



# CATHARS, ALBIGENSIANS, AND BOGOMILS

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**CATHARS, ALBIGENSIANS, and BOGOMILS** (Focusing on the possible influence of Manichaean ideas among these sects.) The commonly held view that late classical Manichaeism experienced a revival in the eleventh century, and that in the three and half centuries between 1000 and 1350 it spread in Europe, where its followers were known as Cathars, has often been repeated both in scholarly and popular accounts. The notion itself goes back to the Middle Ages and 'Manichaean' was used as a label for heretics from about the year 1000 onwards. The medieval historian—usually a monk or a cleric—interpreted this in terms of a universal conspiracy of Manichaeans, led by Satan. Manichaeism is said to have been passed via the Paulicians and the Bogomils to re-emerge in the European Cathars but, as we shall see, this supposed historical transmission is difficult to demonstrate.

Up to 1930, our knowledge of Manichaeism was based mainly on information from its opponents, such as the great Apostolic Father, Augustine (q.v.; 354-430). Since 1930, many authentic Manichaean sources have been found, mainly in Egypt. These have made it possible to study Manichaeism without relying on the interpretations of the Church Fathers. The results have raised questions about the supposed radical character of Manichaean dualism (Stroumsa, pp. 141-53; Drijvers, pp. 99-125; Tardieu, pp. 262-71; Koenen, p. 257). Some researchers have even ventured to claim that Manichaean texts allow both a dualistic and a monotheistic interpretation (Bianchi, p.15).



As a result of the new evidence, the supposed influence of Manichaeism on the Cathars has been increasingly questioned, particularly as regards radical Catharism, because it was especially this variant of Catharism that was said to teach the same dualism as did the Manichaeans (Söderberg, p. 82; Dies, pp. 175-93).

Another trend in the academic debate about Manichaean influence on Catharism centers on developments in medieval Europe itself. By the year 1000, the church had become very corrupt. Ecclesiastical offices were sold, celibacy as a clerical requirement was often ignored, and the parish priests received hardly any theological training. This gave rise to a broad religious reaction: the lay people in particular sought to return to the origins of Christianity. This reaction is known as the Gregorian reform movement. Some researchers think that Catharism is a logical radicalization of this reformation (Moore, pp. 21-22; Morghen).

#### THE SOURCES:

*The Cathar sources.* The texts with moderate Cathar ideas are: the *Interrogatio Iohanni*, also called the *Cène Secrete* (Bozóky); two versions of the rituals, one in Latin (Dondaine, *Un Traité*) and one in Provençal (Clédat); *A Vindication of the Church of God* (Venckeleer, *Revue belge*), *A Gloss on the Lord's Prayer* (Venckeleer, *Revue belge*) and the *Visio Isaia* (Charles).

There are fewer texts with radical Cathar ideas: the *Liber the Duobis Principiis* (circ. 1250-1280; SC 198) and the *Liber contra Manicheos* (BHRE 37). Both texts are problematical: the *Liber the Duobis Principiis* is not representative of the radical Cathars: it comes from the radical fraction of Giovanni di Lugio in Northern Italy (Sacconi, pp. 51-52). However it is the only surviving extensive radical Manichaean text available to us. The *Liber contra Manicheos* (circ. 1218-1222) is by Durand the Huesca, an opponent of the Cathars, and contains a radical Cathar treatise. The contents of the two texts accord closely with the information that we have from the opponents of the Cathars, so we can use both texts.

*The Manichaean sources.* The first texts were found in 1905 in Turfan, Mongolia. Although these texts consist mainly of fragments, they have the unique virtue of being accompanied by illustrations. Most of these texts are preserved in Berlin. Since 1930 an enormous number of almost entirely Manichaean texts has been found in Fayum, in Egypt. These texts, written in



Coptic, include the Manichaean *Homilies*, the *Psalm-book* and the *Kephalaia*. . New discoveries are still being made. The so-called Cologne ManiCodex (q.v.; CMC), discovered in 1970, contains autobiographical passages by Mani (216-274). All these texts have now been made accessible in the *CFM* (Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum), initiated by the International Association of Manichaean Studies (IAMS).

#### CONCEPTS:

*Dualistic tradition:* since the earliest days of Christianity, there has been a dualistic Christian tradition. All the dualist groups teach dualism and docetism in some form or other (see below). This tradition includes the various forms of Gnosticism (q.v.), including that of the Manichaeans, the Paulicians, the Bogomils and the Cathars. Manichaeism was a heretical Christian movement present throughout late antiquity, between approximately 240 and 800 CE. The Paulicians were Christian heretics in the Byzantine Empire between about 600 and 1000. The Bogomils were Christian heretics in the Balkans between about 1000 and 1400. The Cathars or Albigensians (these are synonyms, the original reference being to the Cathars of the city of Albi in Southern France; Müller, p. 2) were an important Christian heresy in Europe between about 1150 and 1350.

*Moderate dualism:* the *Cène Secrete* describes a “moderate dualism”: there is one good God and a fallen angel (Lucifer) who created the earth. This has also been called “Gnostic dualism” . It includes the dualism of the Bogomils and that of the moderate Cathars (Van Schaik, pp. 89-90). Moderate Catharism was influenced by the Bogomil movement (Van den Broek, pp. 87-108; Quispel, pp. 616-18). The inquisitor and former Cathar, Reinerius Sacconi (d. 1262) traces the origin of the various moderate Cathar churches in Southern Europe back to the “church of Philadelphia in Romania” (Sanjek, p. 50).

*Radical dualism:* In addition to the moderate Cathars, there is a more radical variant. The radical Cathars believed in the existence of two gods *ab aeterno*: a good God and a bad God. It is mainly the radical Cathars who are supposed to show vestiges of Manichaean ideas. This radical dualism is also known as “Iranian dualism” (Jonas, p. 212, pp. 236-37). The radical Cathars belonged to the Albanensian Church or the Church of Drugunthia (Van Schaik, p. 79), which also included the Paulician sect in the Byzantine Empire.

*The Bogomils:* The origin of the Bogomils is not clear. Our information about



them comes almost entirely from their opponents. The sources say variously that they derive from the Messalians, the Paulicians, or the Manichaeans (see the sources cited in Hamilton and Hamilton). The only authentic Bogomil text available to us is the *Interrogatio Iohanni*. It is clear that they taught a moderate dualism, docetism, and strict asceticism, and that they rejected marriage (Obolensky, *passim*). The Bogomils first appeared in the tenth century in Bulgaria and spread throughout the Byzantine Empire. Around the year 1150 they were repeatedly condemned and persecuted by Emperor Manuel Komnenos without any apparent effect. The Bogomils spread west from the Balkans (Bosnia and Serbia). They were still being persecuted in Bosnia in 1462. A year later, Bosnia was conquered by the Ottomans, and the Bogomils apparently adopted Islam, as they did elsewhere following Islamic conquests (Bozoky, *DGWE*, pp. 192-94).

History of the Cathars:

Adamar of Chabannes was one of the first to report the existence of Manichaens in Europe, in 1020. Many similar reports were to follow (*MGH. SS*, IV, p. 138). However the sources before about 1150 provide no substantive information about these heretical teachings. The heretics' chief objections concerned the seven sacraments and the unworthiness of the clergy. They wanted to return the church to the pristine era of the apostles (Van Schaik, p. 51). Their criticism of the church attracted the accusation of being 'Manichaeans,' an epithet derived from the writings of Augustine.

In 1143, Everwinus of Steinfeld wrote for the first time about heretics of a different sort, who said that their teachings derived from Greece (Fearn, pp. 24-26). However it was only in 1165 that these heretics were called *Cathari* by Eckbert von Schönau (*PL* 195, p. 17). Eckbert von Schönau was the first to write about the doctrine of dualism, although he too relied heavily on the writings of Augustine (Borst, p. 8; Wakefield and Evans, p. 38; Lambert, p. 63). Apparently Catharism spread in Europe between 1143 and 1165, as manifested in the way that the Catholic Church was becoming increasingly worried about these 'new' heretics in the same period. However the church authorities did not yet have a clear idea of what they were facing. The statements of the council speak of *Arians* and *textores* (= weavers). At the Council of Reims in 1157, measures were taken against the "impure sect of the Manichaeans" (*Mansi XXI*, 1903, p. 843). During the Council of Lombers in 1165, some *boni homines* (= good man) were interrogated, but the source does not tell us whether dualistic ideas were found (*Acta concilii Lumbariensis*, p. 432). Some



researchers even suspect that the people concerned were not Cathars but Waldensians (Duvernoy, *Histoire*, p. 213). The Waldensians sought to reform the church and did not preach dualism.

The first report from a layman about the Cathars dates from 1177. This report is not based on information from Augustine. In a letter to a Cistercian abbot, Count Raymond of Toulouse in Southern France asks how he should proceed against the heretics who “teach two principles” (Stubbs, *Chronica magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, I, p. 270). The heretics were then interrogated, and the report of the interrogations speaks of heretics who preach “two gods” (Stubbs, II, p. 153).

From that point, events move rapidly. Within a few decades, Southern France in particular develops into a Cathar bulwark. The Cathars have the sympathy of the population and the local nobility, while the Roman Catholic Church has little influence.

#### PERSECUTIONS AND THE CRUSADE:

The church’s response came in three increasingly harsh phases:

1. Attempts at conversion: the Cathar priests had been successful because—in contrast to the Catholic clergy—they led pious and ascetic lives in imitation of the apostles. So beginning in 1178, Rome sent Dominican monks practicing the same ascetic discipline, who tried with little success to convert the Cathars to Catholicism.
2. The inquisition, established in 1184. The inquisition was a church court that interrogated those suspected of Cathar sympathies, and the Cathar faithful and priests, in a brutal fashion. Their property was declared forfeit, and they were forced under torture to betray others. The *perfecti* and other intransigent Cathars died at the stake.
3. The crusade: Finally the church turned to its ultimate weapon, launching a crusade against the Cathars in Southern France from 1204. Pope Innocent III announced the ‘Crusade against the Albigensians’ (= Cathars) officially in 1208. Thus there was a domestic crusade in Europe, between the fourth and fifth crusades against the Saracens . The Cathars were often persecuted in horrifying ways. The situation reached its nadir with the conquest of the fortress of Montségur in 1244, when 205 Cathar priests (*parfaits* or *perfecti*) died at the stake. The Cathars retreated into the Pyrenees. However the last



Cathars, a group in the caves of Lombrive, were not eliminated until 1330, when the only access to the caves was bricked over.

#### CHRISTOLOGY:

The Cathars, like the Bogomils, were Christians. They differed from Catholic Christianity in teaching dualism and docetism. Because the Cathars taught that the creation and the body were created by the wicked demiurge or Satan, they could not imagine that Christ could have been incarnated in the flesh. According to the *Interrogatio Iohanni*, he entered Mary through her ear and left her again in the same way (Bozóky, p. 69). According to Sacconi, the radical Cathar Giovanni di Lugio taught that Christ actually suffered, died and rose again, not in the physical world, but in a higher world (Sanjek, p. 57, 5-10; Borst, pp. 270-71). This idea cannot be found so clearly in the *Liber de duobus principiis*, which claims that Christ was crucified by the bad God and creator, meaning the old Testament Jahweh (*Liber IV*, p. 53, ed. Thouzellier). The good God had nothing to do with this. Therefore the crucifixion does not represent salvation for men, but does show that the *veri christiani* (the Cathars) will have to suffer in his footsteps (*Liber VII*, p. 66, ed. Thouzellier). The true salvation is achieved through gnosis. For the Cathars, Christ is the wise teacher who teaches us that our true origin is from the spirit (Borst, pp. 166-67; Müller, pp. 106-107).

#### THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICAL TRANSMISSION:

*Moderate dualism*: as we have seen, there are no problems with regard to the historical transmission of moderate dualism: Bogomil ideas were taken back to Europe by the returning crusaders. The inquisitor Anselmus Alessandria reports this in 1266 (*Tractatus the hereticis*, pp. 308-10). The *Cène Secrete* from about 1190 confirms this: the manuscript ends with a note: “this manuscript originates from Bulgaria” (Bozóky, p. 87). .

*Radical dualism*: the transmission of radical dualism to Europe is considerably more problematic. Radical dualism is said to been brought by a certain ‘Pope Nicetas’ from Constantinople to Northern Italy and Southern France. However the sources are unclear about the sectarian origins of Pope Nicetas; whether he was from the Bogomil Church (Runciman, p. 72; Niel, p. 39), or from the Paulician sect (Borst, pp. 96-97; Thouzellier, p. 13). Pope Nicetas is said to have converted the moderate Cathar bishops to radical Catharism during the so-called Council of Saint Félix de Caraman in 1167 (Fearn, pp. 28-29). However



there are strong indications that this source was a seventeenth century forgery (Dossat, pp. 339-47; Thouzellier, p.14).

*Conclusion:* the only certain fact is the transmission of Bogomil dualism to moderate Cathar dualism. For several reasons given below, this is as far as we can go:

(1) The affinity between Manichaeism and Paulicianism is dubious (See, e.g., Obolensky, p. 18; Garsoïan, pp. 188-93, pp. 204-205).

(2) The transmission of Paulician ideas to the radical Cathars cannot be proven (Garsoïan, p. 233; Wakefield and Evans, pp. 16-18).

(3) Little is known about the teachings of the Paulicians, and the sources derive from the accounts of their opponents (Obolensky, pp. 18-19; Rottenwöhler, p. 353).

(4) The sources also apply the epithet Manichaeans to Eastern heretics (sources collected by Hamilton and Hamilton).

On the basis of the existing sources, the most that can be claimed is that the Manichaeans, the Paulicians, the Bogomils, and the Cathars all display a form of dualism.

#### THE QUESTION OF DOCTRINAL AFFINITY BETWEEN MANICHAEISM AND CATHARISM:

*Ontological dualism.* The Manichaeans taught that there were two principles *ab aeterno*, the one good, the other bad. Only the good principle is called God: the bad principle is not called God anywhere in Manichaean sources (van Schaik, p. 132). It is only in Augustine's polemic anti-Manichaean text *Contra Faustum*, a debate between Augustine and the Manichaean Bishop Faustus, that we find the existence of two gods being discussed, among other topics. Faustus denies the possibility forthrightly (*C.Faust.* XXXI.1): the bad principle is a *pars Dei* which mixes itself with the creation, while the substance of God remains unaffected.

The radical Cathar texts, in contrast, teach that there are two principles, each of them a God, at the ontological level. The bad God (*malus deus*) is identified with the creator from the Old Testament (*Lib. the Duob. Princ.* 49, 1-3). Thus ontological dualism appears to be an important point of difference between



the ideas of the Manichaeans and of the radical Cathars: the Manichaeans preach one God, while the radical Cathars preach two gods.

*Cosmic dualism.* Manichaeism teaches that the good and evil powers are equally present through all the eons of creation, including the physical creation. Moreover the world (heaven and earth) was created by a being from the kingdom of light, the living spirit. In each eon, light and darkness struggle with one another to extract and purify the light. On earth it is the Manichaean priests (the *electi*), who have the task of distilling light by consuming ritual meals. The light in plants and flowers is distilled by digestion. This form of cosmic dualism can be called 'horizontal dualism' (van Schaik, pp. 79-86.)

The radical Cathars-and also the moderate Cathars-in contrast, teach a 'vertical dualism': what is above is good, what is below is bad. The light has fallen into the darkness (the physical world) and must be liberated from it. The creation has been made by a *creator malus*. The Cathar *perfecti* in particular have a horror of the creation and the body (van Schaik, pp. 79-86).

Thus cosmic dualism also appears to be an important point of difference: the Manichaeans teach a 'horizontal dualism', the radical Cathars a 'vertical dualism'.

*Eschatological dualism.* From the Manichaean texts it appears that the good God has foreseen the entire development of the world. He permits wickedness, so that at the end of time the light may shine out with a 'higher' quality in a New Jerusalem. There is an evolutionary perspective: everything will be better.

The radical Cathar texts also say that the good God has foreseen the end, but the goal of creation in this case is to return the light to its origin. There is no evolutionary promise.

Eschatological dualism is a point of agreement between Manichaeism and the radical Cathars: both proclaim the divine providence (van Schaik, pp. 174-75), although they have different opinions regarding the end of time. The Manichaeans preach a *New Jerusalem*, while the radical Cathars preach a *restoration*.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS:

From the above, we must conclude that the supposed relationship between the



radical Cathars and the Manicheans is dubious. Nevertheless, there are many points requiring further research. Two important areas for study are: (1) the relationship between moderate Cathar dualism and Manichaean dualism; and (2) Manichaeism became the state religion of the Uighur kingdom of Turkestan in Central Asia in the year 762 CE, and this territory itself became part of the Islamic world when Turkestan was conquered. Around the year 1000, Islamic writers such as Ebn al-Nadim were writing about Manichaeism (see *al-Fehrest* iii. *The Representation of Manicheism in the Fehrest*). However, the possibility that Manichean ideas reached the Bogomils in the Balkans through the Islamic expansion has been dismissed by some scholars. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (de Blois, p. 510a) this is highly improbable as conversions to Islam only started in the Balkans about 1260, and the main Ottoman colonization was between 1300-1400.

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Abbreviations

SCSources Chrétiennes

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*RHR*Revue de l'Histoire des Religions

*DGWE*Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism

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