castelnau was murdered, allegedly under the order of Count Raimond VI of Toulouse. This event did not trigger the conflict alone, however. Innocent had already recognized that his initial attempts to galvanize the local church and secure the support of secular lords were insufficient to combat heresy. The principal objective of his call to crusade was likely to coerce the secular authorities into extirpating heresy, seen as a serious threat to ecclesiastical authority in the region.²⁰ The papal legate and Cistercian Abbot Arnould Amaury led the crusaders into the Languedoc for what would be a decades-long conflict pitting the southern French nobility

²⁰ Elaine Graham-Leigh, *The Southern French Nobility and the Albigensian Crusade* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), 46-48.

against the northern nobility and the French crown. Peace was finally settled between the French monarchy and the counts of Toulouse with the 1229 Treaty of Paris, though pockets of fighting persisted into the 1240s.²¹ Though the crusade was devastating in certain regions, many nobles in the Languedoc did in fact prosper during the crusade years, particularly the counts of Foix (on whose lands heresy flourished), who entered the French political scene after reigning in relative obscurity as border lords.²² The conflict served to extend French royal authority over much of these lands, but proved quite inadequate in ousting heresy from the region.

The end of the crusade saw the establishment of papal inquisitions throughout the Languedoc. The first was conducted by the Toulousain episcopate in the 1230s before inquisitorial duties were soon taken over by the Dominican and later the Franciscan orders. Such inquisitions were known to summon entire dioceses for questioning about the articles of faith and their knowledge of heresy, effectively bringing about the end of open preaching by the Cathars and other heretics. The Perfects and their most intransigent supporters were often burned at the stake, while those guilty of lesser involvement could be imprisoned indefinitely or forced to wear large yellow crosses on their outer garments as penance. Family estates and other material assets were often seized by the Church as well, ruining the fortunes of many heretics' descendants. In this context, the Perfects were forced to operate clandestinely and found their number of supporters dwindling. Yet within this hostile environment, Catharism was revitalized in the Pyrenean diocese of Pamiers thanks to the evangelical activities of the Autier brothers, Pierre and Guillaume in the late thirteenth century.²³ But by the time of the inquisition at Pamiers

²¹ Graham-Leigh, 2-3.

²² *Ibid.*, 9, 167-168.

²³ The inhabitants of Montailou and the surrounding area, vividly portrayed in Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montailou: Cathars and Catholics in a French village, 1294-1324*. trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Penguin, 1978), were among those converted in this revival.

(1318-1325), led by Jacques Fournier, then bishop and later Pope Benedict XII, Catharism can be said to have vanished for good from the Languedoc.

While some of the Cathars' own prayer and ritual books have survived, historians have become most familiar with the sect through the extraordinary body of evidence produced by their inquisitors. Much of what is known about Cathar theology, the activity of the Perfects, and the sect's organization, for example, is gleaned from the testimonies of the heretics and their supporters rather than their own writings. Because such testimony was given under duress, guided by a set line of questioning under the ever-present threat of punishment—the confiscation of property, indefinite imprisonment or worse—there is cause for concern about the veracity of these depositions. Yet the overall consistency and continuity of individuals' testimonies when compared with one another is remarkable, especially their detailed narratives often go far beyond what was demanded by the questions. As for the integrity of the records themselves, modern historians widely recognize the discriminating accuracy with which inquisitors such as Bernard Gui and Jacques Fournier conducted their investigations. Shortly after the first inquisitions were established in the Languedoc, inquisitorial manuals began to appear, including sets of standard questions for suspected heretics. The techniques of inquisition were thus constantly refined and standardized. Moreover, it was in the best interest of the inquisitors to record testimony as fully and accurately and possible, because these written records were after all their primary means of rooting out suspected heretics. Historians have thus been able to use the rich accounts found in inquisitorial registers to piece together a vivid portrait of Catharism and daily life in Languedocian society. This thesis draws primarily on two of the most extensive inquisitions, those conducted by Bernard de Caux and Jean de Saint-Pierre in the Lauragais between 1243 and 1247, and by Jacques Fournier (later Pope Benedict XII) at Pamiers from 1318 to 1325. Using

these two registers provides a chronological balance between the early and late stages of Catharism, and demonstrates continuity in the internal problems manifest within the sect.

The argument relies to a lesser but still important extent on historical chronicles and polemical treatises. The chronicles of Guillaume de Puylaurens, a servant of two local bishops and later the Count of Toulouse, and Guillaume Pelhisson, a Dominican friar and inquisitor, provide crucial information about the extent to which Catharism had become rooted in the local populace and the difficulties the Church faced in trying to eliminate the heresy. The former is primarily concerned with recounting the Albigensian Crusade, while the latter focuses on the first years of the Dominican inquisition in Toulouse in the 1230s—both transformative periods for Catharism in the region. The polemical treatises were frequently written by former inquisitors and other churchmen with firsthand knowledge of the heretics and their beliefs. They typically comprise summations of individual heresies' beliefs and teachings as well as descriptions of their organization and practices. In some cases, the prejudice of the writer is obvious; for example, it is known that for polemical reasons orthodox writers tended to exaggerate the divisions and internal conflicts within heretical sects, in opposition to the one, universal Church of Rome.²⁴ For example, Rainerius Sacconi, a former heretic turned Dominican friar and inquisitor who wrote a widely circulated tract on heresy, cites as many as sixteen Cathar "churches."²⁵ At the same time, the polemicist James Capelli goes out of his way to dismiss the rumors of debauchery and licentiousness that were frequently used to slander heretical sects, lending credibility to what may seem an otherwise biased genre.

This thesis makes use of Max Weber's notion of charismatic authority to frame the evidence collected from these sources. Weber defines charismatic authority as deriving from

²⁴ Biller, "Goodbye to Waldensianism?" 30.

²⁵ Rainerius Sacconi. "Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno," in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, trans. and eds. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, (New York: Columbia University Press: 1969), 336.

“specific gifts of the body and spirit” held by certain individuals that are “believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody.”²⁶ Charismatic leaders arise naturally during times of distress and thus represent a challenge to the dominant traditional and legal authorities of a particular social environment. Charismatic authority is by its very nature unstable, not only because it lacks a well-defined organizational structure, but also because “pure charisma does not know any ‘legitimacy’ other than that flowing from personal strength, that is, one which is constantly being proved.”²⁷ When a charismatic leader is no longer able to prove himself, or his followers cease to fare well under his leadership, those followers will no longer recognize—and thus legitimize—his authority. Charismatic authority, however, can endure if it is routinized into the traditional and legal authority structures that it initially challenges.²⁸ The Cathar Perfects were holders of an institutionalized form of charisma, but one that was not fully routinized into society. Thus, they had to constantly prove their authority through their exemplary deeds and lifestyle in much the same way as holders of “pure” charisma. The charismatic appeal of such religious virtuosos, defined as a “spiritual aristocracy” that opposes mass religiosity through a heroic form, is acknowledged by modern sociologists.²⁹

Without superimposing this theoretical framework wholesale onto the Cathars, my argument utilizes its basic concepts to understand the decline of the sect.³⁰ Chapter one establishes Catharism within the context of popular religious movements to emphasize the real spiritual appeal of the sect, and then proceeds to describe the charismatic nature of the Perfects’

²⁶ Max Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 245.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁸ Weber refers to the early Christian church’s development of authority as a prime example of charismatic authority, originating from Jesus, becoming routinized.

²⁹ Ilana Friedrich Silber, *Virtuosity, charisma, and social order: A comparative sociological study of monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Ch. 1.

³⁰ It should be noted that Kaelber’s work *Schools of Asceticism* was an explicit attempt to write Weber’s intended study of medieval Christianity, and thus draws far more heavily on sociological theory.

authority. This shows that the stability of the sect was thus contingent on the Cathars' continued demonstration of apostolic piety. Chapter two examines the sect's "spiritual economy" of voluntary gift exchange and how this undermined their ascetic idealism by rendering the sect corporately wealthy, much like orthodox monastic orders before them.³¹ Finally, Chapter three discusses the inherent difficulties that the Cathars had in instituting among their followers the kind of discipline necessary to fully routinize their authority, as well as their failure to prove themselves in the face of inquisitorial pressures. In doing so, this thesis will have demonstrated that the Cathars departed on two major fronts from the religious ideals that gave them importance in the first place, thus explaining why Catharism was unable to withstand persecution.

³¹ This phrase is borrowed from Andrew Roach, "The Cathar Economy," in *Reading Medieval Studies*, Vol. XII (Reading: University of Reading, 1986).

CHAPTER ONE: CHARISMA, VIRTUOSITY, AND THE APOSTOLIC LIFE

This chapter explores Catharism within the context of popular religious movements from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries, examining the revival of asceticism, voluntary poverty, itinerancy and lay preaching that went hand in hand with the anticlerical sentiments dominant at the time. The Perfects exercised charismatic authority over their followers by providing a model of apostolic piety that accorded with popular ideals of holiness, as evidenced by the sect's rituals and customs. This charisma was not the pure type discussed by Weber, as it was partially institutionalized by the sacrament of the *consolamentum*, the spiritual baptism by which believers were saved before death and Good Men and Women were perfected. Nevertheless, this in no way diminished the need for these spiritual elites to constantly prove themselves to their followers. This chapter thus establishes two fundamental points of departure from which the rest of the argument proceeds: first, Catharism was embraced because it provided an answer to the religious and spiritual needs of the laity, and second, the perfected spiritual elite of the sect derived their authority from charisma and thus needed to constantly prove themselves to their followers. The implication of these two main points is that since Catharism lacked a well-established bureaucratic social structure, the Perfects had to provide a viable alternative to the Roman Church to maintain their followers' faith in their authority. Chronic lapses in dogmatic adherence and general worldliness would thus prove at least as detrimental to the sect as inquisitorial pressure.

CATHARISM IN POPULAR RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

According to Weber, one of the key characteristics of charismatic authority is that it arises in times of crisis. “Natural leaders” emerge in times of distress, with no previous experience as officeholders in the bureaucratic sense but holding “specific gifts of the body and spirit” that are “believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody.”¹ This begs the question what “crisis” gave them their *raison d’être*. The crisis lay in the spiritual void left by the orthodox clergy. In the eyes of many, the Church continued to proclaim early Christian standards of piety—i.e. poverty, humility, almsgiving, prayer—as its ideal while hypocritically practicing a temporal form of Christianity that was manifestly detached from these roots. Because the secular clergy were too involved in the world and the monks and nuns were too far removed from it, the Church was unable to satisfy the spiritual needs of its members.² The importance of the Church’s neglect of its pastoral responsibilities cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, Heinrich Fichtenau argues that insufficient emphasis has been placed on the “anticlerical emotionalism and alienation from the institutional church” that fueled heresy.³ It was these fervent feelings of resentment toward and alienation from the clergy that paved the way for the charismatic leadership of the Perfects and others.

The rise of the “profit economy” in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries was a key factor in the heightened spiritual awareness of the general populace and the increasing worldliness of the clergy. Lester Little has argued that this economic development constituted the main crisis to which popular religious movements like the Cathars responded. The unprecedented increase in currency exchange and commercialism during this period created a

¹ Max Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 245.

² Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 37.

³ Heinrich Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars in the High Middle Ages: 1000-1200*, trans. Denise A. Kaiser (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 120.

major moral issue in that the old morality, which generally disdained wealth, was slower to change than the economy of the period. The result was a period of limbo in which money was “simultaneously pursued and scorned.”⁴ The received tradition was biased against the main elements of the new economy, namely cities, money, and the urban professions. Agricultural and pastoral labor was given clear moral preference over all other occupational pursuits.⁵ Avarice took its place alongside Pride as the most important of the Seven Deadly Sins, and hagiographies such as the *Life of St. Alexis*, which dealt with the voluntary renunciation of wealth and the originally Eastern practice of religious mendicancy, became enormously popular.⁶ In essence, the inflexibility of traditional Christian morals made any sort of participation in the new commercial economy tantamount to sin, creating “tensions between morality and behaviour, between theology and society, between religion and life itself.”⁷ The fact that the institutional Church was quite flexible in its own practices further exacerbated these tensions.

In the south of France in particular, a fundamental problem for the Church lay in the *de facto* division between the “high Church” of the aristocracy and prelates and the “low Church” of the rural priests, peasants and ordinary townsfolk. The wealth, influence and aristocratic ties of Occitan bishops were overlooked by the Gregorian Reform of the eleventh century, providing fertile grounds later for the patent asceticism of the Cathar Perfects.⁸ Bishops were among the dominant social group in Occitania, enjoying considerable power and prestige via their pastoral mission, their ties to aristocratic families, their personal wealth (many were propertied lords by birth) and the wealth of their churches. Bishops had their own palace and household, complete

⁴ Lester Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 38, 40–41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸ Linda M. Paterson, *The World of the Troubadours: Medieval Occitan society, c. 1100-c. 1300*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 315.

with an entourage of chamberlains, seneschals, knights and peasants.⁹ In stark contrast, many parish priests lived in the same manner as their parishioners, often as tenants or cultivators. This largely explains why some in the Toulousain and Lauragais listened to the sermons of heretical preachers alongside their parishioners.¹⁰

The reaction against such displays of wealth and power initially came within the bounds of orthodoxy. The twelfth century saw a great upsurge of Cistercian monasteries in Occitania, including some twenty-nine new abbeys founded in the Languedoc. However, the search for simplicity, self-abnegation, and poverty oftentimes resulted in displays of aggression, arrogance, and greed. Cistercians actively sought papal exemptions from various duties, and became wealthy landlords through their agricultural success—a fact that did not endear them to local populations seeking models of spirituality. In addition to establishing rich and productive estates, monks in Occitania handled money to an extent unknown in other regions.¹¹ They speculated in real estate and leased city dwellings; they received pledges from indebted lords: some even followed a systematic policy of land acquisition—all making them easy targets for heretics to rouse popular discontentment.¹² As a result, many laypersons came to see voluntary poverty as the most effective and logical solution to the problem of avarice, which, even when professing completely orthodox theology, often put them at odds with the institutionally wealthy Church. By the time the Dominicans and Franciscans were officially sanctioned as mendicant orders in the thirteenth century, popular lay movements of itinerant preachers and ascetics were already well-established.

⁹ Paterson, 316.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 319.

¹¹ The sharp debate over individual versus communal wealth in regards to the apostolic life is explored in more detail in Chapter Two.

¹² Paterson, 327-328.

Vague reports of dualist heretics began surfacing in Western Europe in the eleventh century, though the first specifically attested to as Catharism came in Cologne in 1143. By the late twelfth century, however, it is certain that Catharism was firmly rooted in Occitania.¹³ The strong reception of Catharism in the Languedoc is frequently explained by the fractured nature of Occitan society: the lack of strict obligations between lords and vassals, the resulting independence of the nobles, and the absence of a strong central authority due to the weakness of the counts of Toulouse.¹⁴ Political fragmentation was complemented by a significant fracture between the reforming clergy and the rest of society that affected all social classes. The Gregorian Reform unwittingly disrupted relations between the clergy and the laity that, though flawed, had long been functional, thus alienating the laity and especially the nobility.¹⁵ The reformed elements became conspicuously wealthy without providing spiritual guidance for the faithful. It is likely not a coincidence that heresy was especially dominant in the Lauragais, where the monastic settlement also had a particularly strong presence. Thus it is not surprising that the records show a particularly strident brand of anticlericalism in the region.¹⁶

There are numerous examples in the sources of the prevalence of anticlerical attitudes in Languedocian society. Guillaume de Puylaurens recounts how “[p]arish priests were held in such contempt by the laity that their name was used by very many people in oaths, as if they were Jews, and just as one might say: ‘I would rather be a Jew’, they used to say: ‘I would rather be a parish priest than do this or that.’”¹⁷ In the midst of the Albigensian Crusade, as the Bishop of Toulouse was passing through the town of Labécède, the Cathar-friendly citizens there jeered

¹³ Paterson, 332-333.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 338-339.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Guillaume de Puylaurens, *The Chronicle of William of Puylaurens*, trans. W.A. Sibly and M.D. Sibly (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 8-9. Guillaume de Puylauren’s chronicle covers events from 1145 to 1275 though it focuses primarily on the Albigensian Crusade and its aftermath, much of which he witnessed while working for the bishops of Toulouse.

him as the “bishop of the devils,” to which he cleverly replied “indeed they speak the truth; they are devils and I am their bishop.”¹⁸ The extent of this animosity in some areas was such that the clergy sometimes took measures to disguise themselves in public, trying to hide their tonsures, for example, by combing their hair forwards from the back of their heads.¹⁹ This reaction on behalf of the clergy should hardly be a surprise, considering that the Perfects “discuss[ed] with laymen at every opportunity the wicked life of clerics and prelates of the Roman Church”; they would “give examples and speak at length about their pride, cupidity, avarice, their uncleanness of life, and whatever other evils they know,” referring to the clergy as the Pharisees and false prophets of Scripture.²⁰ Another chronicler even recounts how some theologians were sent to Toulouse after the 1229 Peace of Paris ended open hostilities in order to extirpate heresy from the region, only to be “made fun of to their faces” by the heretics and their followers.²¹

This anticlericalism manifested itself just as strongly in the early fourteenth century, during the late stages of Catharism. Resentment towards the clergy ran high on two new fronts. First, the clergy were held in contempt for their role in launching the Albigensian Crusade, which brought about the ruin of many noble families in the region. One such nobleman, Bertrand de Taïx, whose grandfather and father had been heavily involved with Catharism, was asked by the bishop Bernard Saisset of Pamiers if he hated the French or the clerics more. Bertrand answered that “he hated first the clerics, for it was they who had made the French come to our

¹⁸ Puylaurens, 76.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

²⁰ Bernard Gui, “Practica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis,” in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, trans. and ed. Wakefield and Evans, (New York: Columbia University Press: 1969), 383-384.

²¹ Guillaume Pelhisson, *Chronique de Guillaume Pelhisson, 1145 -1275*, trans. and ed. Jean Duvernoy. (Toulouse: Pérégrinateur. 1996), 39.

country, and without them the French would never have come here.”²² The imposition of clerical authority via the inquisition was also highly resented by many in the Languedoc.

Second, in the county of Foix, a hotbed of Catharism, the bishop had just imposed a new tax on animal husbandry that was to be paid in addition to the usual tithes. Nobleman and peasant alike greatly resented this tax because not only did it exacerbate economic strain, it was completely unprecedented in the region. The tax became the subject of arbitration, but the bishop-inquisitor Jacques Fournier prevailed; any who would not cooperate in paying the tax were excommunicated.²³ The bailiff Guillaume Autatz of Ormolac, in discussing the 1320 execution of the Waldensian heretic Raymond de Sainte-Foy, confessed to saying: “‘It would have been better for the Sabartès that it was the bishop of Pamiers [Jacques Fournier, his inquisitor] who was burned, rather than this man, for after that he would not make us spend our money.’ I said that not because I hold the bishop as heretic, but because he demands the tithes on stockbreeding.”²⁴

Raimond de Laburat of Quié demonstrated particular rancor toward the clergy after being excommunicated for refusing to pay the tithe. Upon finding the door of the church barred to him when he attempted to go to mass in Sabart on the feast of the Annunciation, he vituperated:

‘We make churches, we buy everything which is necessary to them, the churches are ours, and after that they chase us from them! Cursed be he who forbids a Christian to hear the mass!’ (I was thinking of monseigneur Pierre Du Verdier, archdeacon of Majorca, who pronounced against us this sentence of excommunication.) I added that I did not think that God had ever excommunicated someone from his own mouth or ordered that a Christian was excommunicated by another man, for, I said, I did not believe that our Lord Jesus Christ who redeemed us so dearly by his flesh, his bones and his blood wanted to excommunicate us, or wanted someone else to excommunicate us.²⁵

²² Jacques Fournier, *Inquisition à Pamiers : Interrogatoires de Jacques Fournier, 1318-1325*, trans. and ed. Jean Duvernoy (Toulouse : Edouard Privat, 1966), 96-97.

²³ *Ibid.*, 32, editor’s note.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

On another occasion this same Raimond de Laburat said before many people in his town, including the rector, that he wished that all the clerics, including the bishop of Pamiers, were sent on crusade overseas and that “they were as relentless in fighting the Saracens and conquering their land and avenging the death of Christ as they were determined and relentless in demanding the tithes and the first fruits of the stockbreeding, for if these clerics went there, they would at least leave us here in peace, and would not demand of us what they demand of us.”²⁶ Nor was his resentment over clerical obligations limited to tithing. Raymond was no less infuriated by what he viewed as the unreasonable demands of the clergy when the bishop ordered the inhabitants of Quié to make a Pascal candle of fifteen to twenty pounds of wax. Raymond again went on an anticlerical tirade, saying he wished that “all the clerics were dead or overseas, or that all the laity was in paradise, so that everything which is found in this world belonged to the clerics, since they want everything.”²⁷ He even wished death on his own son, a priest.

Berthomieu Hugou of Saverdun, school headmaster at the priory of Unac (a clerical position), relates how Pierre Guilhem, a cobbler, was complaining to his friend in his workshop about the new tax and the impotence of the count of Foix in preventing it, going so far as to say that “none of the souls which are lost would have been if it were not for the clerics.”²⁸ In Pierre’s version, the insult was merely exacerbated because he had refused to give Berthomieu credit to buy shoes, saying “Leave me; all you clerics are dominators, and strictly want to have what we owe you. If monseigneur the count (that is to say monseigneur Roger-Bernard) were living, he would protect us against your demand of the eighth (that is to say the tithe and the first fruits).” When Berthomieu responded that without the Church’s sacraments of baptism and penance everyone would be lost, Pierre retorted that “there would still be people who were saved,

²⁶ Fournier, 106-107.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

and...ten thousand souls were lost in the Sabartès by the fault of the clergy.”²⁹ This statement implies that the perceived greed in the clergy, as manifested in tithing among other things, resulted in a marked lack of faith in the pastoral mission of the clergy. By the turn of the eleventh century even, it was widely believed that the worth of a priest lay in his imitation of the apostles rather than his ordained office, a notion first advanced by the Donatist heresy in North Africa in the fourth and fifth centuries.³⁰

The case of Guillaume Fort is even more telling of how popular opinion often drew a strong correlation between the personal conduct of the clergy and the validity of their sacraments and preaching. After recanting his beliefs that a sinful priest could not absolve sins and that there is no resurrection of the body before Geoffroy d’Ablis, the inquisitor of Carcassonne, Guillaume Fort appeared some twelve years later before Jacques Fournier in 1321, having relapsed into the same “errors.” He explains that he returned to his erroneous beliefs because of “the bad life of priests,” a clear indicator that the authority supposedly invested in Church offices meant little to him; demonstrations of personal piety were paramount in this epoch. Even more remarkably, though he admits that some of his “errors” were taught to him by the Perfect Guillaume Benet of Montailou, he asserts that he came to the conclusion that there is no resurrection of the body on his own account.³¹ This claim reveals that the average individual in the late Middle Ages was more inclined to theological and philosophical thought than might be assumed, a fact from which Catharism benefited. Certainly, the Cathars’ dualist cosmology provided a very straightforward solution to the problem of evil and suffering in the world. The key point to remember about these examples of anticlericalism is that the Languedoc, at least in theory, should have remained a fertile ground for heresy even as Catharism was disappearing, since the inquisition for all its

²⁹ Fournier, 108-109.

³⁰ Cohn, 38-39.

³¹ Fournier, 127.

devices could not eradicate *popular ideas*. If the waning of this heresy was not accompanied by a waning of anticlericalism, it raises the question of why Catharism was no longer able to draw on the sentiments that had given it such momentum in previous decades.

To be sure, much of Cathar rhetoric derived its force from scathing criticisms of the Church rather than its own theological affirmations. Since precious little survives from the Cathars themselves of their preaching, we are forced to rely on their polemical opponents for knowledge of their tenets. Considering that the Dominicans often debated publicly with heretics in the early thirteenth century, it is reasonable to consider the Dominican friar Moneta of Cremona's 1241 *Summa* a reliable source. According to this tract, the Cathars often used Scripture to employ syllogisms such as the following: "As we find in Matthew 7:17-18, a tree is known by its fruits. The fruit of the Roman Church is evil; therefore the Roman Church is evil... Since the fruit of the Roman faith is evil, its faith is evil."³² They pointed to the fact that there was nothing in the New Testament that resembled the contemporary Church at all, thus concluding that it was not "the Church of God."³³ They saw no merit in the baptism of infants not only because infants "lack faith and the ability to reason" but also because Scripture shows the Apostles giving religious instruction to new believers before administering the sacrament.³⁴ They readily used the Letter of James to object to the Catholic faith as being empty, citing the lack of good works on the part of its members. If the Church did any good thing, "its purpose [was] that the eyes of men may behold it."³⁵ The Cathars' own polemic seemed to have relied on starkly contrasting the Catholic Church with the Church of the New Testament:

³² Moneta of Cremona. "Monetae Cremonensis adversus Catharos et Valdenses libri quinque I (Descriptio fidei haereticorum)." in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, trans. and ed. Wakefield and Evans, (New York: Columbia University Press: 1969), 324-326.

³³ *Ibid.*, 324-325.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 326.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

The Church of Christ, threatened by persecution, was often hungry and thirsty, was naked and buffeted, and made weak; it worked with its hands, not seeking the wealth of others, gladly giving of its own to Christ's poor, so that there was no one in want in their midst... The Roman Church is not in this condition. For the Roman Church is rich in great possessions, in luxuries; it is garbed in purple and linen, and it has splendid feasts every day. It is untroubled and is established in this world, works not with its hands; but being itself wanton and idle, devours the labors of others.³⁶

Indeed the Cathar's arguments against the Catholic Church were many, and proof that a large part of their identity and attraction as a sect was initially derived from their total opposition to it. This suggests that if the Perfects or the sect as a whole were to begin displaying characteristics typically associated with the clergy—i.e. avarice, wealth, moral laxity—then the heresy would not longer be clearly demarcated from its opponent, and thus lose its popular support.

CHARISMA AND SPIRITUAL ELITISM

In casting themselves in opposition to the established Church, the Cathars exhibited another one of the hallmarks of charismatic authority, namely that by its very nature it is “not an ‘institutional’ and permanent structure, but rather, where its ‘pure’ type is at work, it is the very opposite of the institutionally permanent.”³⁷ The Cathars would hardly have attracted the following they did if they were so structurally similar to the Church that they opposed. Rather than any sort of institutionally invested authority, the Cathars only recognized the authority of Perfects who followed the early Christian model of the Acts of the Apostles, one of the most important texts of the New Testament for the Cathars. Though the Roman Church also claimed direct ancestry from the original Twelve, the ties were problematic for many laypersons on a practical level. Only Catholic bishops, not priests, technically had the same authority as the apostles, and bishops were far from living in imitation of their forebears. Popular religious

³⁶ Moneta of Cremona, 326.

³⁷ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 248.

sentiment called for a priesthood that imitated the apostles as well. Monks claimed to imitate the apostles by following their monastic rule, and the canons regular made similar claims on the basis of their own communal lifestyle. However, while portions of the Catholic clergy may have succeeded in divesting themselves of worldly cares, they were all found lacking on the accounts of itinerancy and the obligation to preach, two factors considered crucial to the apostolic life by the Cathars.³⁸

Because it was important for holy men and women to be *visibly* living the apostolic life, much emphasis was placed on external signs of piety. Hence it is not surprising that the Perfects seem to have lacked the intellectualism of Catholic theologians; there was no “test of faith” that one had to undergo to be “perfected,” because what really mattered was how one lived after receiving the *consolamentum*. Men and women became spiritual elites not through theological training but rather by agreeing to observe a life of almost supernatural self-discipline. While theoretically anyone willing could become a Perfect, few felt that they possessed the strength of character necessary to take on this burden.³⁹ Their strictures against having sex, eating meat, lying, swearing oaths, and accumulating material possessions had a long history in Christian spirituality and a strong evangelical base.⁴⁰ Wearing distinct dark robes and full beards, and often looking pale and haggard from their prolonged fasts, the Perfects were as visibly holy as any in medieval society; in the days before the Crusade, people would ask their blessing whenever they passed.⁴¹ For the average person, holiness was to be found in accessible figures such as these, with whom any man or woman could personally interact, rather than the institutional Church.⁴²

³⁸ Fichtenau, 123-124.

³⁹ Mark Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels: The Great Inquisition of 1245-1246* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 101.

⁴⁰ Little, 143.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Pegg, 97.

The reputation of the Perfects as spiritual elites is corroborated by the praise they are accorded by a handful of their polemical enemies, such as the Franciscan friar James Capelli. In a tract written exclusively to refute heretics, Capelli goes out of his way to dispel rumors of immorality among the Cathars, asserting that “they are wrongfully wounded in popular rumor by many malicious charges of blasphemy from those who say that they commit many shameful and horrid acts of which they are innocent.”⁴³ The nature of these rumors primarily concerned allegations of fornication and debauchery, since Good Men and Good Women sometimes lived in community. But Capelli further vindicates them, describing how “if any one of them, man or woman, happens to be fouled by fornication, if convicted by two or three witnesses, he forthwith either is ejected from their group or, if he repents, is reconsoled by the imposition of their hands, and a heavy penitential burden is placed upon him as amends for sin.”⁴⁴ Indeed, the meetings in question were held to hear preaching and make a confession of sins. He went on to say in a more general sense that “they suppose their behavior to be virtuous and they do many things that are in the nature of good works; in frequent prayer, in vigils, in sparsity of food and clothing, and – let me acknowledge the truth – in austerity of abstinence they surpass all other religious.”⁴⁵ The fact that one of the Cathar’s staunch opponents describes them in such terms offers strong evidence that the Perfects on the whole did live by their professed moral code, especially early on.

It is not surprising then that the chronicle of Guillaume Pelhisson, a Dominican inquisitor in the Languedoc, testifies to the strong support enjoyed by the Cathars among certain populations. In 1234, the known heretic Bernard del Soler filed a grievance to the city counsel of Toulouse against the Catholic Bernard Peytavi, with whom he had disputed (it does not say over

⁴³ James Capelli, “Summa contra haereticos,” in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, trans. and ed. Wakefield and Evans, (New York: Columbia University Press: 1969), Wakefield, 305-306.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 305-306.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 303-304.

what). When Bernard Peytavi was brought before the counsel, “he was overcome with words and threats by many believers of the heretics, who held then the consulate and the city in their power.”⁴⁶ The counsel condemned him to banishment for several years and ordered that he pay an indemnity to both Bernard del Soler and to the city for the offense. Even when Peytavi then pleaded his case in the bishop’s court with the backing of the Dominicans, his opponent came to court with “a very great number of bourgeois and nobles of the city, and lawyers, who all were for him and manifested loudly and with great cries against the other.”⁴⁷ In another instance around the same time, when one Dominican preacher claimed in a sermon that there were Perfects holding gatherings in the town, the city consuls ordered this Brother under threat to no longer preach thus, presumably in order to protect them.⁴⁸ Yet another time the Bishop of Albi visited a dying man named Guillaume Peyre of Brens to make arrangements for his funeral, but was told that he wanted to be taken to the “good men” instead. When the bishop rebuffed him, the sick man replied: “Do not trouble yourself about this; if all else fails I shall go crawling to them on all fours.”⁴⁹ Thus it seems that even those with ecclesiastical authority were largely helpless in combating heresy during the decades before the Crusade, “when any man was allowed to follow whatever sect he chose with impunity.”⁵⁰ Even though the Cathars never constituted a majority of the population, the devotion they inspired among a minority was more than enough to eclipse the fervency of Catholic supporters.

The elite status of the Perfects was not, however, merely based on their asceticism. According to their beliefs, the Perfects inherited their spiritual authority directly from Jesus Christ through the Apostles, and even held the same power as Christ since he was not actually

⁴⁶ Pelhissou, 51.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 51

⁴⁸ Ibid., 41, 43.

⁴⁹ Puylaurens, 14.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 13.

the Son of God, as in orthodox theology, but merely a spirit who volunteered to take on the burden of other spirits' disobedience. As Arnaud Sicre recounts, they believed that "the power of the Son of God passes by the hands of the Good Men to other Good Men. This power of the Son of God consists in that what the good men would do on the earth would be done in the heavens." Hence Guillaume Bélibaste, one of the last Perfects, "said that he himself had as great a power as this Son of God...and himself was Son of God of the same title as this Son of God that they call son of the holy Mary."⁵¹

The Perfects were invested with this divine authority through the sacrament of the *consolamentum*, a spiritual baptism which was conferred from one Perfect to another. This consolation, which absolved one completely of sin and ensured entrance to heaven, was typically reserved for believers on the verge of death, since just one sin (including eating meat or touching a woman) would nullify the whole sacrament. These heretications were often public events in the days before persecution became widespread. The knight Guillaume Tondut, for example, claims that around 1203 some fifty persons or more were present at the heretication of his mother in her house.⁵² The Dominican friar Bernard Gui gives an accurate account of the ritual in his 1324

Description of Heresies:

The heretic asks the individual who is to be received, if [the invalid] can speak, if he or she wishes to be come a good Christian man or woman and wishes to receive holy baptism. Upon receiving an affirmative answer, accompanied by the request, "Bless us," the heretic, with his hand over the head of the sick person (but not touching her if it be a woman) and holding the Book, repeats the Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word," as far as "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." At the conclusion of the reading, the invalid repeats the Lord's Prayer, if he can; if not, one of those present says it for him. Thereafter, the sick man, if able, bows his head over clasped hands and says three times, "Bless us," while all the others present adore the heretic in the fashion described above. On the spot, or in a place apart, the heretic makes many prostrations, obeisances, and

⁵¹ Fournier, 162.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 118.

genuflections to the ground, repeating the Lord's Prayer several times while bowing and rising.⁵³

Thereafter, the individual was held to be sinless and a vessel of the Holy Spirit. For those who were sick, it was desirable to die as soon as possible after receiving this sacrament, lest they have the opportunity to sin once more and fall back into the cycle of reincarnation. The Perfects, who received this sacrament while alive and well, took on the burden of their followers' sins (much like Christ) through their ascetic lifestyle, since true penance was only possible after having received the one true baptism. In this way, the Perfects did provide a theological justification for their status as spiritual role models.

For fear of dying unbaptized, believers entered into the *convenenza*, an agreement with the Perfects that they would be consoled at the end of their lives, even if no longer in control of their faculties.⁵⁴ The need to be near the Perfects so that they would be able to arrive in time for an emergency consolation fostered a strong sense of community among believers. We are told of Count Raymond VI of Toulouse that "up until today [sometime near the beginning of the thirteenth century] he has been accompanied by heretics in plain clothes in order to be under their care at the end of his life. For he believes that by means of the baptism of the Holy Spirit he... can be saved without any repentance."⁵⁵ Some decades later, Pierre Mauri shows this still to be the case, even at a time when most Perfects had become fugitives operating clandestinely or in exile. He exhorted his "friend" Arnaud Sicre to bring some fellow believers to live with them: "If you can find this Alazaïs and Bernard and bring them here, so that we are living together in proximity to the Good, I would be very glad of it. For there is no one who has had for a moment the understanding of the Good who is not desirous to live near the Good. We do not know in fact

⁵³ Bernard Gui, 383.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 382.

⁵⁵ Fichtenau, 91.

when we must die and one must endeavor to be near the Good to be able to have it when we are sick.”⁵⁶

Such communities allowed believers to partake in the holiness of the Perfects by means of more commonplace rituals, which were marked by a simplicity reminiscent of rituals in the early Church. The practice of adoring Good Men and Women and asking their blessing was formalized in a ritual known as the *melioramentum*, or amelioration, also described by Bernard Gui:

The believer bends the knee and, with hands clasped, bows low before the heretics over some bench or down to the ground. He bows three times, each time saying as he rises, ‘Bless us,’ and finally concluding, ‘Good Christians, give us God’s Blessing and yours. Pray the Lord for us that God may keep us from an evil death and bring us to a good end or into the hands of faithful Christians.’ The heretic replies: ‘From God and from us you have it (that is, the benediction); and may God bless you and save your soul from an evil death, and bring you to a good end.’ ...However, they say that the reverence described above is made not to themselves but to the Holy Spirit, who, they say, is in them and by Whom they have been received into the sect and order which they claim is theirs.⁵⁷

The ubiquity of this practice is well-evidenced in the depositions. The former Perfect Bernarde Targuier, then a widow, testified in 1243 how both men and women, noble and peasant in her town “were believers and friends of the Perfects,” coming often to adore them and hear their preaching.⁵⁸ Such spiritual communities also gave believers access to the preaching of the Perfects, another crucial mainstay for adherents of the sect. We see this in the words of Arnaud Sicre when he requested that Guillaume Bélibaste come more often to share his “good words” with him and two other believers at San Mateo, since “[they] must all stay together to mutually

⁵⁶ Fournier, 166. Arnaud Sicre was actually working for Jacques Fournier to apprehend the Perfect Guillaume Bélibaste, and thus feigned to be a believer in order to infiltrate their community. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

⁵⁷ Gui, 382.

⁵⁸ Bernard de Caux, *Cahiers de Bernard de Caux (1243-1247)*, trans. and ed. Jean Duvernoy, on Duvernoy’s website, <http://jean.duvernoy.free.fr>, 9.

revive in the Good.”⁵⁹ In short, believers experienced the divinity embodied in the Perfects through such practices as ritual adoration, the blessing of bread at meals, and hearing their sermons.

Hence we find in the inquisitorial registers that witnesses were constantly asked if they had ever “adored” the heretics, which was taken by the inquisitors to be an incriminating act. However, in many cases the act of adoration appeared to be little more than a reverential gesture and not a profession of faith, particularly before the crusade. The fact that many non-believers would show their respect to the Perfects indicates the extent to which the Perfects’ religious virtuosity influenced their position in society. For example, Pierre de l’Auque says that when he and several others were at a house rented to three Perfects by one Sicard Bou, the same Sicard gave him a hard slap when he was the only one of the group who did not adore these Perfects.⁶⁰ In the same vein, the knight Pierre Caudière maintains that in 1229 when he was among a group in a house with six Perfects, he performed the adoration out of “self-esteem vis-à-vis the others.”⁶¹ Thus the Perfects commanded respect not merely from their own supporters, but across religious boundaries as well.

Lest anyone doubt the importance of showing reverence to the Perfects, the Cathars taught that there was a strong correlation between the adoration of the heretics and salvation. Béatrice de Planissoles recounts these words of Pierre Clergue, the heretical parish priest of Montailou:

All the good Christians, those who adored them, believed in them, and were received by them in their sect, were saved. And he said that for this reason his mother Mengarde was saved, for she had done many good deeds to the good Christians, and Na Roqua and Raimond Roché her son, who had been a certain time imprisoned for the cause of heresy,

⁵⁹ Fournier, 182-183.

⁶⁰ de Caux, 125.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

drew all their subsistence from her house. His mother did well to these two persons because they had been heretics and believers.⁶²

This should hardly be surprising however, since it was through such daily interactions with and gestures toward the heretics that believers came to enter the *convenenza* and secure their salvation when the time of their death came. Indeed, as Pierre Clergue also explained to Béatrice de Planissoles, “you could not be strengthened in their faith if you did not see or hear them.”⁶³ Seeing consoled heretics—i.e. being physically in their presence—certainly was spiritually significant in the lives of believers. Emersende Mauri, for example, boasted of having seen more than twenty heretics in her time.⁶⁴ The inquisitors were acutely aware of this as well, as they routinely asked those testifying if they had ever “seen” heretics. It was also an important event for believers when Perfects came to their towns and villages. Pons Grimoard of Castelsarrasin, seneschal of the Count of Toulouse in the diocese of Cahors, tells how his friend Pierre de Belfort woke him up in the middle of the night to come see two Perfects whom he was lodging and had presumably just arrived.⁶⁵

At the same time, the fact that Cathar practice required believers to be in the direct presence of the Perfects made it rather difficult for the heretics to sustain belief amongst their followers, let alone attract new ones, once they were forced into hiding. Moreover, when it became difficult for believers to see their saintly leaders in the flesh, this was cause for great concern since their salvation was potentially at stake. Thus Emersende expressed her fear that Guillaume Bélibaste’s might be too afraid to visit her on her deathbed on account of her daughter, a staunch anti-Cathar who threatened to put an axe in Guillaume Bélibaste’s head

⁶² Fournier, 61.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 208.

⁶⁵ de Caux, 57.

should he ever enter their house again.⁶⁶ This, of course, would prevent her from receiving the Cathar baptism, condemning her soul to yet another reincarnation.

The Perfects place in society was not merely limited to religious rituals and preaching either. Because spiritual matters were so closely connected with the regular customs of Languedocian society, the Perfects had other important social roles, arbitrating disputes and arranging marriages, for example. The knight Guillaume Tondut recalls how in 1231 a dispute he had with his sister-in-law (which he does not detail) was settled by calling the Perfect Aymar de Roquemaure to make a composition between them and before a witness.⁶⁷ At about the same time, the knight Raimond Unaud, Lord of Lanta, tells that a group of Perfects made peace and accord between his father and him, and all present adored these Perfects afterwards.⁶⁸ Some eighty years or so later, when Arnaud Sicre was speaking to Pierre Mauri about the dowry arrangements for the marriage between his sister Raimonde Sicre and the latter's brother Arnaud Mauri, Pierre advised that they wait for Guillaume Bélibaste to return before coming to a final agreement, since the Perfect was "worth more" and "had more intelligence."⁶⁹ When the marriage agreement was finally arranged—a dowry of no more than forty *livres* in addition to clothing and a mule on which it would be carried—Arnaud Mauri "swore an oath on it between the hands of the heretic, for, said Pierre Mauri, the oath made between the hands of monseigneur [Bélibaste] had more value than if it were made on the Gospels."⁷⁰ It thus seems that the Perfects commanded respect even in non-religious aspects of life by virtue of their mystical aura as holy men and women.

⁶⁶ Fournier, 208, 210.

⁶⁷ de Caux, 119.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁶⁹ Fournier, 183.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 222.

Certainly, the willingness of many heretics to accept martyrdom contributed greatly to this aura that already surrounded them as ascetics. Ideologically speaking, this was an accepted part of Catharism, as believers were warned “of the need to bear all misfortune with constancy and steadfastness for the preservation of his faith and doctrine,” and exhorted to “disdain all adversity.”⁷¹ The believer Raimond Roussel of Montailou was likely expressing a widely-held belief when he said that “the good Christians do not feel the fire, for the fire with which we burn them cannot do harm.”⁷² Simply put, “when the good Christians are burned for their faith, they are martyrs of Christ.”⁷³ The Cathars were even able to use the fact of their persecution as proof of their piety: “They say that they occupy the place of the apostles and that it is because of the foregoing facts that the members of the Roman Church, to wit, the prelates, the secular and regular clergy, and especially to the inquisitors of the heretics, persecute them and call them heretics, just as the Pharisees persecuted Christ and His apostles, although they are really good men and good Christians.”⁷⁴ Their opponents also praised the “patience, even serenity” with which they embraced burning at the stake, and after Bernard of Clairvaux returned frustrated from his 1147 mission to the Languedoc he noted, “they would rather die than convert.”⁷⁵ We see this mentality in full action in 1244 at the fall of Montségur, the last Cathar stronghold to capitulate, where approximately two hundred Perfects were confined in an enclosure and burned alive after refusing to accept conversion.⁷⁶ This kind of zeal for the faith was certainly not limited to the Perfects either. Guillaume Pelhisson recounts how one Jean le Tisserand, already imprisoned by the Inquisition of Toulouse, was consoled in prison by two Perfects and then

⁷¹ Capelli, 303.

⁷² Fournier, 53, 62.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Gui, 383.

⁷⁵ Fichtenau, 83.

⁷⁶ Puylaurens, 108.

begged to follow them to the stake to be burned, which he, of course, was allowed to do.⁷⁷ Thus the Perfects, by virtue of their religious ardor and austerity, took on a heroic status that made them worthy of devotion and adoration.

Indeed, the case of Raymond de Sainte-Foy, who was burned at Pamiers in 1320 for refusing to recant his Waldensian beliefs, strongly attests to the lasting impressions left by martyred heretics. One Bérenger Escoulan of Foix recounts how the execution was the talk of the tavern where he had lunch in Pamiers, having gone there to see the execution: “They said that when they burned him, when the bonds which held him were consumed, he joined his hands toward the sky and commended his soul to God. Hearing that, I said that this could not be a heretic, who had thus invoked God and holy Mary, and continued by the Creed. That if he had commended his soul to God, God would welcome it and take care of it, meaning by that that his soul would be saved.”⁷⁸ From the town of Ornolac, the bailiff Guillaume Autatz describes his discussion about the same execution with his fellow townspeople as they were assembled in the square after Sunday mass:

I arose and said to them: ‘I am going to tell you this affair: this man that they burned was a good cleric, and there was not a better one in this area, except the bishop of Pamiers, with whom he disputed often, and he was right against him. He believed in God, the holy Mary, all the saints, the seven articles of faith. This was a perfect Christian, and of this fact it was a great injustice to have him burned.’ The people asked me then why he had been condemned, if he was such a good Christian and good cleric, and I answered: ‘Because he was saying that the sovereign Pontiff cannot absolve and he was denying Purgatory.’⁷⁹

This event is discussed by several others interrogated by the same inquisition. These anecdotes demonstrate how individual displays of piety and devotion to one’s beliefs could greatly

⁷⁷ Pelhisson, 51, 53, 55, 57.

⁷⁸ Fournier, 31.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 32.

influence popular perceptions, simultaneously attributing divine favor to heretics and arousing anger towards their clerical persecutors.

Some believers were even willing to forsake their families, including young children, in order to follow the apostolic model encouraged by the sect. In the early fourteenth century, the servant Raimond Roussel, in his attempts to convince the noblewoman Béatrice de Planissoles to elope with him, tells the story of another noblewoman's struggle to leave her infant behind:

Raimond told me that one of these two women, at the time of leaving her house of Châteauverdun, had a child in the cradle, and she wanted to see him before leaving. She embraced him, the child smiled, and as she began to move away a little from the place where he was bedded, she came back again towards him; the child began to laugh, and this game began again of such a sort that she could not leave him. At last she ordered her nanny to take away the child, which she did. And so she left. And Raimond told me this so as to incite me to do the same!⁸⁰

This anecdote shows that Catharism, or more specifically the Perfects' example, did have a sufficient spiritual draw to incite believers to leave behind their ordinary lives for the *vita apostolica*. Indeed, the two women referred to above, Alesta and Serena of Châteauverdun, were later arrested at Toulouse when their refusal to kill a chicken for supper betrayed their heretical beliefs; after refusing to recant, they were burned at the stake. Examples such as these illustrate that Catharism flourished where it did because of its strong religious appeal, not merely as some broader sociological phenomenon of dissent.

In addition, while visible indicators of holiness may have been most important in maintaining the loyalty of their adherents, the dualist cosmology of the Cathars likely appealed to many as well. The problem of evil in the world had long been a point of contention in Christian theology, and while Catholic intellectuals may have felt that the issue had been sufficiently addressed, for the common person in the Middle Ages this question was as pressing

⁸⁰ Fournier, 53.

as ever in light of the uncertain existence they faced. Certainly, when Guillaume Bélibaste said to his followers, “Look at all the evils which are in this world, the storms, the hail, it is not God the Father who made them, but the prince of this world, the enemy of God the Father,”⁸¹ this must have seemed a most plausible explanation to those accustomed to dealing with the hardships of medieval life. And it was this simplification of doctrine, that the world was simply evil, that likely held such a great appeal for many believers; it was something that could be easily understood, providing a commonsensical explanation for the realities of everyday existence.⁸² Indeed, even Count Raymond VI of Toulouse is cited as saying, “It goes to show that the devil created the world, for nothing works out the way I want.”⁸³ Yet Catharism was in this sense unprecedented in Western Christendom because of its total rejection of the visible world as evil went beyond the tradition of Christian asceticism. As likely an explanation as it may have been for some, the task of simultaneously shunning the world and living in it created tensions between the sect’s ideology and practice. It was these tensions that would eventually undermine the charisma of the Perfects as the difficulties of this paradox became apparent.

⁸¹ Fournier, 175.

⁸² Fichtenau, 102.

⁸³ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 248.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PROBLEM OF COMMUNAL WEALTH

This chapter examines how the Cathars, despite their vows of individual poverty, amassed considerable wealth as a community through both benefactors and their own industriousness—a wealth that undermined their image as apostolic holy men. This disparity between their purported poverty and their actual level of economic comfort subverted the charismatic authority of Perfects. This problem is explored in the greater context of medieval attitudes toward wealth and poverty, specifically in comparison to the monastic and mendicant orders which experienced similar losses in popularity due to their accumulation of corporate wealth. Historians have long acknowledged that the Cathars enjoyed a certain degree of prosperity, yet never has this observation been discussed at length as part of the greater dilemma of private versus corporate ownership that afflicted many ascetic movements in the Middle Ages.¹ Nor has this materialism been situated in the context of the sect's decline as it has for the decline of certain orthodox orders.

Antimaterialist attitudes were not new in Christianity, and for centuries monasticism had been regarded as “the surest road to Heaven” because of the monks' renunciation of world, and by association, material wealth.² Yet while monks renounced private possessions and thus remained individually poor, they did not renounce corporate possession. Their accumulation of wealth, much of it landed, allowed them—or perhaps even obliged them—to live like the nobility or gentry. And as we have already seen in this age of heightened spirituality, devotional movements reacted against this manifest wealth. As early as the tenth century, Benedictine monasteries had come to be recognized as worldly institutions that enjoyed considerable secular

¹ See Jean Duvernoy, *Le catharisme: l'histoire des cathares* (Toulouse: Privat, 1979), 245-252.

² Diana Wood, *Medieval Economic Thought*, (Cambridge: University Press, 2002), 26.

patronage and substantial landholdings. The monastery of Cluny, founded in 909, reacted in protest against the worldliness and complacency of monasticism, placing itself solely until papal jurisdiction and modifying the original Benedictine Rule to be even stricter. Numerous other monasteries attached themselves to Cluny, creating a network of monastic reform across Europe. Yet by the twelfth century, the Cluniac monks likewise began to suffer for their renown, enjoying considerable popularity and countless gifts, so that a new wave of reform was in order. This banner was taken up by the Carthusian and Cistercian orders. The Carthusians were successful in restoring and maintaining monastic discipline, but as they were “too ascetic” for the average Christian they never achieved the influence of other monastic movements. On the other hand, the Cistercians, known for their stark abbeys and equally stark lifestyle, gained enormous momentum as reformers, thanks largely to the charismatic leadership of Bernard of Clairvaux. They too, however, could not escape involvement in temporal affairs and their withdrawal from the world proved short-lived.³ Thus the monastic movements that had originally benefited from reactions against materialism became scorned for the same reason, as new movements attempted to recreate the apostolic life.

The mendicant orders attempted to address the problems apparent among the regular orders by renouncing all property, both individually and corporately, and by ministering among the urban poor rather than withdrawing from society. This, however, had its own problems, especially for the Franciscans. Owning nothing worked well enough when Francis of Assisi had but a handful of followers, yet when his following expanded and developed into a worldwide missionary order, it was quite impractical. His own vague statements on poverty raised questions about whether ownership could be separated from use, what exactly was meant by renunciation,

³ C. Warren Hollister and Judith M. Bennett, *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 197-202.

and the actual nature of Christ and the Apostles' poverty. A temporary solution was reached when Cardinal-Protector Ugolino (later Gregory IX) drew up the Second Rule for the order, in which a "spiritual friend" served as a financial intermediary, providing the friars with clothes and other necessities. Later Innocent IV vested ownership of Franciscan property in the papacy but allowed the brethren to retain its use. However, these compromises only led to conflicts within the group, including the splintering of the Spiritual Franciscans, whom John XII condemned as heretical in the 1320s.⁴ It soon became apparent that the order was hardly poor at all, and the friars could no longer be considered beggars in light of their considerable financial backing. Their popularity among a spiritually-minded laity suffered much like that of the monks before them. Thus the history of monasticism and mendicancy in the Middle Ages can be seen as a repeating cycle of piety and popularity, worldly complacency, and reform.

Unlike the Franciscans or even their heretical counterparts the Waldensians, the Cathar Perfects, though voluntarily poor, were never mendicants. They supported their pastoral mission by their own work instead. Thus the Waldensian precept of poverty stands in marked contrast to that of the Cathars, as described by the martyr Raymond de Sainte-Foy: "He who makes a vow of poverty must have nothing, neither his own nor in common, nor must live from the work of his hands, for the Lord said: 'Do not worry about drink, about food, or about work, but see the lilies of the fields, which grow without working nor amassing in granaries' [Mt 6:28-31]."⁵ On the other hand, we see something of the Cathar work ethic in the words of Pierre Mauri, when he says of the clergy: "And their great houses, do you believe that they built them by the work of their hands? No, whereas our lords [the Perfects] live by their work."⁶ In addition, the Cathars

⁴ Wood, 28-29.

⁵ Jacques Fournier, *Inquisition à Pamiers : Interrogatoires de Jacques Fournier, 1318-1325*, trans. and ed. Jean Duvernoy (Toulouse : Edouard Privat, 1966), 27-28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

equated work with engaging in manual labor, whereas the Waldensians channeled their energies almost exclusively into the “work” of preaching.⁷ Hence the Cathars were never withdrawn from the world in the same way as hermits or mendicants, and were in fact obligated engage in worldly activities by their own economic philosophy.

Thus while Cathar doctrine may have effectively called for the renunciation of the visible world, the reality of Cathar practice was otherwise. The first-hand accounts from the inquisitorial records indicate that the sect was very much involved in secular affairs, relying extensively on the patronage of the aristocracy and thriving off a system of informal social obligations. Though they worked in various trades (particularly textiles) as best their itinerant lifestyles would allow, the Perfects were still largely dependent on the goodwill of their believers and sympathizers for their livelihood. They were guided from village to village, sheltered in peoples’ homes, and given gifts that included everything from simple foods to entire tracts of land—all for little more than their preaching, the performance of a sacrament, or a mere blessing. In this informal economy, the deathbed bequests of hereticated believers were crucial for the sustainment of the sect. Though this was never described overtly as an exchange of spiritual goods for material goods, the Cathars essentially offered salvation through the sacrament of the *consolamentum*—again, the *only* means of salvation—in exchange for donations of money, land, or any number of smaller gifts.

This “spiritual economy” of the Cathars was thus predicated upon the same fundamental principles of the spiritual-material exchange that sustained orthodox monastic and mendicant orders. The charity of their supporters was linked with notions of reciprocity and gift exchange, creating a mutually binding relationship between rich and poor—a symbiotic relationship that

⁷ Lutz Kaelber, *Schools of Asceticism: Ideology and Organization in Medieval Religious Communities* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 145.

was a constant feature in late medieval society.⁸ Almsgiving and other good deeds assumed a society of unequals, yet pious benefactors expected something in return for their benevolence, usually in the form of prayers for their salvation. Hence, this type of mutual obligation between spiritual leader and believer was not unique to the Cathars, as parish priests often received gifts in exchange for performing the burial rites of Catholics. Yet whereas parish priests and monks had the support of the Church's highly bureaucratic infrastructure, the Perfects had to earn and maintain the respect of local populations to support themselves. This respect was predicated on their ability to persuade individuals that it was necessary to receive the *consolamentum* at death. The Perfects achieved this less through theological argument than through the example of their personal piety. Thus, the Cathar economy can be said to have had charismatic foundations, depending on the Perfects' religious virtuosity for its viability. This would prove especially problematic as the Cathars amassed corporate wealth to a significant degree, much like the regular and mendicant orders of the Catholic Church that they thrived on maligning.

The modern sociologist Ilana Friedrich Silber has analyzed the phenomenon by which a voluntary "network of material and symbolic exchange" between religious virtuosos and other social sectors—especially between monks and the laity—results in the massive influx of wealth to monasteries. This system was all the more remarkable because it allowed a self-marginalized religious elite that eschewed most aspects of social life to sustain a "position of cultural prestige and corporate wealth... devoid of the ordinary paraphernalia of political control and power."⁹ Silber notes that such material contributions, though crucial to the viability of the institution over the long-term, could also contribute to the corruption of monastic discipline.¹⁰ Furthermore,

⁸ Wood, 42-43.

⁹ Ilana Friedrich Silber, *Virtuosity, charisma, and social order: A comparative sociological study of monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

because the gift exchange was so conditional, “it was automatically undermined by changes that affected the laity’s interest in entering or maintaining the relationship.”¹¹ This latter characteristic can be said to have had major implications for Catharism in the face of the inquisition. Most importantly for this thesis, Silber identifies the precariousness of the monastic institution due to what he labels as its “alternative structure,” defined as an intermingling of structural and antistructural elements. Like any institution, monasticism has to meet a number of common organizational challenges, namely the maintenance of discipline and commitment, recruitment, material needs, management of property, interaction with the outside world, and self-perpetuation. Yet these are made all the more difficult due to monasticism’s self-defining withdrawal from the world. Its virtuoso dimension is a double-edged sword that is simultaneously the source of the institution’s power and organization over the laity as well as its own corruption and decline. Because of the ascetic limits on consumption and the collective management of labor and property, monasteries tended very strongly to accumulate wealth, which in turn threatened the basic vocation of poverty and asceticism.¹² It can be said then that all movements of voluntary poverty, being similarly predicated on their demarcation between a group of religious virtuosos and the common believer, faced the same perennial quandaries as the monastic institution. The Cathar spiritual economy can therefore be said to have been intrinsically precarious as well.

One of the most fundamental aspects of the Cathars’ spiritual economy was the Perfects’ need for shelter. Regardless of their social status before being “perfected,” Good Men and Women relied on the hospitality of individual households to carry out their pastoral duties, which depended heavily on their being physically present for their believers. We have already seen how

¹¹ Silber, 206.

¹² *Ibid.*, 41-42.

the Perfects maintained their charismatic authority through such rituals as the blessing of bread at meals, the blessing of believers who “adored” them, as well as through their preaching.

Accordingly, the registers are filled with examples of individuals housing Perfects, if not in their homes then on their land. The knight Bernard d’Orsas reports how, just after the conclusion of the Albigensian Crusade (c. 1230), one family of Lissac kept their mother and her companions, all Good Women, permanently in their house; around the same time Raimond de Canté did the same for his grandmother and her companions, also heretics.¹³ Maffré de Paulhac, a knight, recounts how the Perfects Pons Gilabert and his companion (they typically traveled in pairs) rented the house of Guinhe de Villemur.¹⁴ Other arrangements were of a more transitory nature: Péronne de la Claustre and her husband Pons housed two Perfects whom they did not even know that had been brought there by two knights.¹⁵ Often the Perfects were not even kept in households, but in adjunct buildings. Arnaud Hélié, another knight, recounts how he heard the preaching of and adored two Perfects near his cowshed.¹⁶ His friend Guillaume Garsias, a knight of Fanjeaux, even housed Perfects in his stable for a half-night and half-day without his knowledge.¹⁷ Whether in a home or a granary, a lean-to or a thicket, the basic function of the Perfects’ presence was the same: believers and supporters came from throughout the surrounding area to pay their respects and build the relationships that resulted in their heretication at death. One Pierre de Noye admits to having housed Perfects twice during the year of 1232, for periods of one and three weeks respectively, during which time he “saw there coming to them all the believers, who adored them several times.”¹⁸

¹³ Bernard de Caux, *Cahiers de Bernard de Caux (1243-1247)*, trans. and ed. Jean Duvernoy, on Duvernoy’s website. <http://jean.duvernoy.free.fr>, 133.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

To safely conduct the Perfects from place to place, their supporters furnished them with guides and escorts, a measure of safety that predates any organized persecution. The nobleman Raimond Unaud, Lord of Lanta, relates in his confession how in 1231 one Guillaume de Taissonières sent a messenger to bring him Good Men for his sick mother. Upon hearing this, Raimond Unaud spoke to his acquaintance Bec de Roqueville, who handed over to him two anonymous Perfects. Raimond and the squire Raimond Azéma of Lanta led these Perfects to the house of the sick woman, where they spent the night (though they did not hereticate her, because of a watchful priest) before being led back to Raimond's *hôtel*. Raimond confesses to having adored these heretics when greeting and leaving them—kneeling before them and asking their blessing—and giving them food to eat.¹⁹ Other cases were even more urgent. In a separate account, Raimond Unaud came to the aid of his squire, Guillaume de Garnès, who had been arrested in Toulouse. After receiving a message that this Guillaume wanted to be hereticated before he was hanged, Raimond brought two Perfects to him at the forks outside the Château Narbonnais, where he was in fact consoled. Raimond and his squire then returned these Perfects on the backs of their own horses.²⁰ Accounts such as these hint at a rather extensive network of guides and safe-houses, in which certain trusted individuals could be counted on to know the whereabouts of certain Perfects at a given time.

As for material transactions, most gifts consisted of small quantities of food and money. For most believers, small quantities of perishable items were apparently sufficient demonstrations of goodwill toward the Perfects.²¹ Perfects were sometimes identified by their involvement in such exchanges. For example, the noblewoman Madame Finas, wife of Isarn, Lord of Tauriac, was about to give ordinary food to Pons Touelle, whom she did not recognize as

¹⁹ de Caux, 145.

²⁰ Ibid., 146.

²¹ Roach, 63-64.

a Perfect, before sending him off with an escort to the home of her friend Guillemette Faure: when he requested bread and onions only, according to the strictures of the Perfects' diet, she realized his status, and honored his request accordingly.²² Guiraud Galhart claims to have brought the Perfect Bernard de Lamothe and his companion fruits as a gift on behalf of his acquaintance Jean de Cavalsaut.²³ Other such gestures seem to have been made on a regular basis, as in the case of the knight Guillaume Tondit, who along with his brother Bernard-Pons, supplied their mother, a Good Woman, with three cartons of wheat, a half-carton of nuts and ten *sous* on an annual basis.²⁴ This system of gift exchange lasted as long as the sect. Even in the early fourteenth century, Pierre Mauri took it as a matter of pride that for the last several years he had given the Perfects the best garments he had that would not make do for him, boasting that he had dressed thirteen "Churches" (as he was wont to call the Perfects), whom he said were praying for whom accordingly.²⁵ As this example indicates, the Perfects typically gave little in recompense for the hospitality they received, save their prayers, blessing, or sermons; it seems that their very presence was payment enough in most cases.²⁶

While such everyday interactions were enough to provide for the Perfects' most basic needs, they frequently received larger gifts, particularly in the form of deathbed bequests, which were largely responsible for their corporate wealth. While the Catholic clergy also benefited from such large gifts, the chronicler Guillaume de Puylaurens asserts that the heretics "benefited from such legacies more than the men of the Church."²⁷ The *convenenza*, the agreement that a person would be "consoled" on their deathbeds, was as much an economic as a spiritual

²² de Caux, 109.

²³ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁵ Fournier, 177-178.

²⁶ Andrew Roach, "The Cathar Economy," in *Reading Medieval Studies, Vol. XII* (Reading: University of Reading, 1986), 63.

²⁷ Guillaume de Puylaurens, *The Chronicle of William of Puylaurens*, trans. W.A. Sibly and M.D. Sibly (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 9.

agreement, since the baptism of the Holy Spirit was given in exchange for the transfer or promise of property. Accordingly, the Cathars before the Crusade are described as flourishing “to the extent that they had their homes in the towns and fortified places, established farms and vineyards, and procured large houses in which they openly preached heresies to their believers.”²⁸ Yet even after persecution began, bequeathals were a regular expectation of what it meant to be a Cathar believer. The knight Pierre Caudière describes the logistics of such transactions:

My brother Montespieu was hereticated at his death, as thus my father Caudière told me. And [the knight] Braconac seized as collateral our smallholding at Caunas, against my brother and me, for the two hundred *sous melgoriens* that my said brother had bequeathed to the Perfects at his death. And this Braconac took then in three years twenty-four *setiers*²⁹ of wheat from this smallholding that he paid to the Perfects.³⁰

In brief, these deathbed bequests were the means by which the Cathars in southern France acquired the vast majority of their wealth.³¹ The money gathered from deathbed bequests was partially justified by the cost of their travels and the maintenance of their network of safe-houses.³² But on the whole it seems that the resulting communal wealth created tensions with their professed vows of poverty in much the same way as with the monastic and mendicant orders of the Church.

The external pressures of the inquisitions understandably deterred gift giving. The days of Perfects residing publicly in their houses disappeared with the coming of the crusaders. But the extent to which persecution alone dismantled their economy is questionable. First, many of the confessions describe the hosting and guiding of heretics in the period of inquisition after the

²⁸ Puylaurens, 9.

²⁹ A *setier* is an old unit of measure for grain, equal to approximately 150 liters. Thus 24 *setiers* is a significant amount of wheat.

³⁰ de Caux, 131.

³¹ Roach, 53-54.

³² *Ibid.*, 55.

Crusade. Guillaume Faure of Pech-Hermier, for example, admits in 1243 to having housed the Perfect Serny for eight days and delivered him from imprisonment—all after he had already been made to appear before a previous inquisition.³³ He also admits to having helped conduct two Perfects in their travels after his first deposition, though ultimately he did not know “from where they came nor where they were going.”³⁴ This detail, that one of their more ardent supporters was not privy to the details of their whereabouts or itineraries, indicates that the Perfects were at least somewhat successful in operating clandestinely. Indeed, we have already seen cases where their supporters did not know that Perfects were in their presence or conducted them anonymously from place to place. The squire Raimond Azéma, in corroborating Raimond Unaud’s story of their helping to hereticate the condemned squire Guillaume de Garnès outside the Château Narbonnais, adds the remarkable detail that “all the crowd which was there saw all this [ritual], but they did not know that there were Perfects there.”³⁵ In other words, the *consolamentum* was performed in public before numerous witnesses without it being discovered. Considering that some of their supporters claimed they did not even know the adoration ritual of the *melioramentum*, as Odon de Barèges avowed,³⁶ it makes perfect sense that the average individual in the Languedoc would not be able to recognize a heretication before his/her very eyes. If the Perfects were this successful at secrecy then, they may not have been as easily targeted as one might assume, suggesting that other factors contributed to their decline in support.

Furthermore, even after several decades of the inquisition executing, imprisoning, and seizing the goods of the Cathars and their supporters, the sect’s remaining adherents still

³³ de Caux, 17.

³⁴ Ibid., 21.

³⁵ Ibid., 151.

³⁶ Ibid., 113.

associated them with collective wealth. Arnaud Sicre describes his conversation with Pierre Mauri after explaining to him that he was poor on account of his mother, whose assets had been seized after her conviction:

[Pierre Mauri] told me that one must not worry about poverty as long as we follow their good and holy way, for, he said, there is not a malady which they cure faster. He himself had been ruined three times, and however he was richer than he had ever been. He had been ruined a first time in the valley of Arques when Raimond Maulen and many others of the same locality went to confess to the Pope. 'I had then the value of one thousand *sous*, and I lost everything; then I lost the fraternal part³⁷ that I had at Montailou, and I did not dare go there to reclaim it. Then I took a job as a shepherd with Barthélémy Morrel of Ax, then with Raimond Barri of Puigcerda. I left them with three hundred *sous* that I lent to a companion in the region of Urgel, who thereafter refused to return them to me, denying to have received them. And nevertheless I am now well off, for among us it is a habit and it is the precept of God that if you only have one obole,³⁸ you must share it with your brothers in need.'³⁹

The story of Pierre Mauri illustrates that in the (relatively) well-developed economy of the Languedoc, one might recuperate from financial ruin, especially within the corporately wealthy ranks of the Cathars. The rapid accumulation of wealth was likely aided by the rather fluid nature of the region's economic infrastructure, as evidenced by the ease with which individuals could translocate and take up new work. Arnaud Sicre, for example, was able to work as a cobbler for a few months in different towns as he worked to infiltrate the network of believers to apprehend Guillaume Bélibaste.⁴⁰ Nor was this wealth engendered strictly by the industry of believers: Perfects were known to handle money as well, and not just in trivial amounts. For example, when the noblewoman madame Stéphanie was arrested and lost nearly all her assets, the Perfect

³⁷ The part of the heritage owed him by his elder brother, who became the head of the family upon the death of their father.

³⁸ A silver-alloy coin worth 1/24 of a *sol*, or one half *denier*.

³⁹ Fournier, 167-168.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

Prades Tavernier lent her some one hundred silver *tournois*, which he later asked her to return by way of messenger.⁴¹

In addition, large sums of money are mentioned among Cathar believers around the same time, in the early fourteenth century. Bernard Clergue admits to having spent some fourteen thousand *sous* in just one year on various noblemen and officials in his attempt to have his brother Pierre released from prison—a sum that few could afford at the time.⁴² Pierre Mauri also narrates the story of a Perfect he once knew who possessed what he calls “the treasure of the heretics,” which he valued at some sixteen thousand pieces of gold or more. This Perfect, however, had to entrust his wealth to a nephew who then he fled the Toulousain region and was never heard from again.⁴³ Moreover, the spiritual economy of gifts and donations, including deathbed bequests, seems to have been relatively intact as late as 1320, when what remained of the sect had been relegated to mountainous regions near the border of Catalonia. For example, Arnaud Sicre reported to Guillaume Bélibaste after going on several errands in the Sabartès that he brought back two silver *tournois* from a man at Lavelanet, and a woman from Villeneuve-d’Olmes had a bequest (presumably from a deceased relative) of twenty *sous* ready for delivery, though she could not give it to Arnaud without Guillaume’s permission.⁴⁴ Thus, inquisitorial attempts to dismantle the Cathars’ network of support through the appropriation of their assets were not in themselves enough to undermine their pastoral mission, suggesting that other factors had to be involved. The sect’s dwindling popularity by this time may not have resulted exclusively from the inquisition’s work, but been caused by the antimaterialistic attitudes that beleaguered the monastic and mendicant orders.

⁴¹ Fournier, 86.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

One clue to this may rest in the fact that the Cathars' communal wealth did not go unnoticed by their critics. As early as 1184, Durand of Huesca, a converted Waldensian, noted the disparity between the Cathars' engagement in the "earthly matters of trade" and their amassment of wealth and the life of the apostles in the New Testament, where such commercial practices are notably absent.⁴⁵ Guillaume de Puylaurens' account of the 1211 siege and capture of Lavaur during the Albigensian Crusade supports this notion: "There was a considerable crowd of robed heretics [i.e. Perfects] inside Lavaur, not only those who normally lived there, but also a great number who had come there from distant parts, in the hope that many persons might be wounded there and succumb—these they would then adopt into their sect, and thus secure possession of their goods."⁴⁶ The Dominican polemicist Rainerius Sacconi also characterizes the Perfects as being greedy:

They do little or no almsgiving, none to outsiders, except to avoid scandal among their neighbors and to be held in esteem by them, and little to their own needy. The reason for this is threefold. The first is that they do not thereby expect greater glory in the hereafter or forgiveness of their sins. The second is that almost all of them are very avaricious and grasping. This is why the poor among them, who in time of persecution do not have the necessities of life or anything with which to repay those who harbor them for goods or houses destroyed on their account, can hardly find anyone who is then willing to receive them; but wealthy Cathars can find many. Wherefore every one of them accumulates wealth if he can and saves it.⁴⁷

While one must be cautious with the comments of such polemical opponents, the inquisitorial depositions thus far mentioned corroborate the view that Perfects were in fact quite interested in material gain.

⁴⁵ Heinrich Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars in the High Middle Ages: 1000-1200*, trans. Denise A. Kaiser (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 99.

⁴⁶ Puylaurens, 38.

⁴⁷ Rainerius Sacconi. "Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno," in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, trans. and ed. Wakefield and Evans, (New York: Columbia University Press: 1969), 334.

The Cathar spiritual economy was just one response to the problem that confronted many popular religious movements of the Middle Ages—how to reconcile the spiritual benefits of voluntary poverty with the economic necessities dictated by their pastoral mission. For the Cathars, unlike the orthodox clerics, there was no inherent contradiction between material benefits and spiritual profits, between a life of austerity and commerce.⁴⁸ The Cathars seem to have justified this apparent contradiction to their theology, much like Catholic monasteries and the Church itself, by differentiating in theory between individual and communal wealth. Individual Perfects remained poor while their communities were permitted to accept and administer contributions.⁴⁹ They were required by their roles as bishops or the heads of convents, for example, to manage financial matters.⁵⁰ And while such economic involvement may seem contradictory for ascetics devoted to a life of poverty, it is important to remember that these obligations were not incumbent upon their believers, who could be rich landowners, merchants, or even bankers and thus provide the sect a vital link to commercial trade.⁵¹

Yet in the eyes of popular opinion, the gap between the Cathars' discourse on poverty and their economic success may have been too noticeable for even the most charismatic preachers to overcome. Indeed, as long as the Cathars existed in the Languedoc, they maintained the same rhetoric concerning personal poverty. In the early fourteenth century, Guillemette Mauri explains to Arnaud Sicre the rigor of the Perfects' asceticism at great length: "if they found a purse full of gold or money they would not touch one obole of it...but they would say: '*Deniers*, God return you...to whom you belong,' and they would do that however poor they be." She goes on to observe that however hungry or thirsty they were, the Perfects would not take a

⁴⁸ Jean-Louis Biget, "Hérésie, politique et société en Languedoc (vers 1120-vers 1320)," in *Le Pays cathare*, ed. Jacques Berlioz (Manchecourt : Maury-Eurolivres, 2000), 69.

⁴⁹ Fichtenau, 99.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

piece of fruit from a tree that they did not know belonged to one of their friends, and even then would offer to reimburse them.⁵² Furthermore, she describes this self-denial in explicit contrast to not only the bishops and priests, but also the mendicant orders. Certainly, anticlerical rhetoric also retained its importance within the sect. In the late 1290s, Raimond Roussel, the servant of Béatrice de Planissoles, argued that “just as it is impossible for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, it is impossible that those who have wealth be saved. This is why the kings and the princes, the prelates and the religious, and all those who have wealth cannot be saved, but only the good Christians.”⁵³ Yet considering the corporate wealth of the Cathars and the Perfects involvement in it, it is reasonable to believe that much of Languedocian society came to hold similar opinions to those expressed by the Cathars’ polemical opponents. This is all the more plausible considering popular opinion of the monastic and mendicant orders regarding their similar amassment of wealth.

Furthermore, financial matters were the source of internal tensions among the Cathars. For example, Esperte, the widow of Bernard Servel of Tarascon (a former fugitive) recounts how one na Condors, sister of Guillaume’s mistress Raimonde, once lent a poor heretic twenty *sous*, but when she demanded them back he merely told her, without giving a precise date, “that he would pay her when he could and when God wanted... which greatly irritated this Condors.”⁵⁴ Instances such as this of resentment over debts and other financial obligations likely placed increasing strains on the internal relations within the sect as the decades wore on.

Thus, the Cathars’ accrual of wealth may have precipitated the decline of the sect in two ways: first, by blurring the distinction between themselves and the orthodox clergy in popular perception, making them subject to the same antimaterialist attitudes that were directed at

⁵² Fournier, 163.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

Catholic orders, and second by directing personal concerns away from the religious matters that were the essence of the sect, creating tensions not only among members but more importantly between doctrine and practice. Because they did not enjoy the institutional backing of a highly developed bureaucratic infrastructure, it was crucial for the Cathars to find a suitable compromise to the perennial quandary by which renunciation within ascetic communities leads to the accumulation of corporate wealth. Yet, as the sources clearly demonstrate, the Cathars lapsed into the same practices that resulted in the unpopularity of other orders before them, making it highly likely that this phenomenon resulted in their own loss of grassroots support. Finally, concern with materialistic matters proved distracting for the Perfects, and may be viewed as a source of corruption that undermined their charismatic authority as religious virtuosos.

CHAPTER THREE: ANOMIE AND THE CRISIS OF AUTHENTICITY

This chapter examines how the Cathars' reputation was also damaged by the lack of disciplinary guidance among the believers and a decline in ascetic rigor among the Perfects. This chapter explores how the sect's total rejection of the visible world and failure to provide governing norms for its believers unwittingly discouraged potential converts and encouraged defection among followers, making it virtually impossible for the sect to resist inquisitorial pressures. As shown by the Manichaeans of St. Augustine's time, it is crucial in hierarchical sects with a simple two-level structure that the believers are required to emulate their spiritual leaders in some way. In the absence of such moral exhortation, the double-standard creates a rift that over the long term becomes untenable since common believers are as crucial to the well-being of the community as the elites. Weber's definition of anomie is used as a heuristic device to explore the effects of this doctrinal amorality. Finally, this chapter demonstrates how the lower moral character of later Perfects, in terms of their own self-imposed asceticism, resulted in a crisis of authenticity among believers, as these Cathars failed to prove themselves on charismatic grounds.

DISCIPLINE AND ANOMIE

For charismatic authority such as that of the Perfects to have lasting effects, it is also essential that it be translated into discipline, which Weber defines as "the consistently rationalized, methodically trained and exact execution of the received order, in which all personal criticism is unconditionally suspended and the actor is unswervingly and exclusively set

for carrying out the command.”¹ Such conduct under orders is always uniform as well.

Charismatic leaders must make use of discipline, as a code of conduct to which subjects submit themselves in obedience, if such leaders hope to expand their sphere of domination.² Thus, if we take Weber’s theory to be valid, it would have been necessary for the Perfects to hold their supporters to some sort of moral standard in order to sustain themselves within medieval society. But of course the Cathars, though they may have exhorted believers to lead moral lives, could not on the basis of their doctrine make any real demands for discipline on the part of their adherents and sympathizers, on whom their very existence relied. This proved a severe handicap for the full routinization of the heresy. Unbaptized believers remained outside the gift of salvation, thus living free of the imposed code of conduct that makes bureaucratic authority enduring.

The effect of this lack of discipline on the followers of Catharism can be understood in terms of the sociological theory of anomie. Although anomie is usually discussed in relation to the theories of Emile Durkheim and Robert Merton, Weber also developed a more limited version of this concept.³ Weber used the term to indicate the complete absence of ultimate guiding values—a state of existence for which there is no historical case study. But in his analysis of religious movements, Weber identified two ideal-types that had high anomic potential: (1) inner-worldly asceticism, defined as a mastery of the world in relation to the inner self (as opposed to the outer-worldly version of monasticism), identifiable in early Calvinism, and (2) outer-worldly mysticism, defined as a devaluation and rejection of the outside world,

¹ Max Weber, “The Meaning of Discipline,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 253-254.

² *Ibid.*, 253-254.

³ Durkheim described anomie as a state where values are diminished or absent, leading to feelings of alienation, purposelessness, and even suicide. Robert Merton used anomie to develop Strain Theory, defining it as a discrepancy between common social goals and the legitimate means to attain them due to a limiting social structure.

identifiable in Buddhist monks.⁴ Catharism (and Gnostic religions in general) can be seen as a rare blend of the two, as it demanded that the Perfects deny themselves to maintain their inner purity without asking them to withdraw from the world, while at the same time rejecting the world altogether on the grounds of their special knowledge of God. The high anomic potential of Catharism thus becomes clear: the Cathars rejected the norms of the world in which they lived (the creation of the devil) in favor of a divine norm, reserved only to those who had been fully initiated, based on their privileged gnosis of God's plan for salvation. Thus Catharism can be said to have fostered anomie, especially among its believers, exhorting them to reject the institutional norms that had hitherto governed their lives without fully providing an alternative set of norms. This lack of guiding values likely alienated believers over the long-term, especially considering the heightened spirituality of the age, by making their lives seem in large part purposeless until the moment of their death, when the *consolamentum* would suddenly lend it meaning.

We can see the problems inherent in Cathar disciplinary rationale when we compare it to Manichaean doctrine in the fourth century and even earlier. The Manichaeans also were dualists, and maintained a similar division between a sacerdotal class of "elect" and much more numerous lay class of "auditors."⁵ This division into a strictly regimented, select group and a less restricted support class has obvious parallels with Catharism. Yet in Manichaeism, it was widely recognized that "neither pole of the community could obtain salvation without the assistance of the other."⁶ The importance of the Elect for salvation was obvious since they are the only means of it for the Auditors; yet the Elect could not have survived on a daily basis or sustained their

⁴ Marco Orrù, "Weber on Anomie," *Sociological Forum* 4, 2 (June 1989): 264-266.

⁵ Jason David BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body: In Discipline and Ritual*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

sect without them, making the Auditors the “refuge of the Church.”⁷ Membership in the Manichaean community meant some degree of conformity to its norms—the Three Seals, the Five Commandments of the Elect, and the Ten Commandments of the Auditors—and obedience to a disciplinary code.⁸ Auditors were held in generic terms to the Three Seals (of the mouth, of the hand, and of the breast) in that they were expected to participate in fasting, almsgiving, and prayer, giving them a disciplinary common ground with the Elect.⁹ Despite polemical depictions of Manichaean Auditors as depraved hedonists, the religion’s own norms show that the Auditors were expected to partially emulate the rigorous asceticism of the Elect, including weekly fasting, daily prayers and alms.¹⁰ In addition to requiring a fairly generic morality and a moderate emulation of the Elect’s regimen, the Manichaean community constrained the Auditors to view their deviance from higher norms and to demonstrate public remorse for it; in Manichaean confessional texts, Auditors learned and performed narratives of their identity that emphasized the gap between their daily actions and those of a saved soul.¹¹

Such a disciplinary code for all members of the sectarian community is conspicuously absent from Catharism. Indeed, there was inherent tension in the sect due to its doctrine that believers would receive the same salvation as the Perfects, although they were not expected to—and sometimes discouraged from—exerting any real individual effort. Their salvation lay with the Perfects, whom they were expected to support. In one of his sermons, Guillaume Béliaste applied the parable of the landowner who hired workers for his vineyards [Mt 20] to mean that those who “have the understanding of the Good” would have the same recompense as he and the

⁷ BeDuhn, 65.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 56-58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

other Perfects “who for so long have fasted and had bad nights.”¹² Accordingly, believers were taught that they could swear oaths and lie so long as they were in the way of falsehood (i.e. unconsolated), because it did not matter whether they swore on the Gospels or a leaf. Perfects, because they were in the way of truth, were of course not allowed to swear or to perjure themselves.¹³ Also in contrast to the Manichaeans, Cathar believers were actually discouraged from praying. Mere believers were forbidden from saying the Our Father, because as they were not in “the way of truth,” they were said to sin mortally for addressing God the Father while still eating meat and sleeping with women.¹⁴ (At the same time, Pierre Mauri did tell Arnaud Sicre that he should conserve it in his memory so that if he was asked by a confessor to say it, he would be able.)¹⁵ Such tenets appear to have been standard to Cathar belief.

Cathar theology provided a logical basis for this lack of a disciplinary code beyond just the doctrine concerning the *consolamentum*. The Mosaic Law was of little or no importance to the Cathars. In fact, it was often eschewed, because the God of the Old Testament was in fact the evil one that had created the visible world.¹⁶ More importantly, there is no threat of eternal punishment. The Cathars did not believe that souls could be eternally condemned to hell, because their souls were already living in it and thus were already condemned; there could be no second condemnation.¹⁷ Rather, all souls would either receive salvation or remain trapped in their corporeal prisons, depending on whether or not they accepted the teachings of the sect.¹⁸ We see

¹² Jacques Fournier, *Inquisition à Pamiers : Interrogatoires de Jacques Fournier, 1318-1325*, trans. and ed. Jean Duvernoy (Toulouse : Edouard Privat, 1966), 170.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 195-196.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁶ Heinrich Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars in the High Middle Ages: 1000-1200*, trans. Denise A. Kaiser (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 81; “Brevis summula contra herrores notatos hereticorum,” in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, trans. and ed. Wakefield and Evans, (New York: Columbia University Press: 1969), 355.

¹⁷ “Brevis summula,” 356.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 355-356.

Guillaume Bélibaste preaching that the souls of the wicked do not go to hell after their death since “there was not a hell other than this visible world in which the spirits go from body to body...doing penance.” He went on to add that “the world will only end when all the spirits created by the holy Father will have been incorporated in the bodies of men or women of our faith, in which they will be saved and will return to the heavenly Father.”¹⁹ In theory then, the worst a Cathar had to fear was reincarnation rather than the eternal suffering that always loomed as a threat in orthodoxy.

Because religion was so crucial to the moral norms of Western Christendom, the fear of punishment for one’s sins was crucial to order in medieval society. However, Cathar theology explicitly placed both Perfects and believers alike outside of this paradigm. Thus we discern among the Cathar believers a paradox between their simultaneous reverence of the Perfects for their moral rigor and their own personal disregard for the conventions of acceptable behavior in medieval Christendom—a paradox with anomic consequences. We see this tension explicitly in Arnaud de Bèdeillac’s confession about Guillaume Bayard, the wealthy official from Tarascon. He relates how Guillaume Bayard would praise the heretics with great respect since they “practiced many abstinences, for they did not eat meat, fasted frequently, did not lie, did not sleep with women, did not kill any animal, and if one did them wrong, pardoned immediately.”²⁰ At the same time, Guillaume admitted to sleeping with the sisters Gaude and Blanque de Montels (among others), saying that he would only worry if he was sleeping with someone of his own blood. Arnaud de Bèdeillac remarks that “this Guillaume Bayard did not fear the sin, whatever he did or said, for he did not fight against the sin of the flesh with women, whether they were

¹⁹ Fournier, 175.

²⁰ Ibid., 88-91.

married or not.”²¹ And his flouting of moral proprieties was not limited to extramarital relations. Arnaud claims to have heard from “many people” that as a lawyer, Guillaume accepted fees from both parties involved in cases, as between Pierre and Guillaume Calvet.²² When his own daughter’s new marriage proved to be displeasing to his wife Lorda (it is not said why), he arranged to have it dissolved by suborning a number of witnesses to testify that she had previously been married to a squire, a case which he won. Arnaud de Bédeillac had been named by Guillaume as a witness, and when he refused to testify under oath about this imaginary marriage, Guillaume tried to convince him that perjury was not a great sin since it could be absolved by buying an indulgence of only one *tournois*. Arnaud still refused, saying “as I was already low-esteemed because of poverty, if they knew in Sabartès that I was a perjurer, I would be even less popular. I feared equally the sin.”²³ This last statement is remarkable not simply because Arnaud claims to have feared the sin (as one might think to do before a bishop-inquisitor), but because it indicates that actions deemed sinful were in fact—not just in theory—condemned by the general populace. That is, one could not act in the way that Guillaume Bayard did and expect public opinion to turn a blind eye. Thus, the aberrant behavior of such individuals likely undermined the credibility of the sect as a whole.

Guillaume Bayard was hardly the only individual associated with heresy to have used its doctrines to suit his own agenda. When Raimond Roussel, a Cathar believer and servant of Béatrice de Planissoles, attempted to convince her to leave her family behind and elope with him to Lombardy, he used religious rationalizations such as the following: “the Lord said that a man should leave father, mother, wife, husband, son and daughter and follow him, and that He would give him the Kingdom of Heaven. And as the present life is brief, and the Kingdom of Heaven

²¹ Fournier, 88-91.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

eternal, man had not to worry about the present life.”²⁴ Yet it was not long before he revealed his actual intentions, sneaking into her room at night while she slept and attempting to make love to her.

More notorious was Pierre Clergue, the parish priest of Montailou, who belonged to a rich and powerful family (his brother Bernard had been bailiff of the Count) and had been led by his official duties to make himself the supplier of the inquisitor of Carcassonne.²⁵ Pierre Clergue had quite a reputation as a friend of the heretics. He was known in the town of Ax for having regularly slept with one Alissende, the wife of Pierre Roussely, and her sister Gaillarde, the wife of Pierre Bent. He was also said to have frequented the baths of this town, having many other women come sleep with him in the town hospital at night.²⁶ This was not, however, simply a matter of irresistible charm; Pierre Clergue used the threat of the inquisition as leverage to get what he wanted. Thus Raymond Vayssière of Ax notes: “To what I believe, there are no women in Ax, or few, that cannot have this rector when he is there, by fear of the Inquisition of Carcassonne.”²⁷ Pierre Clergue was equally adept at satisfying his lust for money. For example, he took a payment of one hundred silver *tournois* from Guillaume Mondon of Ax in order to have this Guillaume’s yellow crosses removed.²⁸

Pierre Clergue’s advances on Béatrice de Planissoles are a case in point. When she initially rebuffed him, for example, saying “I would like better to give myself to four men than to one priest, for I have heard it said that a woman who has been known carnally by a priest cannot

²⁴ Fournier, 51

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 135, editor’s note.

²⁶ Medieval hospitals were generally religious communities maintained by monks and nuns. They often performed other duties in addition or in place of caring for the sick, including providing refuge for pilgrims or the poor.

²⁷ Fournier, 135-136.

²⁸ *Ibid.* It was a common penance for those guilty of lesser involvement with heresy to wear large yellow crosses on their outer garments, one in the front and one on their back.

see the face of God,”²⁹ Pierre Clergue appealed to Cathar doctrine to show Béatrice that she was “foolish and ignorant” for having such a concern: “The sin is the same for a woman to be known by her husband or by all other men, the same still whether it is man, husband or priest. It was even a greater sin with a husband, he said, because the spouse believed not to sin with a husband, but was conscious of it with other men. The sin was thus greater in the first case.”³⁰ Pierre Clergue even went on to explain that incest was not forbidden either, since brothers had sex with their sisters at the beginning of humanity; incest was only forbidden by the Church to prevent violence among brothers competing for the best-looking sister. This is classic Cathar argumentation, reasoning that since the human body (and all else in the world) is the creation not of God but of the Devil, any sort of carnal relations are, therefore, a sin. Nor was it the exclusive province of Pierre Clergue, as Isarn, Lord of Tauriac heard it said by believers over half a century before.³¹ This sort of antinomian reasoning is essentially summed up by the later assertion of Pierre Clergue “that man or woman could freely commit any sort of sin when they lived in this world, and act entirely according to their good pleasure. It sufficed at his death to be received into the sect or the faith of the good Christians in order to be saved and absolved of all the sins committed in this life.”³²

It is reasonable to assume that this deviant behavior—encapsulated in the maxim “since everything is forbidden, nothing is”—undermined the credibility of Catharism as the only true form of Christianity, and the most pious. Certainly, Pierre Clergue’s conduct was well-known, as has already been shown, and it was not well received among the majority of the population. For example, Raimonde Guillou once heard her husband Arnaud Vital talking to Bernard Belot

²⁹ Fournier, 55.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Bernard de Caux, *Cahiers de Bernard de Caux (1243-1247)*, trans. and ed. Jean Duvernoy, on Duvernoy’s website, <http://jean.duvernoy.free.fr>, 101.

³² Fournier, 56-57.

upstairs in their home about how one Mengarde Maurs had her tongue cut out (a penalty for false testimony) because she had accused Pierre Clergue of heresy: “See what did the traitor, he cut out the tongue of Mengarde, and yet she was of good faith and religion, she is a good woman, one of the best of this town, and of good belief.”³³ The machinations of his brother Bernard, who had much influence over who was imprisoned in the dungeons of Carcassonne and for how long, could easily take up another several pages as well. It is entirely plausible that, though the majority of believers lived in accordance with accepted moral norms, the corruption of a few disreputable individuals did much to damage overall esteem for the sect.

Their behavior could not be condemned on the sect’s own doctrinal grounds. While the Catholic sacrament of penance can be said to promote a similar attitude of indulging in sin now with the assurance of forgiveness later, orthodox doctrine at least emphasized the importance of good works, and taught that contrition was only genuine if it involved a sincere effort to avoid sin in the future. Even Waldensianism developed a salvation economy similar to that of Catholicism, in which Waldensian believers would confess to itinerant confessors. The Waldensians believed their sacrament was more valid because their confessors were demonstrably holy, living lives of strict poverty and renunciation, whereas the questionable morality of the Catholic clergy invalidated their sacraments.³⁴ Thus even other heresies placed importance on the conduct of their members. Catharism stood apart because its double standard gave non-baptized adherents a moral freedom that made it difficult to sustain the sect over the long term. Though this seemed to pose few problems during Catharism’s heyday (i.e. before it was systematically persecuted), the lack of disciplinary expectations may have been precisely what made persecution so effective. Because they did not have to satisfy a rigorous code of

³³ Fournier, 142.

³⁴ Lutz Kaelber, *Schools of Asceticism: Ideology and Organization in Medieval Religious Communities* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 155.

conduct, but only the expectations of the spiritual economy, the Perfects' supporters had little reason to risk their own well-being for that of the sect. After all, martyrdom could only be rewarding for those who had already been Perfected; for the common believer, even the ultimate sacrifice would not be enough to achieve salvation. It is not surprising then that we find less than zealous attitudes toward martyrdom among believers, as when the noblewoman Béatrice de Planissoles said of two executed heretics that "they would have done better to abandon the heresy than to let themselves burn."³⁵ In this way, Catharism failed to provide believers with the type of alternative moral structure that was crucial to the sustainment of a sect in medieval society—and crucial to preventing anomie from occurring.

Hence, over the long term the Cathars were unable to foster the kind of allegiance and obedience that make routinized institutions enduring. For example, Arnaud Sicre was enticed by the prospect of monetary gain to betray the sect for which his own mother had eagerly accepted martyrdom. Arnaud Sicre received handsome compensation from the inquisition for successfully delivering Guillaume Bélibaste into their hands, a task for which he was permitted to feign being a Cathar believer.³⁶ Arnaud explains that he came to the inquisition after discussing with his brother Pierre how they might recover the house of their mother Sibille den Balle, which had been seized by the count of Foix after her conviction. When Pierre answered that "he saw no other way of recovering this house than to take a heretic and deliver him to the power of a lord," also noting that a price of fifty *livres tournois* had been placed on the Mauris, Raimond Issaura of Larnat, and many others in the diocese of Pamiers. Thus Arnaud concluded "if I was able to discover a robed heretic, I could recover all the goods that I had lost by the fault of our

³⁵ Fournier, 53.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

mother.”³⁷ Perhaps had Catharism offered a more rigorous discipline, or any whatsoever, for believers, the inquisition would not have been able to benefit from self-interest to the same extent and could have been more effectively resisted.

Furthermore, Cathar soteriology proved spiritually unfulfilling for many believers, which may partially explain why earthly gains could prove more alluring than spiritual ones. In his 1244 confession, Pierre de Noye, after having been a believer for six years, explicitly states his reason for leaving the sect: “I abandoned their faith because I heard them say that we might believe them as much as we wanted, if we could not have them about at our end, we were damned.”³⁸ The significance of this statement cannot be overemphasized, especially since it comes from one of the earlier inquisitions, when the sect’s hold was still rather strong. First, it shows that however logical the dualist explanation of the problem of evil may have been, the double standard of Cathar discipline did not always inspire peace of mind for believers in terms of their own salvation. Second, it suggests that doctrinal coherence, and not just the visible piety of ascetic behavior, was of great importance to those seeking personal spiritual fulfillment. More importantly, Pierre de Noye’s confession suggests that the insignificance attributed to his own actions may have proved unsatisfying, especially in the pre-Reformation religious landscape where good works were taken as evidence of good faith. He seems to have felt that his vicarious experience of the holy (to which all believers were relegated) did little for his own personal salvation. In the religious environment of the late Middle Ages, this lack of moral consequence may have been alienating, pushing believers towards a state of anomie. By way of extension, if Pierre de Noye found such teachings alienating and/or unfulfilling, it is logical to presume that other believers may have lost their enthusiasm for the sect for similar reasons.

³⁷ Fournier, 157.

³⁸ de Caux, 45.

Indeed, certain believers recognized the need for conducting themselves in ways that at least loosely resembled those of their spiritual leaders, despite being explicitly told that such measures were worthless among the unperfected. For example, while Arnaud Sicre was working for a time as a cobbler, Pierre Mauri bought from him a pair of good, solid shoes. He soon returned to Arnaud and asked him to make another pair, explaining that he had given the first to Guillaume Bélibaste. When asked why he would give such a sturdy pair to a man who did not work out in the fields, Pierre explained to Arnaud that “one had to give for his soul, which is the most noble part of man, and which will last eternally, the best of what one has, and make in this century solid foundations for it. But for the body, which will soon be destroyed, one must take what there is that is most vile, and this is why he had given these good shoes to the heretic.”³⁹ Quite separately, Jean Mauri is said to have observed many of the practices of the Perfects—“which consist in prayer, preaching, and the fact of eating nothing that they have not earned, because Son of God said that man must live by his toil”—explaining that he did so because “he had as much need of being saved as the heretic.”⁴⁰ Thus it seems that believers intuitively recognized the anomic potential of Catharism, and thus had to actively seek out behavioral norms for themselves in order to give ethical significance to their daily lives.

FAILINGS ON THE PROVING GROUNDS

Because of their own doctrinal rigidity, there was little room for error among the Perfects’ if they were to maintain their status among and authority over their believers. This is because charisma “does not know any ‘legitimacy’ other than that flowing from personal

³⁹ Fournier, 177-178.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 220.

strength, that is, one which is constantly being proved.”⁴¹ In other words, the Perfects consistently had to demonstrate the kind of holiness they professed to live, and any deviation from the strictures of their ascetic existence had the potential to delegitimize their status as religious virtuosos for their believers. Though the Perfects’ strict observance of apostolic ideals is generally accepted, the records indicate that the discipline practiced by the Perfects was declining—and the sect along with it—by the end of the thirteenth century. The decline in moral rigor among the Perfects likely compounded the corruption already evident among believers, essentially eroding the underlying foundations that had allowed Catharism to rise to prominence in the first place.

Besides having to prove the validity of their charisma, the Cathars had their own equally important reasons for adhering strictly to their ascetic ideals. Because the authority of the Perfects was derived not from the authority of office as in the Catholic Church but from the piety of the individual, serious consequences resulted should a Perfect be known to have fallen into sin. This created what the former heresiarch turned Dominican inquisitor Rainerius Sacconi called “a notable uncertainty among them” in his 1250 *Summa*:

All Cathars labor under very great doubt and danger of soul. To specify, if their prelate, especially their bishop, may secretly have committed some mortal sin—and many such persons have been found among them in the past—all those upon whom he has imposed his hand have been misled and perish if they die in that state. In order to avoid this peril all the churches of the Cathars, excepting only or two, have allowed the *consolamentum* for the second, or even for the third time... These facts are a matter of common report among them.⁴²

⁴¹ Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 248.

⁴² Rainerius Sacconi. “Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno,” in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, trans. and ed. Wakefield and Evans, (New York: Columbia University Press: 1969), 336. Italics added.

In other words, the Cathars had the same problems concerning invalid ordinations that the Catholic Church had during the eleventh century.⁴³ Even as early as 1180, when one Cathar bishop in Lombardy was caught with a woman the ensuing scandal divided the Cathars of northern Italy into six dioceses and two doctrinal branches.⁴⁴ As for the Perfects themselves, they had routine penitential ceremonies for the absolution of minor sins; grave transgressions were expiated by means of public penance, severe fasts, and/or the loss of seniority and authority, as well as the necessity of a new baptism of the Holy Spirit. Thus Cathar doctrine seems to have left both Perfects and believers alike in doubt about the validity of their sacraments, adding to the instability of their place within society.⁴⁵ Additionally, this probably increased believers' scrutiny of the behavior of the Perfects, on whom they placed all their hopes for salvation.

Guillaume Bélibaste offers a case study. He was known to be of less-than-savory character before he became a Perfect. He had initially entered the Cathar orders either in penitence or to find asylum as an outlaw after having killed a shepherd in the course of a brawl.⁴⁶ He was also known to have seduced Raimonde, the woman with whom he lived while a Perfect, during their exile in Spain. Guillaume Bélibaste was reconsoled by his fellow Perfect Raimond of Castelnau, but fell quickly back into his old habits. What is more, when he got Raimonde pregnant, he married her off to Pierre Mauri (who was no dupe as his testimony indicates), since as a Perfect he was able to perform a simple marriage ritual in lieu of a more public Catholic ceremony.⁴⁷ This behavior was a blatant affront to Cathar doctrine on several grounds. First, there is Guillaume's obvious breaching of his vows to not touch any woman—a sin which

⁴³ Heinrich Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars in the High Middle Ages: 1000-1200*, trans. Denise A. Kaiser (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 90.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴⁶ Fournier, 155-156, editor's note.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

rendered all his sacraments and rituals useless according to their belief. Second, Guillaume was essentially depriving Raimonde of the opportunity to receive eternal salvation, at least for the nine months she was with child, as the Perfects taught that a pregnant woman could not be saved because of the unconsolated soul contained in her womb.⁴⁸ Finally, the fact that Perfects would even perform marriages indicates their increasing laxity in doctrine, since according to their own beliefs marriage was a mortal sin that, through procreation, simply perpetuated the misery and suffering of this world. In the ideal world of the Perfects, no one would marry or have children so that the salvation of all souls would come about sooner. Most Cathar believers did marry, however; in late thirteenth century Montailou it was even considered normal and desirable to marry so as to perpetuate Cathar households.⁴⁹

Bélibaste's severe lapses in ascetic rigor did not go unnoticed. Arnaud Sicre was quick to question how Guillaume Bélibaste could keep a woman in his house and yet refrain from touching women altogether, as was purported. Guillemette Mauri answered that the Perfects were better able to avoid suspicion by doing so, since it gave the appearance of their being married. She asserted, however, that "although they live with a woman under the same roof, they never touch them," and that if by chance they did, they would not eat or drink for three days and nights. Guillemette alleged that they slept in two beds "very far from one another."⁵⁰ When the demands of travel required that they pass for spouses by sleeping in the same bed, they dressed in such a way so as their flesh could never touch.⁵¹ How much Guillemette believed her own words and how much cohabitation was common practice for Perfects is difficult to ascertain, but

⁴⁸ de Caux, 91.

⁴⁹ Linda M. Paterson, *The World of the Troubadours: Medieval Occitan society, c. 1100-c. 1300*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 336.

⁵⁰ Fournier, 169.

⁵¹ Ibid.

we do know that this account simply did not match the reality—a fact of which Arnaud Sicre seemed to be aware.

For all his praising of poverty, Guillaume Bélibaste also showed himself to be just as interested in material gain as the Catholic clergy he lambasts. Indeed, Arnaud Sicre, after having more or less earned his trust over the course of a few months, lured Guillaume Bélibaste into the hands of the inquisition by telling him that his aunt, who was very rich but could not travel because of her age and her gout, much desired to see him.⁵² He told Guillaume that his aunt had given him money to pay for his travels (though in reality this money came from Jacques Fournier), and offered to conduct him to her home by horse.⁵³ To further earn his trust, Arnaud offered to pay for a feast on the Nativity with Guillaume Bélibaste and the others at the request of his “aunt,” who had just received payment for a debt of ten *livres* in gold *agnels*.⁵⁴ Lest there have been any doubt in the mind of the heretic about his aunt’s wealth, Arnaud showed him and Pierre Mauri one of these gold *agnels*, adding that he had nine others from her. He then told Guillaume that “if he wanted this *agnel*, or even the others, that he take them, because this was the desire of my aunt, who had told me to pass Christmas with him, without letting him spend anything, but to cover the expenses with this money.”⁵⁵ This offer was too much for Guillaume to resist, and he accepted, saying, “That this be for the love of God; that God save our friends...”⁵⁶ In short, this Perfect seems to have been just as interested in money as the next person, despite his vow of individual poverty.

⁵² Fournier, 213.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 215. The *agnel* was a gold coin instituted by King Louis IX in the thirteenth century, and thus represents the growing influence of the French monarchy in the Languedoc.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

In more general terms, the Perfects had a reputation for equivocating in their speech as well. Because of the absolute prohibition against lying among consoled individuals, the Perfects took great precautions with their words, often qualifying statements with phrases like “one could say” or “if God wants it.”⁵⁷ It was a common trick of the Perfects to answer questions from the clergy and inquisitors in such a fashion, as Bernard Gui’s inquisitorial manual shows that he was well aware. For example, Guillaume Béliaste tells the story of how a priest had come to administer the sacraments to his companion Raimond as he lay ill. When the priest asked him if he believed that the consecrated host was the body of Christ, he answered that he believed as a good Christian ought to believe, meaning by this that he believed concerning the host as the “good Christians” (i.e. the heretics) believed.⁵⁸ The peasant Jean Jouffre mentions a sword-carrying Perfect, who would draw his weapon when assailed and say “If you approach, you will die!”, meaning that the aggressor would die some day, not by his sword (the Perfects were forbidden from shedding the blood of any living creature).⁵⁹ The same Jean also recounts how when the Perfect Guillaume Autier was walking with his companions along the Ariège River, he took a stone in hand and issued the challenge to one of his companions that he could not throw that stone to the water, betting the companion’s portion of the fish pie they were carrying for lunch. As soon as the bet was made, Guillaume Autier tossed the stone into the water, thereby winning the bet since his companion could no longer throw *that* particular stone.⁶⁰ Jean Jouffre’s testimony suggests that he, and presumably others, were rather unimpressed by such prevarications on the part of the Perfects.

⁵⁷ Fournier, 99. editor’s note.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

Believers and nonbelievers alike were certainly conscious of the character of the Perfects with whom they associated. Pierre Mauri complained how Guillaume Bélibaste was less learned than one of his previous companions, then deceased, but that this other Perfect was a “delicate man” who “did not know how to earn his bread by any activity whatsoever.”⁶¹ Jeanne, the niece of Guillemette Mauri, was keenly aware of the Perfects’ shortcomings in proving their God-given authority, challenging Guillaume Bélibaste on one occasion: “You give yourself as the Son of God and as God! And where are your miracles?”⁶² Though a matter of conjecture, this simple utterance may well reveal popular sentiments toward the Perfects. By this time, Cathar believers were relatively small in number and forced to operate in secret, as many now feared their own ruin (economic or worse) if they were caught out by the inquisition. However, it is important to remember that the risk of ruin may have been worth it, as it is for the martyrs of any sect, if the Perfects had maintained their charisma (and a believable promise of eternal salvation) by way of their pious example. Certainly the Catholic clergy were not considered spiritual role models by the average layperson, leaving room for spiritual virtuoso to fill this niche in society. But as soon as the Perfects’ behavior proved to be less than divine, or even as base as that of the secular clergy, believers were left with little reason to choose the riskier side in this conflict.

We also see jealousy between Perfects, as when the Perfect Raimond Fabre of Razès returned to the home of his hostess Esperte, the widow of Bernard Servel of Tarascon, expecting to enjoy a fish pâté she had made, only to find that another Perfect had come that day and eaten it. Raimond said, “he would well have preferred that it was she who ate it, rather than the other heretic,” since as Esperte said, there was sometimes “jealousy and rancor” among them.⁶³ The records say nothing about the causes of this “jealousy and rancor,” but what matters most is that

⁶¹ Fournier, 204.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 212.

such internal enmity seems to have existed—and could ill be afforded in a sect struggling to maintain its very existence. It seems that the pressures of the inquisition would have not been nearly so effective had the Cathars not suffered from their own infighting.

On the whole, it seems that Catharism was unable to sustain a promise of eternal salvation convincing enough to engender loyalty and obedience within the sect. Indeed, Guillaume Béliaste goes so far as to say that “all the tribulation of our Church comes from these false believers.”⁶⁴ Even as early as 1234, Perfects were known to defect from their sect—among them Raimond Gros, Sicard de Lunel, Guilhelm del Soler, Pierre Gausbert, and the Brother Bernardin to name a few—each providing testimony that proved catastrophic for virtually everyone who had been involved with them.⁶⁵ One believer, Guillaume Peyre, upon being released from a long sentence in the dungeons of Carcassonne, went among various believers he knew, asking for a loan to pay the debt of forty *sous* he had amassed while in prison. When he found no willing helpers, he returned to the inquisitors and confessed everything he knew. Pretending to still be a believer, he then lured the Perfect Jacques Autier into the hands of the authorities by telling him of a supposed sick woman in Limoux who needed to be hereticated.⁶⁶ Such self-interest is hardly shocking, but it was particularly damaging for a sect whose allure lied in the promise of exclusive salvation and whose members professed to share well among themselves. Furthermore, the fact that defection and treachery were not uncommon phenomena may indicate that the reality of Catharism continued to drift further away from its apostolic idealism.

⁶⁴ Fournier, 192.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 201, editor’s note.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

The Cathars had ways of attempting to deal with duplicity within their ranks, and violent measures became common. As Pierre Mauri describes a process for dealing with “bad believers” and persecutors:

[The Perfect] gathers the believers, in which he has confidence, in the greatest number possible and says to them: ‘There is a false believer among you (by naming him who persecutes the Church of God), let us see what you others will know to do.’ Right away, whether he is present or not, some of these believers decide among them which of those present will act, and in what manner, and thereafter they kill the false believer, if they can. Then they report it back to the heretic. In doing this they believe not to sin.⁶⁷

As a case in point, Guillaume Bélibaste and the Mauri family, for fear of being denounced, plotted on diverse occasions how they could eliminate their fellow believer Mersende’s troublesome daughter Jeanne. Guillaume Bélibaste justified this measure saying that “the bad grass must be uprooted from the field, and that if some bad brambles pushed to the door of the house, one had to cut it and burn it” [Heb 6:8], meaning that it was permissible to eliminate those who might betray the true “Church of God.”⁶⁸ Pierre Mauri proposed that he and Arnaud Sicre kill her “together”; he would speak to her, since she had confidence in him, and Arnaud would sneak up behind and pierce her with a lance. Arnaud was understandably averse to this idea, turning to Guillaume Bélibaste and saying, “And you, why don’t you do it?” Pierre Mauri defended his lord, arguing that the Perfect could not kill any living creature while in the way of truth, whereas he and Arnaud could do it since they were “still in sin.” Not only that, Guillaume Bélibaste claimed that he would be able to take on the burden of this sin and absolve them of it. This violent means was ruled out however, and poisoning by realgar (a type of arsenic sulfide) was decided upon. Arnaud, however, secretly tipped off the town apothecary, and Jeanne was

⁶⁷ Fournier, 199-201.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 198-199.

never assassinated.⁶⁹ Thus it seems that the Perfects were far more concerned with adhering to the letter of the law rather than the spirit of it, implicating themselves in activities that were deemed sinful yet avoiding guilt by passing along responsibility to their followers, who as we have seen were allowed to sin.

The large gap between rhetoric and behavior was noticed by believers and nonbelievers alike. Indeed, up to its very last days the sect maintained its rhetoric of righteousness in the face of the corrupt and immoral Roman Church. Guillemette Mauri told Arnaud Sicre how the Catholic clergy, in following the “large and spacious way” to perdition (curious considering the Cathars did not believe in hell), would “enter in the houses of rich, young and beautiful women, to take their money from them, and when they find them consenting, sleep with them, although they put on faces of humility.”⁷⁰ This, of course, was in stark contrast to the Good Men, who would “not touch even one woman,” since they followed “the hard and narrow way by which we go to heaven.”⁷¹ Yet it is hardly plausible that such rhetoric was taken in good faith in light of the deviance and corruption displayed by both believers and Perfects alike. Lax morality were hardly unheard of at the time, yet a sect whose success was founded on their addressing the unfulfilled spiritual needs and desires of people had to hold its members to a higher ethical standard to maintain its hold in society. Failure to do so resulted in a crisis of authenticity concerning the Perfects. The long-term inability to satisfy these needs also likely contributed to the tendency of believers and even Perfects to forsake their fellow Cathars—the very trend that made inquisitorial measures so effective.

⁶⁹ Fournier, 199-201.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

By placing the appeal of Catharism back within the context of its popular religious appeal, this thesis has argued that Catharism's well-being as a movement was contingent on retaining its spiritual merits for believers. Catharism was one of many movements among the laity that emphasized an ascetic model based on voluntary poverty and a literalist interpretation of the apostolic life as found in the New Testament. Through their asceticism, preaching, and ritual interaction with the laity, the Perfects possessed an institutionalized form of charisma. However, the Cathars undermined their charismatic and spiritual appeal on a few major fronts. First, the Cathars, like most monastic communities, were unable to fully reconcile their professed renunciation of the world with the necessity of their involvement in it. The concern for material wealth among both Perfects and believers corrupted their purported spiritual purity and tarnished their reputation among the laity who admired them largely for the asceticism. Second, the lack of a disciplinary model for Cathar believers proved detrimental to the group in the long-term. In seeking spiritual fulfillment and the promise of salvation, many believers found instead a large chasm between themselves and the Perfects because of this double standard. The "normlessness" of their station can be said to have had anomic consequences which destabilized the Perfects' community of support—the community that was crucial to the survival of the sect. Third, the reputation of the Cathars was blemished by corruption among a few Perfects and their growing tendency to adhere to the letter of their law rather than its spirit, which in turn corroded their relationships of trust with believers. Thus, while the inquisition may have accelerated the extinction of heresy in the Languedoc, Catharism was already weakened by its own internal problems. Indeed, these may have proved more debilitating than any external pressures. After all,

nowhere in history has pure repression succeeded in stamping out a cause or idea once it has already taken root.

In her book *Jesus as Mother*, Caroline Walker Bynum emphasizes the importance of models in twelfth-century religiosity—the very time period in which Catharism rose to prominence. It is in this context that we can more fully understand the internal factors in Catharism’s decline and their broader implications. In the medieval religious milieu, it was crucial to teach by example as well as word, where teaching meant “being oneself an observable pattern that was available to others for the reshaping of their lives.”¹ Through their strict asceticism and championing of the apostolic life, the Perfects certainly seemed to offer this kind of religious model, at least to the individual. Yet while the twelfth century may have “discovered” the individual, as historians have traditionally alleged, Bynum reminds us that the inward exploration of spiritual motivation went hand in hand with a sense of group belonging. Individuals yearned to identify with a group that both defined itself as a model and was in itself “a means of salvation and of evangelism.”² Catharism did furnish a model of salvation and evangelism, but one that was accessible to few. Most lay believers were unwilling to live the difficult life of the Perfects, nor were they expected to do so. As a result, the spiritual benefits they received from the apostolic model of the Perfects were limited in nature. Although believers could partake in the sanctity of the Perfects by sharing meals with them, hearing their preaching, ritually adoring them, and receiving their blessing, these acts were merely ways of associating oneself with this particular group in the hopes of partaking in one final salvational act. They were ultimately insignificant in the salvation of the individual. Indeed, the prospect of salvation was severely restricted in Catharism—only those few perfected individuals could be sure of

¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 97.

² *Ibid.*, 105.

receiving it. The rest of believers lived in constant uncertainty because no matter how moral a life they observed or how closely they followed the apostolic model, eternal bliss was contingent on their receiving the *consolamentum* before death. This problem of accessibility in Catharism contrasts markedly with orthodoxy and other heretical sects, where salvation was attainable through a combination of faith, good works, and repentance. In these other religions, the group model actively complemented that of the individual. Catharism, on the other hand, did not provide a meaningful group identity because the external signs of belonging were rendered meaningless by the sect's own theology.

In addition, Catharism can be said to have been a religion of externalism. Bynum notes that for twelfth-century people, attention to outer religiosity had to be accompanied by commensurate inner growth and virtue. And at the risk of stating the obvious, they were “aware of the possibility of hypocrisy”—an awareness that was fundamental to popular anticlericalism.³ Yet the need for inner growth and virtue is precisely what is absent from Catharism. In this way, Catharism created a disjunction between the inner and outer aspects of spirituality. Certainly, it must have taken a measure of inner piety for the Perfects to adhere to their austere way of life, as most appear to have done, and to avoid sin. Yet the means of measuring the purity of a Perfect remained by necessity entirely external. Unlike most variations of Christianity, God's judgment played a negligible role in Cathar theology. God had already condemned the souls of men to perdition in the visible world for their disobedience, and so divine judgment was a *fait accompli*. Therefore, if an individual had been consoled, maintained the outward signs of apostolic piety, and was “known” not to have sinned, they were saved, as were all others they consoled at death. There was little emphasis on the inner state of the Perfects' soul, a state that only an omniscient God could discern. The lack of emphasis on internal spirituality for the average believer is much

³ Bynum, 98.

more obvious. Because they were in the way of sin and would be until their deaths, the Cathar believer was held to no identifiable standard of external piety, let alone an internal standard. They merely had to show outwardly that they desired to be consoled. It is thus likely that many late medieval persons would have come to see the lopsided externalism of the Cathars as a type of religious hypocrisy. Indeed, in the late medieval mindset, such an imbalance could hardly have been thought to provide the meaningful fulfillment of a true religious model.

This may explain why persecution was so problematic for the Cathars. Historians have widely acknowledged that persecution was actually “good” for early Christianity in promoting the growth of the religion.⁴ It was not until the first large-scale organized persecutions by the Roman Empire in the third century that the number of Christians began to increase significantly.⁵ The sociological effects of martyrdom were certainly not lost on the early Church; martyrdom was promoted to strengthen fragile communities, bring the new religion to the attention of pagan society, and win new converts.⁶ In the same vein, deniers of the faith were known to undermine group loyalty and weaken group cohesion, creating doubt that a fledgling faith could ill afford.⁷ The Cathars, like many persecuted religious groups in Christendom, clearly identified themselves with the martyrs of the early Church in their rhetoric. It is also undeniable that a number of Cathars, mostly Perfects, accepted burning at the stake rather than recanting their beliefs. Why then, did their sacrificial deaths fail to create the same religious growth as in early Christianity? For one, it cannot be ignored that medieval inquisition was more systematic and thorough in nature than Roman persecutions. But it should also be noted that martyrdom for a Cathar believer lacked the same meaning as it did for an early Christian. Again, because the

⁴ Keith Hopkins, “Christian number and its implications,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6.2 (1998): 185-226.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁶ Paul Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006). 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*

group salvational model applied only to the perfected elite, Catharism failed to promote the type of group cohesion that makes martyrdom worthwhile or even desirable for a believer. Even martyrdom was no substitute for the *consolamentum*. Furthermore, Catharism's externalism and accompanying failure to provide an internal spiritual model for its believers made it difficult to foster the kind of religious zeal that new movements need to grow and sustain themselves. Hence, it is not surprising that for most medieval people and even many believers in the sect, Catharism was not a cause "worth dying for."

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