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## Morality Among Cathar Perfects and Believers in France and Italy, 1100-1300

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MORALITY AMONG CATHAR PERFECTS AND BELIEVERS  
IN FRANCE AND ITALY, 1100-1300

by

James Edward Myers

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment  
of the  
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James Edward Myers

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
I	THE CATHARS . . . . .	4
II	THE HISTORICAL TRADITION . . . . .	14
III	THE PERFECTS . . . . .	27
IV	THE BELIEVERS . . . . .	44
V	CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	56
	SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	64

## INTRODUCTION

Travelling through Southern France today one is immediately struck by an enormous interest in the Cathars of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. From Perpignan to Avignon, throughout the Midi, Frenchmen of all ages and from all walks of life are more familiar with the history of their medieval ancestors than most of us Americans are with our eighteenth-century founders. Every bookseller has the latest books and tracts on the Cathars in his window. For teachers, doctors, students, and factory workers the Cathars are often a topic for general conversation. One need only go to Montségur on a weekend to be impressed by the vast number of people, young and old, who undergo the rigorous climb up to the last stronghold of Catharism in search of their past. In the last ten years the French have published nearly one hundred books or articles on the Cathars, some of them are scholarly efforts, but for the most part they are rapidly produced syntheses of earlier scholarly efforts prepared for the French public at large and for foreign tourists who are merely curious.

The current interest of the French in Catharism is not surprising. For many people of Southern France the Cathars are not merely a passing interest for they are directly affected by them. The Cathars were their ancestors, and the military, governmental, and religious activity that occurred in Southern France during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries because of the Cathars and their

beliefs had an influence and lasting effect on this part of France.<sup>1</sup>

For the majority of Americans, even those with a background in medieval studies, the Cathars are either entirely unknown or their more interesting customs and beliefs are known only in part and incorrectly. Most textbooks on medieval history gloss over Catharism in a page or two, usually only repeating the statements of other, earlier summaries. Because of the growing French interest in the Cathars, the recent research of French scholars, the deplorable state of Cathar studies in English, and the importance of Catharism as a probable reform movement to medieval, Renaissance, and Reformation history, I think studies in this area by Americans should be increased. Many of the popular views among American historians are based upon the efforts of nineteenth-century historians who were either influenced pejoratively by their Catholic background or lacked many of the sources available to us today, or both. As a result their knowledge on the subject is often sadly defective.

With these views and objectives in mind I shall attempt a study of the sources currently available on one aspect of Catharism and, I hope, make a contribution towards solving one of the problems that has confronted historians of the movement and has, as I hope to show, resulted in conflicting views.

The Cathars have been accused by many historians of highly

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph R. Strayer, The Albigensian Crusades (New York: The Dial Press, 1971), pp. 163-174.



immoral and degenerate behavior. This view is still found in many texts, and it is one which my research has led me to conclude greatly exaggerated. The purpose of this thesis will be to examine pertinent sources on the behavior and moral standards of the Cathars and I shall hope to arrive at some definite conclusions. I shall begin with a brief outline of the religion and history of the Cathars, then treat the sources for the problem, and finally review the conclusions of some other historians. The main body of the thesis will be a discussion of Cathar behavior and morals, which will take into account the differences between Cathar "Perfects" and "Believers." Then I shall attempt a summary and presentation of conclusions which I think must necessarily be drawn from the evidence.

## CHAPTER I THE CATHARS

Since the objective of this thesis is not to present a comprehensive study of either the history of the Cathars or their religion; I shall begin this chapter by merely summarizing these two aspects. However, to understand what shall be discussed later the reader must be acquainted with both the religion and the history of the Cathars.

The Cathars belonged to a religious group which flourished in Western Europe from c. 1150 to 1300 A.D.; this group considered themselves the only true practitioners of Christianity. A few Cathar communities were found in England and in Germany, near Cologne, but they were short-lived and the main Cathar concentrations were in Northern Italy and Southern France. It was in France, in the vicinity of the village of Albi, near Toulouse, that they became most conspicuous, and it is from this region that they derived the name often given them: "Albigensians." How they originated and developed in Western Europe is still a matter of scholarly debate. Some authorities claim from available evidence that they originated from the Bogomil sect in the Balkans and Constantinople, and others claim that they sprang up independently, in Languedoc, as a reaction to local prevailing religious and social conditions. As of this writing most historians seem to have reached limited agreement on the view of Arno Borst, that Languedocian Catharism had its roots in

Bogomilism, but developed its own characteristics to suit its particular situation and environment.<sup>2</sup> However they originated, the Cathars somehow came into being in France and Italy in the early twelfth century. The sect spread rapidly, gaining adherents and establishing congregations, until by the latter half of the twelfth century it had become large and influential enough to attract the attention of the Church at Rome. Once the institutional church had become aware of Catharism, it undertook the elimination of the heresy, an effort which began with a preaching mission, grew into a crusade, and finally developed into an inquisition which had totally eliminated the sect by the early fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

The Cathar religion itself differed from orthodox Christianity on two essential points. First, the Cathars interpreted Scripture, specifically the gospel of John, as an affirmation of the existence of two gods, one evil and the other good. Second, basing their

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<sup>2</sup>For both sides of the question see Jeffrey B. Russell, Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), pp. 192-215, and Steven Runciman, "Byzantium and the Slavs," in Norman Baynes and H. St. L. B. Moss (edd.), Byzantium (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1948), pp. 353-54. Arno Borst has made an extensive study of the question and concludes that Catharism was derived from the Eastern tradition but differs greatly from its ancestors because of the conditions in which it developed. See Les Cathares (Paris: Payot, 1974), p. 55ff.

<sup>3</sup>The heresy was influential and disturbing enough to the Roman Church that it began to take steps to eliminate the heresy with a preaching crusade in mid-twelfth century. One of the first advocates and participants of the preaching crusade was Bernard of Clairvaux, Super Cantica Canticatorum, sermo 65 in Sancti Bernardi opera (edd. J. Leclercq et al.; Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 7 vols. in 9, 1957- ), II, pp. 172-77.

beliefs on the same source, they denied the humanity of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

A dualistic theology was not new or unique with the Cathars, for the explanation of evil in the world has always been a point of discussion; it is especially troublesome for Christians who believe that the universe was created by a good god. The Christian problems with dualism seem to have begun with the gnostics and Manicheans, with which latter group Saint Augustine devoted considerable effort. It was the Manicheans who posited the conclusion of two gods, or creators, which the Cathars followed in their dualistic beliefs. Cathar dualism had two phases, or periods. During the earlier phase they professed a mitigated, or partial dualism in which the evil force of the world was identified with a fallen angel, Lucifer, who was inferior to the good God, the God of the Spirit. Later, absolute dualism predominated, declaring there were two equal and co-eternal deities. The God of the Old Testament was the evil God, the creator of the physical world which was totally corrupt. The New Testament God was the good God and creator of the spiritual world, which included man's soul or spirit. The history and distinction between the two concepts need not be of particular concern to this thesis for both result in the Cathar conviction that the physical world has been created by an evil power and is therefore corrupt.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>For a complete and detailed exegesis on these two doctrines from Cathar sources, see Antoine Dondaine, Un Traité néo-manichéen du XIIIe siècle: Le Liber de duobus principiis, suivi d'un fragment de ritual cathare (Rome: Istituto Storico Domenicano, 1939).

<sup>5</sup>Arno Borst, op. cit., pp. 131-35.

The Cathar believed man's spirit, the creation of the good God, was imprisoned in his physical body, the creation of the evil God Lucifer. The only true objective of his life therefore was the liberation of this spirit from its imprisonment. This liberation could take place only if the man, or woman, lived according to the doctrines of Catharism, abhorring and avoiding those creations of the evil God, the physical world. Unless one did this his soul could potentially be reincarnated, a number of times, in human or animal bodies. The soul would remain imprisoned in the physical world until such time as the Cathar became perfected and thus liberated his spirit.<sup>6</sup> To the Cathars predestination was therefore not a problem as it was in orthodox Christianity for they believed all spirits would eventually be released to the spiritual world.<sup>7</sup>

Because of these beliefs the Cathars had two levels of adherents. Those believers who underwent the ritual of consolamentum, or spiritual baptism, became perfecti, or perfects. It was they who had attained the liberation of the spirit and were the leaders and ministers of the religion. Only these perfects could legitimately be considered Cathars for only they had achieved purity and had obtained the assurance of salvation through the ritual of the consolamentum. The ordinary believers were followers of, or believers in, Catharism. But they were not real members of the sect

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<sup>6</sup>Concepts of reincarnation, salvation, and creation according to Cathar doctrine are best illustrated by Rainerius Sacconi, Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno in Dondaine, Un Traité néo-manichéen, pp. 64-78.

<sup>7</sup>An exception to this was the spirit of perfects guilty of certain sins. This topic will be dealt with later.

and were not assured salvation at the end of their present physical existence. This differentiation can easily be compared with the distinction in orthodox Christianity between the catechumen and the baptized member of the Church. Believers were people who had accepted the tenets of the Cathar faith and hoped to be allowed to receive the consolamentum before their death and be assured of salvation.<sup>8</sup>

The proper life for the Cathar, that is, the life which would liberate the spirit, lay in rejecting the physical world, all that had been created by the evil God. This rejection included physical pleasures and comforts, but it centered on procreation as the worst of all evils. As a consequence of this belief, the Cathars, or more specifically the perfected believers, rejected sex in or out of marriage, marriage itself, and the eating of foods they thought related to coition, such as meat, eggs, and cheese. In addition to these tenets of faith, the Cathars rejected taking oaths and the killing of humans for any reason because of such commands in Scripture. They would not kill most animals realizing that they possibly contained spirits of their departed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>For purposes of this thesis the title "Cathar" will refer to both perfects and ordinary believers and the differentiation made when appropriate.

<sup>9</sup>For the best outline of Cathar beliefs and practices in this regard from Cathar sources see Theo. Venckeleer, "Le manuscrit A.6.10 de la Collection vaudoise de Dublin, I: Une Apologie," Revue belge de philologie et histoire, XXXVIII (1960), 815-34.

The Cathar concept of sin was extremely complicated. The topic is an intricate one, treated in depth in a scholarly study by René Nelli in La Philosophie du Catharisme, and a detailed study of it is well beyond the scope of this thesis. But since an understanding of this concept is crucial to the questions asked in this thesis, it merits an introductory explanation. I shall summarize the conclusions drawn by Nelli from his interpretation of the sources. The Cathar recognized no such thing as sin in the Judeo-Christian sense as not being a substance but a voluntary turning away from God. To the Cathar evil was a substance created by the evil God, Lucifer, just like any physical substance of earth or flesh. The act of participating in the creations of the evil God, acts of the flesh such as incest, robbery, or drunkenness could not be an offense against the good God of the immaterial spirit. These activities were merely of the flesh, carried out by a body created by the evil God and were only natural to physical creation. The flesh had no relationship to the good God and therefore any activity of the flesh could not be a turning away from Him. Under this theory a Cathar could do anything he wished and yet not sin. Because a Cathar, perfect or believer, could not commit a "sin" against the Spirit by engaging in such an act as incest, is not to say such acts were permitted him. The objective of the Cathar's life was to shed the flesh, to avoid all contact and intercourse with the creations of the evil God. Only after he had received the consolamentum and was totally devoid of all contact with physical things not

essential to existence could he achieve salvation. The believer lived in preparation for this event and, although physical activities were not sins for him, avoidance of such activities were necessary and would bring him closer to purity and salvation.

To the perfect, one who had already received the consolamentum and whose salvation was assured, the situation was somewhat different. Whereas the ordinary believer could engage in physical activities like adultery and not irreparably damage his salvation, the perfect never could commit these acts. Once the believer had received the consolamentum and become pure, a sin of the flesh not only impeded but obliterated his salvation. He was thereafter doomed to an eternity of nothingness (nihil). From a state of purity, or perfection, he had "sinned" against the Spirit, that is he had destroyed his purity. Thus we can see that although the Cathars did not have the same definition of sin as did orthodox Christianity they considered it essential for their salvation to avoid most of the same activities orthodox Christians at the same time considered sinful.<sup>10</sup>

It was inevitable that their very different creation myths would create conflicting moral values, behavioral patterns, and religious beliefs. The Cathars based their beliefs on their interpretation of the New Testament, for they rejected the Old as

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<sup>10</sup>The only scholarly work I know which deals directly with the Cathar concept of sin, and a work based on the existing Cathar writings, is René Nelli, La Philosophie du Catharisme (Paris: Payot, 1975). My summary is derived from this work and from an interview with Professor Nelli in Toulouse, France, on May 20, 1976.



a revelation of the evil God and inapplicable to themselves save as illustration and support for their doctrine. They denied the orthodox Christian concept of the Trinity, believing the Son less than the Father, the Holy Spirit less than the Son, and each being different in substance. They denied that Jesus had become human and that His incarnation and crucifixion were actual events. Because of the spiritual nature of Christ these events could only appear real. Because of their interpretation the Cathars denied the authority of the Church to teach, interpret Scripture and posit doctrine, and to mediate between God and man by sacraments.

The Cathars held various views of the Virgin Mary. The most popular saw Mary an angelic being, like Christ, who had come into the world before Him, to make possible the appearance of His birth. They considered the Church a creation of the evil God and therefore not only useless, but harmful. The Church and its sacraments were the evil God's instruments to trick men and women and prevent their conversion to the true, Cathar, faith.<sup>11</sup>

It was only natural that the Church should react to this rejection of its authority, to this threat to its territories and jurisdiction, and the danger to faithful Christians it considered implicit in Cathar doctrine. Its first reaction was a peaceful one, an attempt to teach Cathars the errors of their ways by

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<sup>11</sup>For one source dealing with all of these topics see Moneta of Cremona, Adversus Catharos et Valdenses libri quinque (ed. Thomas A. Ricchini; Rome, 1743), pp. 2-6.

preaching the true faith. This mission was entrusted to the Cistercian monks about 1145 and Bernard of Clairvaux became its leading emissary. This attempt to solve the "problem" lasted for some sixty years. Preachers travelled the countryside, preaching and debating with heretics, writing polemical treatises against them, and attempting to institute a reform among their own orthodox clergy who had, for the most part, lost the respect of orthodox Christians and Cathars alike.<sup>12</sup>

By the beginning of the thirteenth century it had become evident that these missionary efforts were vain, for the Cathars had not only survived but increased. The Church took a second step to deal with the heretics, a crusade. The actual motives for the Crusade, and the manner of its conduct, have long been a matter of controversy. We here need only state that a crusade was called by Pope Innocent III on March 10, 1208, and it lasted until 1229. During these twenty-one years the whole of Languedoc -- its social, governmental, and economic structure, and even its language -- was altered. Multitudes of people, both Cathars and faithful Catholics, were either killed or deprived of their means of livelihood. At the Crusade's end, however, the Cathars still flourished, albeit in a new manner, for the efforts of the Crusade had forced them to

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<sup>12</sup> See an account of Bernard's mission by Geoffrey of Auxerre translated in Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, Heresies of the High Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 125-26.

go underground and to operate clandestinely. The third, and final, step in the Church's attack on the heresy was the famous, or rather infamous, Inquisition. This inquisition, to which the Dominican Order owes its infamy and growth, developed incredible efficiency and by the beginning of the fourteenth century had managed to eliminate the Cathar threat to the Church by annihilating Catharism.<sup>13</sup>

Catharism became an extinct religious movement and was thenceforward interpreted by members of the organization responsible for this extinction. It is no wonder that, after six hundred years, misunderstanding of Cathar teaching and behavior should have replaced accurate analysis. Perhaps with the diminution of Catholic fervor, a more analytical survey of Cathar moral teaching and practice can now be attempted.

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<sup>13</sup>There are many accounts of the Crusade and Inquisition against the Cathars by modern historians; only a few, however, are in English. A popular account is Zoé Oldenbourg, Massacre at Montségur: A History of the Albigensian Crusade (trans. Peter Green; New York: Pantheon, 1961). See also Walter L. Wakefield, Heresy, Crusade, and Inquisition in Southern France, 1100-1250 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974). For readers of French Pierre Belperron's La Croisade contre Les Albigeois, 1209-1249 (Paris: Perrin, 1967) is the best account and treats the topic in greatest depth.

## CHAPTER II THE HISTORICAL TRADITION

The secondary literature on the Cathars will be utilized in this study, for the most part, to illustrate the diverse and contradictory statements made by historians concerning Cathar morals. It is the diversity of these statements, and the lack of any study dealing directly with Cathar morality, that have prompted this inquiry which is based on only one type of historical source: contemporary written literature by and about the Cathars. Sources written by the Cathars themselves are, of course, invaluable, but unfortunately most of them have been destroyed or lost over the centuries and we must rely primarily upon accounts by their Catholic contemporaries. These Catholic sources fall into several categories, and before undertaking an examination of their content it is essential that we learn what they are, so that we may place the sources in their proper perspective.

The Catholic sources fall into four categories which, although they overlap, can be placed into distinct time periods. Although it is beyond our intention and the usefulness of this study to identify every author, categorization of at least the major writers, and especially those cited in this work seems a necessity. The first contemporary writings on the Cathars were letters. The authors of these letters were the first Catholics to recognize Catharism as a growing heresy and to become alarmed at its potential

threat to the orthodox Church. They can all be dated ca. 1140-1160 and their writers also composed sermons and polemics to warn their contemporaries of the heretics. The Cathar heresy was new to them, and, although they were not yet well enough acquainted with the heresy to understand its doctrines, rituals, or organization, they were eyewitnesses and therefore are valuable sources for Cathar activities. Of these writers four deserve mention here because of their value to Cathar studies. However, only two of them comment on the topic of this study and will be useful to it. Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny from 1152 to 1156 wrote ca. 1133 to the archbishops of Arles and Embrun, et al., to explain the activities of the heretic Peter of Bruys and to express his concern that Peter's teachings, which were causing grievous harm to the Church, should be recognized and dealt with.<sup>14</sup>

The other three writers were instrumental in initiating the first institutionalized efforts to suppress Catharism. Eberwin, prior of the Premonstratensian abbey of Steinfeld and Geoffrey of Auxerre, later abbot of Clairvaux, publicly expressed their alarm at the rise of Catharism in the middle of the twelfth century by writing to Church leaders to describe the heretics of Cologne and Toulouse and to appeal for their aid in combatting them.<sup>15</sup> Bernard

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<sup>14</sup>Peter the Venerable, Epistola sive tractatus adversus petrobrusianos haereticos in J. -P. Migne, Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina (Paris, 221 vols., 1844-64), 189:719-850.

<sup>15</sup>Eberwin of Steinfeld, Epistola ad S. Bernardum in PL 182: 676-80, and Geoffrey of Auxerre, Epistola ad Archenfredum in PL 185:410-16.

of Clairvaux responded to their appeals with a series of sermons addressed to the heretics in 1144, and set out on a preaching mission to Toulouse in 1145.<sup>16</sup>

It did not take many years for many Catholic clergy to become aware of the basic doctrines of the rapidly growing Cathars. Churchmen became alarmed at the danger, especially in areas where Cathars were becoming numerous, and polemicists took up the pen to defend orthodoxy. This period of first reaction extends roughly from 1160 to 1200 and includes such figures as Bonacursus,<sup>17</sup> Durand of Huesca,<sup>18</sup> Ermengaud of Béziers,<sup>19</sup> and Ebrard of Béthune.<sup>20</sup> Although none of these men—with the exception of Bonacursus, was intimately familiar with Cathar doctrine—they set out to expound its errors in an effort to expose them to the faithful. Bonacursus, who claimed to be an ex-Cathar perfect, is among the earliest polemicists, and his treatise, written in the third quarter of the twelfth century, concentrates on exposing Cathar beliefs. The other three

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<sup>16</sup>Geoffrey of Auxerre, Sancti Bernardi...vita et res gestae libris septem comprehensae: Liber tertius auctore Gaufrido monacho ....in PL 185:312-13.

<sup>17</sup>Bonacursus, Manifestatio haeresis catharorum quam fecit Bonacursus in PL 204:775-92.

<sup>18</sup>Durand of Huesca, Liber contra Manicheos in Christine Thouzellier, Un Traité cathare inédit du début du XIIIe siècle d'après le Liber contra manicheos de Durand de Huesca (Louvain: Bibliothèque de la Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique, XXXVII, 1961), pp. 87-113.

<sup>19</sup>Ermengaud of Béziers, Contra haereticos in PL 204:1235-72; 178:1823-46.

<sup>20</sup>Ebrard of Béthune, Contra Valdenses in Maxima bibliotheca veterum patrum et antiquorum scriptorum ecclesiasticorum (edd. Marguerin de la Bigne et al.; Lyon, 27 vols., 1677), 24:1525-84.

writers, flourishing ca. 1200, furnish excellent examples of the early polemics. Although they were not well acquainted with the details of Catharist doctrine and ritual, as their descriptions clearly evince, they aimed their pens at the abominable errors they thought existed in Catharism.

By the beginning of the thirteenth century Churchmen had become better versed in Catharism and its interpretations of Scripture. At that time a new type of writer came to the fore, the theologian. The theologians, like their predecessors, wrote largely polemical works, but they attacked the Cathars in a rational and scholastic manner. Their appeal was on an intellectual level rather than emotional; they presented the Cathar position and then refuted it by logical deduction and/or Scriptural quotation. It is to these theologians and their detailed summae against the Cathars, that we owe most of our knowledge about Cathar interpretation of Scripture and Cathar doctrine. Alan of Lille was the first scholar to make a planned and systematic attack against the heretics and his work, written in 1200, is an excellent example of scholastic disputation.<sup>21</sup> Alan makes no mention of personal experience with Catharism, but his treatise is sound, informative, and devoid of the usual accusative attitude. Prevostin of Cremona's summa can also be dated ca. 1200 and although it makes its attack in scholarly terms it

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<sup>21</sup>Alan of Lille, De fide catholica contra haereticos sui temporis in PL 210:305-430.

is of less value to the historian of Catharism for Prevostin devotes the largest part of the treatise to another heretical sect, the Passagians.<sup>22</sup>

Peter Martyr and Salvo Burci appeared next, writing ca. 1235. Salvo, a layman, wrote an extensive treatise against all heretics.<sup>23</sup> His knowledge of the heresies is indisputable, as is his knowledge of Scripture, with which he refutes them. Peter wrote a voluminous work detailing, and refuting, the errors of the Cathars and other heretical sects in Italy.<sup>24</sup> He was a Dominican, and had spent some time as an inquisitor, in which capacity he had had personal experience with the heretical sects.

James Capelli,<sup>25</sup> Rainerius Sacconi,<sup>26</sup> and Moneta of Cremona<sup>27</sup> end our list of theologians who wrote against the Cathars and are the ones most important to our study. All three men wrote in the middle of the thirteenth century; all had personal experience with the Cathars (Rainerius had himself been a Cathar for seventeen

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<sup>22</sup>Prevostin of Cremona, The Summa contre haereticos Ascribed to Praepostinus of Cremona (edd. Joseph N. Garvin and James A. Corbett; Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, Publications in Medieval Studies, XV, 1959).

<sup>23</sup>Salvo Burci, Liber supra Stella (ed. Ilarino da Milano, "Il Liber supra Stella," Aevum, XIX (1945), 309-41.

<sup>24</sup>Peter Martyr, Summa contra hereticos (ed. Thomas Kappeli, "Une Somme contre les hérétiques," Archivum fratrum praedicatorum, XVII (1947), 320-25.

<sup>25</sup>James Capelli, Summa contra hereticos in La Eresia catara: Saggio storico filoso con in appendice disputationes nonnullae adversus haereticos (ed. Dino Bazzocchi; Bologna: Licinio Cappelli, 2 vols. in 1, 1919, 1920).

<sup>26</sup>Rainerius Sacconi, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup>Moneta of Cremona, op. cit.



years), and all were academics. Their summae treat all aspects of Catharism in detail and are of particular importance here because they are the only theologians to discuss Cathar morals.

One other writer of this period deserves mention for his work bears heavily on the problem at hand. Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, who wrote ca. 1212-1220,<sup>28</sup> was one of two historians of the Crusade against the Cathars in France, the other being William of Tudela.<sup>29</sup> An analysis of Peter's history and a comparison between it and other sources shows him to be an accurate but not objective chronicler of events. He attempted to combine polemics with his history, and the result is less than objective, resembling the frantic efforts of earlier alarmists.

The last category of sources is provided by the inquisitors. The period of inquisitorial writings extends from ca. 1250 to 1500. The inquisitors wrote primarily for other inquisitors. The early inquisitors learned much about the Cathars and their doctrines as well as the best methods by which to obtain confessions from them. This knowledge they put in writing, to pass on to those who followed in their task, that they might carry out their mission effectively. The first of the inquisitor-authors was David of Augsburg, a

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<sup>28</sup>Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, Hystoria albigensis (edd. Pascal Guebin and Ernest Lyon; Paris: Libraire Ancienne Honoré Champion, 3 vols., 1926-1939); PL 213:541-712.

<sup>29</sup>William of Tudela, La Chanson de la croisade albigeoise (ed. Eugène Martin-Chabot; Paris: Les classiques de l'histoire de France, XIII; 3 vols., 1931-1961).

participant in the first Inquisition of 1181 and a man whose handbook provided a model for later authors.<sup>30</sup> The best known inquisitorial authors, the men whose works have been included in this thesis, are Anselm of Alessandria,<sup>31</sup> William of Puylaurens,<sup>32</sup> and the most notable of all, Bernard Gui.<sup>33</sup> Anselm and William wrote during the early days of the Inquisition in the middle of the thirteenth century about their experiences with, and knowledge of, the Cathars and Waldenses. The inquisitorial source most valuable to this thesis came from the pen of Bernard Gui. His manual for inquisitors outlines all the errors and characteristics of the major heretical sects to be found at that time in Southern France, as well as of the Jews. He wrote ca. 1325 and thus his manual falls outside the time period of this thesis, but, Bernard had been prior of several Dominican convents in Southern France during the latter half of the thirteenth century and we may be sure that much of his experience with the Cathars was gained within the limits of that century. All of the inquisitorial manuals provide invaluable

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<sup>30</sup>David of Augsburg, De inquisitione haereticorum (edd. Edmond Martène and Ursin Durand; Thesaurus novus anecdotorum, Paris, 5 vols., 1717), V, pp. 1777-94.

<sup>31</sup>Anselm of Alessandria, Tractatus de haereticis in Antoine Dondaine, "La Hiérarchie cathare en Italie, II: Le 'Tractatus de heretics' d'Anselme d'Alexandrie, O.P.: Catalogue de la hiérarchie cathare d'Italie," AFP XX (1950), 234-324.

<sup>32</sup>William of Puylaurens, Chronica in Collection Des Mémoires Relatif A L'Histoire de France (ed. M. Guizot; Paris: Brière, 1824), XV, pp. 205-329.

<sup>33</sup>Bernard Gui, Manuel de l'Inquisiteur (ed. G. Mollat; Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 2 vols., 1926).

sources for Cathar studies because they were written by learned men who spent much of their lives dealing professionally with heretics.

One other source must also be mentioned; the gossipers. Foremost among these was Walter Map, who wrote in the latter half of the twelfth century.<sup>34</sup> Walter and other gossipers only repeated quaint or sensational stories they had heard to titillate their audiences and often had no actual experience with the Cathars upon which to base their tales.

These are the four types of sources we will deal with in this study. We have surveyed them briefly, not to inform the reader of the history, credentials, or style of each author, but to provide him with the background and motivation of the sources we shall be utilizing.

Works about the Cathars did not stop with the elimination of the sect in the fourteenth century but have continued steadily until today. The greatest number of the works dating from 1500 to 1850, however, advance an essentially biased assessment in support of a religious or philosophical view, such as Protestantism or Marxism, and cannot claim historical accuracy.<sup>35</sup> It was not until 1849, when Charles Schmidt published his classic study of the Cathars, that any scholarly efforts were made to unravel the tangled accounts. From that time until now certain historians have been

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<sup>34</sup>Walter Map, De Nugis Curialium (ed. Thomas Wright; London: The Camden Society, 1850).

<sup>35</sup>For a history of authors dealing with Catharism during this period see Arno Borst, op. cit., pp. 29-40.

delving into Catharism with enthusiasm and it is their conclusions regarding Cathar morals at which we shall now look.

In spite of the great number of studies on the Cathars and popular literature about them, no one has made a study specifically about Cathar morals. Yet almost without exception, modern treatments of Catharism have made three basic accusations against Cathar behavior: they practiced the endura; Cathar perfects engaged in sexual activity; and the sexual behavior of believers lacked any bounds or moral standards. Almost without exception the authors fail to substantiate their accusations. Surely it is unheard of for historians and historical novelists to repeat statements of earlier writers without searching the sources. In treating Cathar moral behavior, however, we find that there is no essential agreement on any point. The discovery of this vast difference of opinion initiated this study and I think it therefore worthwhile to survey the conclusions of various leading historians of Catharism.

The first charge we face concerns what the historians say about the endura, or holy suicide. A. L. Maycock exaggerates when he says.

Nor was the practice [endura] by any means exceptional. It has been maintained, indeed, that the "Endura" put to death more victims in Languedoc than the stake or the Inquisition.<sup>36</sup>

Charles Henry Lea is less sweeping but agrees that: "This Endura

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<sup>36</sup>A. L. Maycock, The Inquisition (New York: Harper, 1927), p. 42.

was also sometimes used as a mode of suicide, which was frequent in the sect."<sup>37</sup> Lea goes on to describe the different means of suicide. He neglects, however, to reveal the sources for his statement or analyze what other functions the endura had.

Numerous others have asserted that the endura was a common practise among the Cathar perfects. Fernand Niel and Yves Dossat disagree. Niel says:

In the first place the practice of the endura did not appear until the fourteenth century, and by then the Cathar Churches had long since disappeared. One finds no trace of it in the central years when Catharism flourished.<sup>38</sup>

Dossat backs him up with equal certainty:

Outside the later documents, one cannot find even one unquestionable case of the endura. It is not proper to find it between the lines of an account of a trial of the suicide of a prisoner.<sup>39</sup>

These four men are well-known and respected historians. Which is one to believe?

The second charge, concerning the sexual activity of Cathar perfects, is obscured by the same disagreement. We have the view of Steven Runciman, who says that: "So long as it did not lead to the conception of children they positively seemed to encourage

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<sup>37</sup>Henry Charles Lea, A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages (New York: The Harbor Press, 3 vols., 1955), I, 95.

<sup>38</sup>Fernand Niel, Albigois et Cathares (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), p. 54.

<sup>39</sup>Yves Dossat, "Les Cathares dans les documents de l'inquisition," Cahiers de Fanjeaux, 3 (1958), 85.

sexual intercourse or at least not to discourage it...."<sup>40</sup> A. S. Turberville agrees and refused to be surprised that the perfects engaged in sexual activity. "Nor need we wonder that these holders of a doctrine of ultra-asceticism, of a complete celibacy, were credited with the foulest of sexual orgies."<sup>41</sup> René Nelli and Paul Alphantery disagree. Nelli does believe that the perfects occasionally failed to live up to their own code of celibacy. "In the era of the expansion of Catharism moral failures seem to have been rare and seldom to have existed among the perfects."<sup>42</sup> Alphantery does not admit even that much.

...The Perfect vowed to be chaste. It was one of the essential traits of the moral teaching of the Cathars, and it is certainly the one which most strongly impressed their contemporaries.<sup>43</sup>

Here again we see a fundamental disagreement among scholars.

When we examine the accusation that Cathar believers led immoral lives we are once more faced with contradictory opinion. The writers are almost unanimous in agreeing that the believers did engage in degrees of sexual activities which were considered immoral in the Middle Ages. Maycock, who has no apparent sympathy

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<sup>40</sup>Steven Runciman, The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy (Cambridge: The University Press, 1955), p. 152.

<sup>41</sup>A. S. Turberville, Medieval Heresy and the Inquisition (London: Archon Books, 1964), p. 31.

<sup>42</sup>René Nelli, La vie quotédienne des Cathares du Languedoc au XIIIe siècle (Paris: Hachette, 1969), p. 49.

<sup>43</sup>Paul Alphantery, Les idées morales chez les heterodoxes latins au debut du XIIIe siècle (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études, Sciences religieuses, 1903), p. 63.

for Catharism, writes that "...the Albigensian heresy practically banished the moral code from the life of the 'Believer'."<sup>44</sup> Jean Guiraud agrees and claims Catharist morals were other than human: "The believers took all the more liberties with human and Catharist morals because they were persuaded that the Consolamentum would purify them at their last hour...."<sup>45</sup>

Although most modern historians admit immorality in contemporary terms existed among the believers, some do not. Henry James Warner, in praising the purity of the Cathars says:

...For we may dismiss as incapable of proof the charges of extinguished lights, promiscuous intercourse, etc., which were but a rechauffé of the charges made against the early Christians.<sup>46</sup>

Walter Wakefield agrees with Warner, and in his work on the Cathars attempts to clear the air of all obscurity over aspects of Cathar morality in one sweeping paragraph:

The mistaken idea that death by endura was a normal Catharist practice, however, seems to have arisen from over-emphasis on incidents in which Good Men who were too ill to repeat the Lord's Prayer refused unsanctified food or when a prisoner of the Inquisition preferred death to the dungeon. Suicide was not a characteristic practice when the religion was flourishing and reports about it, like those of nasty sexual aberrations-and, we may add, of secret lore preserved from ancient esoteric cults-must be

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<sup>44</sup>A. L. Maycock, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>45</sup>Jean Guiraud, The Mediaeval Inquisition (trans. E. C. Messenger; London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1929), p. 40.

<sup>46</sup>Henry James Warner, The Albigensian Heresy (New York: Russell & Russell, 2 vols., 1967), I, 28.

regarded with scepticism, as tales purveyed by rumor and encouraged by credulity and hostility, medieval and modern.<sup>47</sup>

This gives some example of what the student of Catharism comes up against when reading secondary accounts. As we shall see, the original sources were equally contradictory but answers to the charges, if they can be proved at all, must, in the end, be derived only from the original sources; to which we now turn.

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<sup>47</sup>Walter L. Wakefield, op. cit., p. 41.



### CHAPTER III THE PERFECTS

The moral behavior of Cathar perfects, especially the practice of the endura, has occasioned divergent comment. Most of the historians appear either to have drawn their conclusions out of the air or to merely have repeated those of their predecessors, for they offer no support from the primary sources. Yet these sources offer an abundance of information which would enable the scholars to draw some tenable conclusions.

We must separate the moral behavior of the Cathar perfects into two separate aspects: activities pursued during the course of their religious duties or rituals, and activities practised in their day to day living.

The perfects have been accused of practising, or advocating the practise of, three deviant forms of behavior during their religious functions: the endura; child sacrifice or infanticide; and sexual aberrations for religious purposes. As we have seen, the endura has exercised a certain fascination over historians; but they have dismally failed to settle on a single definition of endura. According to Fernand Niel the endura was any form of ritual suicide committed by a Cathar.<sup>48</sup> Such a definition is hazardous, for a suicide committed to resolve personal problems or to avoid torture

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<sup>48</sup>Fernand Niel, op. cit., p. 53.

or death by fire should not be considered a ritualistic suicide. If it is, Niel's use of the term could be applied to any suicide, Cathar or otherwise. Walter Wakefield gives what seems the most appropriate definition, which, for the purposes of this thesis, shall be the one used. He says that the endura is "Holy suicide, [which] applies only to [the] Perfect, ...suicide by fasting or the murder of a newly baptized person to prevent contamination of his purified soul."<sup>49</sup>

Because so many historians have referred to the endura, one is surprised to find that the Cathar sources themselves say nothing about it at all. Two contemporary Catholic theologians, Rainerius Sacconi and James Capelli give indirect evidence of the practice. Both were orthodox clergymen, the one a Dominican, a former heretic, and an Inquisitor. The other was a Franciscan. They had had personal experience of the Cathars and they offer contradictory evidence. Rainerius wrote:

Since many of [the perfects], when ill, have sometimes asked those who nursed them not to put any food or drink into their mouths if they could not at least say the Lord's prayer, it is quite evident that many of them thus commit suicide.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Walter Wakefield, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>50</sup>"Siquidem multi ex eis in suis infirmitatibus dixerunt aliquando eis, qui ministrabant eis, quod ipsi non ponerent aliquid cibi vel potus in os eorum si illi infirmi non possent dicere 'Pater noster' ad minus, unde verisimile est quod multi ex eis occiderent seipsos hoc modo." Rainerius Sacconi, op. cit., p. 68.

James Capelli countered this charge:

...They [the perfects] administer this imposition of hands [the consolamentum] to believers in the sect who are ill, out of this has grown the popular rumor that they kill them by strangulation....From personal knowledge we affirm this to be untrue, and we urge that no one believe that they commit so shameful an act.<sup>51</sup>

From the years when Catharism was a living religion, there is only one other source which mentions the endura, as defined here.

I quote an inquisitorial account:

The consolamentum of Mme. Fays, widow of a knight, who lived in Palajac (Viterbe, Tarn). Following the deposition of her servant, Rixende (July 16, 1274) Mme. Fays, who had fallen ill, demanded the heretics be notified....One or two days later, in the middle of the night, when the whole world slept, William Prunel and Bernard Tilhols were led to her house. The patient came down from her room and she gave to the heretics some money that she had with her. Then followed the ceremony which took place in private and without witnesses. After she had entered into the sect, the patient would eat or drink nothing. She died at the end of fifteen days, at the time preceeding Lent.<sup>52</sup>

These are the only sources dealing with the endura which can be found prior to the fourteenth century. The scarcity of testimony among the mass of literature concerning the Cathars is significant. If the practice had been common, there would surely have been more

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<sup>51</sup>"Unde saepe apud eos reiteratur; hanc utique impositionem manum credentibus suae sectae egrotantibus secundum predictam formam faciunt, de quibus vulgaris fama inolevit quoniam eos sugillando sufocant, ut martires vel confessores efficiantur, quod per experientium falsum esse didicimus et ne aliquid illos tantum flagitium perpetare credat suademus." James Capelli, op. cit., II, 138-39.

<sup>52</sup>Doat 25, f. 174-76, cited in Yves Dossat, op. cit., p. 86.

evidence. Rumors of such a practise apparently abounded, for it is reply to these rumors that James Capelli claimed he wrote. The apparent fact that the Cathars often waited until they were ill or near death to receive the consolamentum, which would require strict asceticism thereafter, probably stands behind the accusation.<sup>53</sup>

The fact that they waited until they were very ill, as did Mme. Fays, then received the consolamentum and died, could easily have given rise to the stories of suicide among those either hostile to, or ignorant of, the Cathar ritual. The Catholic sacrament of Extreme Unction could conceivably be so misconstrued if described by the pen of an uninitiated or hostile observer.

One of the most heinous crimes of which the Cathars perfects are accused is child sacrifice. On this subject we have only three sources. The earliest is provided by Paul, a monk of Chartres, who wrote about an incident in the eleventh century.

When a child was born of this most filthy union [sexual intercourse during a religious rite], on the eighth day thereafter a great fire was lighted, the child was purified by the fire in the manner of the old pagans, and so was cremated. Its ashes were collected and preserved with as great veneration as Christian reverence is wont to guard the body of Christ....<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Bernard Gui, op. cit., I, 20, 22.

<sup>54</sup>"Ex quo spurcissimo concubitu infans generatus, octava die, in medio eorum copioso igne accenso, piabatur per ignem, more antiquorum paganorum, et sic in igne cremabatur. Cujus cinis tanta veneratione colligebatur atque custodiebatur, ut christiana religio corpus Christi custodire solet...." Paul of Chartres, Vetus Agnon in Cartulaire de L'Abbaye de Saint-Pere de Chartres (ed. M. Guerard; Paris: L'Imprimerie de Crapelet, 2 vols., 1840), I, 112.

A century later Guibert of Nogent wrote of this same child of its fate:

Now if it so happens that a woman has there been got with child, as soon as the offspring is delivered, it is brought back to the same place; a great fire is lit, and the child is thrown from hand to hand through the flames by those sitting around the fire until it is dead. It is then reduced to ashes; from the ashes bread is made, of which a morsel is given to each as a sacrament.<sup>55</sup>

Geoffrey of Auxerre, writing about Bernard Raymond and Raymond Baimac, two heretics who confessed under inquisitorial pressure in 1181, claims that they confessed to the turpitudes and abominations of having practised sexual liberty and to have conducted pregnant to abortion and infanticide.<sup>56</sup>

There are no direct rebuttals to these accusations. The account of Paul of Chartres was written some fifty years after the incident he described, and it includes miraculous appearances by a demon in the likeness of a small beast during the ceremony. Other accounts of the same incident, moreover, include descriptions of practices unknown to Cathars and applicable to other heretical groups.<sup>57</sup> These three factors would seem to discredit the assertion

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<sup>55</sup>"...quod si inibi foemina gravidetur, partu demum fuso in idipsum reditur; ignis multus accenditur, a circumsedentibus puer de manu in manum per flammam jacitur, donec extinguitur; deinde in cineres redigitur; ex cinere panis conflicitur; cuique pars pro eucharistia tribuitur..."Guibert of Nogent, Histoire de sa vie (1053-1124) (ed. Georges Bourgin; Paris: Libraire Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1907), p. 213.

<sup>56</sup>Geoffrey of Auxerre, Epistole, PL 185:410-16.

<sup>57</sup>See Ademar of Chabannes, Chronique in Collection de textes pour servir à l'étude et à l'enseignement de l'histoire, XX (ed. Jules Chavanon; Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1897), pp. 184-85.

that the Cathars actually practised infanticide. Whether or not Guibert of Nogent read Paul's account, the two are similar enough to suggest that Guibert was merely repeating an earlier story, especially since Guibert himself admits that he is not writing from firsthand observation.<sup>58</sup>

Only Paul of Chartres, Guibert of Nogent, and Geoffrey of Auxerre make such accusations. Paul of Chartres relates an event that had taken place prior to the flourishing of Catharism and the circumstances from which the other two accounts are derived make them highly suspect. Geoffrey of Auxerre gives an account of the confession of two heretics extorted under inquisitorial pressure who later went on to become regular canons at Saint Sernin and the Cathedral of Saint Etienne in Toulouse.<sup>59</sup> Whether these two converts later returned to the heresy is not recorded, but the fact that they confessed to save their lives, that they were self-admitted liars, and that they probably were not truly indoctrinated into the Cathar faith is shown in an account in Roger of Hoveden's Chronica Magistri.<sup>60</sup> The credibility of these accounts is further undermined by the lack of similar accusations after 1220, and the direct denial of such practises in Cathar ritual and doctrine (for example: "This

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<sup>58</sup>Guibert of Nogent, op. cit., p. 212.

<sup>59</sup>Jean Leclercq, "Le temoignage de Geoffroy d'Auxerre sur la vie cistercienne," Studia Anselmiana, 31, Analecta monastica, II, (1953), 197.

<sup>60</sup>Roger of Hovedene, Chronica magistri (ed. William Stubbs; London: Longmans, 4 vols., 1868-71), II, 152.

Church refrains from killing, nor does it consent that others may kill") tend to indicate that the charges have no validity.<sup>61</sup>

Some of the sources accuse the Cathar perfects of engaging in sexual activity during the course of their religious ceremonies. This particular charge is not often repeated by modern writers: but, it has been made and deserves a hearing. Among the numerous accusations of sexual indiscretion among the perfects the only ones describing ritual intercourse are made by Paul of Chartres and Guibert of Nogent. Guibert echoed Paul in writing that

They hold meetings in cellars and secret places, the sexes mingling freely, who when candles have been lighted, in the sight of all, fair women with bare buttocks (it is said) offer themselves to one lying behind them. The candles are extinguished and immediately they all cry out together "Chaos!" and each one lies with her who comes to hand.<sup>62</sup>

Bernard Gui made a rash accusation in his Inquisitor's Manual of an abnormal sexual practice but this account concerns the Waldensians and is actually the repetition of an earlier writer.<sup>63</sup> The only thing Bernard says concerning the heterosexual behavior of

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<sup>61</sup>"Aquesta gleisa se garda de aocire, ni a aotre non o consent." Theo. Venckleer, op. cit., 823.

<sup>62</sup>"...conventicula faciunt in ypogeis aut pennalibus abditis, sexus simul indifferens, qui, candelis accensis, cuidam mulierculae sub obtutu omnium, relectis, ut dicitur, natibus, procumbenti eas a tergo offerunt; hisque mox extinctis, chaos undecunque conclamant, et cum ea quae ad manum venerit prima quisque coit...." Guibert of Nogent, op. cit., p. 213.

<sup>63</sup>Bernard Gui, op. cit., I, 48. Bernard seems to repeat David of Augsburg, De Inquisitione hereticorum (ed. W. Preger, Abhandlungen der historischen Classe der Königlich bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, XIV (1878), pp. 210-11.

Cathars is that they "...do not touch any woman..."<sup>64</sup> A man so experienced in Cathar customs surely would not have failed to include such accusations if he knew them to be true. James Capelli directly refuted the charges brought by Guibert and Paul of Chartres. Writing in the middle of the thirteenth century, he said:

For it is true that once a month, either by day or night, in order to avoid gossip by the people, men and women meet together, not, as some lyingly say, for the purpose of fornication, but so they may hear preaching....<sup>65</sup>

The best sources for determining the decorum of Cathar religious ceremonies are the rituals themselves. In a thirteenth-century consolamentum ceremonial we find the bishop, or perfect in charge, instructing the supplicants:

Consequently, you must understand how necessary it is that you love God in truth, in kindness, in humility, in mercy, in chastity, and other exemplary virtues, since it is written: "Chastity makes a man near to God; in like manner, however, corruption draws him away"; and again, "Chastity and virginity bring [us] near the angels."<sup>66</sup>

This is only one of many exhortations declaring chastity. It seems inconceivable that a serious Christian sect, which the Cathars

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<sup>64</sup>"Item, non tangunt aliquam mulierem." Bernard Gui, op. cit., I, 18.

<sup>65</sup>"Nam verum est quod semel in mense, aut in die aut in nocte propter rumorem populi vitandum et viri et mulieres conveniunt non ut fornicentur ad iuicem, ut quidam menhis verbis sumit hereticus languentem occasionem...." James Capelli, op. cit., II, 157-58.

<sup>66</sup>"Unde debetis intelligere quod oportet vos diligere deum cum veritate, cum benignitate, cum humilitate, cum misericordia, cum castitate et cum aliis virtutibus bonis, quia scriptum (est): 'Castitas facit hominem esse proximum deo; similiter autem et corruptio facit ellongare.' Et iterum: 'Castitas et virginitas angelis proxima est.'" Antoine Dondaine, Un Traité néo-manichéen, p. 162.



considered themselves to be, would take an oath to chastity and then practice promiscuity in their worship.

Both Catharist ritual and the tenets of their faith absolutely refute these accusations. So does James Capelli, an orthodox clergyman who wrote from personal experience and whose account, on the whole, seems reliable when compared to others. The written accusations, again, derive from early and spurious sources. One of the arguments occasionally used to support these charges is that the perfects, because they did not marry, naturally sought in sexual rituals an outlet for their natural instincts.<sup>67</sup> By the same logic we could expect to find similar activity among the celibate clergy of the orthodox Church. In the face of the evidence I think the stories represent slander and accusation to discredit the Cathar enemy or result from a misunderstanding of their rituals. It was a custom of Cathar perfects to have a female housekeeper travel with them on their journeys, to prepare food and tend to other housekeeping chores. Bernard of Clairvaux, in preaching to the Cathars about this custom, clearly illustrates the possibility of assuming the worst from an observation:

How, then, do you manage to guard your continence? Surely this sort of thing is not permitted you. If you do not happen to know it, the Church forbids men and women who have taken a vow of chastity to live together. If you do not wish to offend the Church,

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<sup>67</sup>See remark by Turberville in chapter II.

send the women away. Otherwise, from this one sin others, though not at present manifest, will undoubtedly be considered probable.<sup>68</sup>

Sex itself was considered no more immoral in the Middle Ages than it is today. The Cathar perfects, however, had vowed chastity, just as had orthodox clergy. For them, then, any sexual activity constituted an immoral act. An abundant literature accuses them of this sin and immorality. Therefore it is important to determine whether or not they actually did engage in sexual activity, deviate or otherwise, contrary to their vows.

The earliest accusation was lodged by Ademar of Chabannes, who wrote at the beginning of the eleventh century.

...Manicheans appeared throughout Aquitaine leading people astray. They denied baptism and the Cross and every sound doctrine. They abstained from food and seemed like monks; they pretended chastity, but among themselves they practised every debauchery.<sup>69</sup>

Here again the account is very early and its application to the Cathars of more than a century later is problematic.

Durand of Huesca, an ex-Waldensian and avowed opponent of the

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<sup>68</sup>"Et quomodo tuta tibi cum ista continentia tua? Sane nec licet tibi istud. Cohabitationem, si nescis, virorum et feminarum in his, qui vovere scandalizare Ecclesiam, eice feminam. Alioquin ex hoc uno cetera, quae non adeo manifesta sunt, procul dubio credibilia fiunt." Bernard of Clairvaux, *op. cit.*, II, 176.

<sup>69</sup>"Paulo post exorti sunt per Aquitane Manichei, seducentes plebam. Negabant baptismum et crucem et quidquid sanae doctrine. Abstinentes a cibis, quasi monachi apparebant et castitatem simulabant, sed inter se ipsos omnem luxuriam exercebant...." Ademar of Chabannes, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

Cathars, is our next witness.<sup>70</sup> He wrote after returning to orthodox Christianity:

For God himself, they say, has two wives, Collam and Colibam, and from them He begat sons and daughters in the manner of humans. On the basis of this belief, some of them believe there is no sin in men and women kissing and embracing each other and even having intercourse, if it should be known, nor can one sin in doing so for payment.<sup>71</sup>

Durand purported to describe Languedocian Cathars, but he stated that he was talking about some of them, not about the perfects as a whole. We should also remember that Durand was a reformed heretic, with perhaps a converts zeal for furthering the newly embraced cause.

Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay is the most damning witness on this subject. In his account of the Crusade, the description of the situation in Toulouse is either exaggeratedly biased or hyperbolically indicative of thirteenth-century rhetoric, for the abominable condition he describes is beyond belief.<sup>72</sup> Whatever the reasons for his rhetoric he does say that the perfects, "...falsely claimed to keep themselves chaste."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>We are not certain Durand is the author of the polemic attributed to him, but, he is commonly named as such and shall be so here. See Christine Thouzellier, Une Somme anti-cathare le Liber contra Manicheos de Durand de Huesca (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1964), pp. 31-32.

<sup>71</sup>"Nam ipsum deum dicunt duas habere uxores, Collam et Colibam, et de ipsis filios et filias humano more generasse. Ex huius fidei respectu quidam illorum credunt non esse peccatum inde osculari et amplectari et etiam concumbere, si quis suam cognoverit, nec peccatum posse committi de pecunia huiusmodi." Antoine Dondaine, "Durand de Huesca et la polemique anti-cathare," Archivum fratrum praedicatorum, XXIX (1959), 270.

<sup>72</sup>Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, op. cit., 213:545.

<sup>73</sup>"...castitatem se tenere mentiebantur...." Ibid., 547.

Ademar, Durand, and Peter are the only three writers who directly accuse the Cathar perfects, as a group, of sexual activity. Other sources provide ambiguities. Bernard of Clairvaux, in Sermon 65 on the Song of Songs, was not sure enough of their engaging in sexual activity to make accusations. In the end of section two and the beginning of section three he wrote: "They are reported to secretly engage in abominable and obscene practices....But I pass over what they would deny. Let them answer to proven facts."<sup>74</sup> In other words, Bernard had heard a foul accusation and was aware of Cathar denials. In the middle of section four, in comparing the virtues of the perfects with those of the apostles, he wrote:

Daily you sit beside a maiden at the table, your bed is next to her bed in the chamber, your eyes [meet] her eyes in conversation, your hands [touch] her hands in work-and do you wish to be thought continent? Perhaps you are, but I doubt it.<sup>75</sup>

Bernard, the cloistered monk, had his suspicions about what the perfects were doing in their mixed communities, but he was not so sure either of their chastity or their unchastity that he wanted to commit his accusations to writing.

Anselm of Alessandria recorded an incident concerning a

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<sup>74</sup>"Nam nefanda et obscena dicuntur agere in secreto....Sed taceo quae negarent; ad manifesta respondeant...." Bernard of Clairvaux, op. cit., II, 173.

<sup>75</sup>"Quotidie latus tuum ad latus iuenculae est in mensa, lectus tuus ad lectum eius in camera, oculi tui ad illius oculos in colloquio, manus tuae ad manus ipsius in opere; et continens vis putari? Esto ut sis; sed ego suspicione non careo." Ibid., II, 175.

specific Cathar perfect, Philip, who upon becoming a Cathar bishop "...after a short time knew two Cathar women, and so leaving the Cathars returned to the secular life with the women."<sup>76</sup> This story of Philip is prime supportive evidence for the accusations. Philip left the Cathars however, and the question, of course, is why did he leave? The inference is that Philip found his philandering incompatible with Cathar discipline. The position of the two women in Anselm's account is open to question. Anselm apparently regarded them as secondary characters for he did no more than mention them as the occasion of sin. He did not identify them as perfects or believers, but we may hypothesize that they were perfects, for Anselm says they also returned to the secular life.

Rainerius Sacconi, writing in Lombardy in the middle of the thirteenth century, said:

When, moreover, anyone of them, after he has received the imposition of hands, commits a sin of the flesh or any other which is a mortal sin according to their belief, he need confess that sin only and no others and may again receive the imposition of the hand....<sup>77</sup>

Rainerius found that if some of the perfects engaged in sexual activity they considered it a mortal sin-hardly grounds for alleging it as a common practice.

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<sup>76</sup>"...post modicum tempus congnoovit duas catharas, et sic relictis catharis reversus est ad seculum cum ambabus." Anselm of Alessandria, op. cit., 310.

<sup>77</sup>"Auando autem quis eorum cadit in peccatum carnis, vel in aliud quod sit secundum opinionem eorum mortale, post receptam manus impositionem, oportet eum confiteri illud peccatum tantum et non alia, et recipere iterum manus impositionem..." Rainerius Sacconi. op. cit., p. 67.

An Italian source from the beginning of the thirteenth century, De heresi catharorum, concerns another Cathar bishop, Garattus:

But within the period agreed upon, Garattus was accused on the testimony of two witnesses of being guilty of relations with a woman, for which reason he was deemed unworthy of the episcopal office by a great many of them....<sup>78</sup>

Here is another Cathar perfect who had broken his vows of chastity, and whose behavior was unacceptable to the rest of the religious community. He was later removed from his office for this behavior.

If these sources leave doubt as to the behavior of the perfects, still others do not for they clearly deny any such immorality. We have already seen that Bernard Gui emphatically asserted their chastity. James Capelli, in writing about the perfects, made a much stronger defense. He said:

...They are, however, most chaste of body. For men and women observing the vow and way of life of this sect are in no way soiled by the corruption of debauchery....Actually, the rumor of the fornication which is said to prevail among them is most false.<sup>79</sup>

Other sources support the statements of Bernard Gui and James Capelli. Guillemette Mauri tells us:

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<sup>78</sup>"Set iste garattus, ante terminum constitutum, duobus testibus astantibus, reprehensibilis, causa unius mulieris, habitus est. Qua de causa a compluribus illorum illius dignitatis indignus creditus est...." De heresi catharorum in Antoine Dondaine, "La Hierarchie cathare en Italie, I: Le'De heresi catharorum in Lombardia,'" Archivum fratrum praedicatorum, XIX, (1949), 307.

<sup>79</sup>"...tantum castissimi quidem sunt corpore. Viri et mulieres illius sectae votum et propositum observantes, nullo modo corruptione luxuriae fedantur....profecto fama fornicationis quae inter eos esse dicitur falsissima est." James Capelli, op. cit., p. clvii.

Although the Bonhommes sometimes live with women, they do not have any contact with them. If it should only happen for them to extend the hand toward them and so touch one, they would not eat or drink for three days and nights. The woman who lives with Monseigneur [Belibaste] takes care of his cooking and makes his bed, so the neighbors believe they are husband and wife. Monseigneur buys meat on Sunday and Thursday that he brings home. As he is obliged to touch this meat with his fingers, he washes them three times before eating or drinking. On other days this woman eats the same things as he. When the heretic dwells permanently in a locality, they sleep in two beds, very far apart. But, when they are travelling they pass themselves for husband and wife in the inns. They lay in the same bed, but completely clothed so that one cannot touch the other or his naked body.<sup>80</sup>

Numerous other examples could be quoted in defense of the chastity of the perfects. The citation of two more accounts from inquisitorial proceedings should suffice to illustrate the point. In a confession before the Inquisition in Toulouse in 1310 a heretic teacher claimed that he would not touch a woman for the whole world. In another, from the same time, a woman related that her father, after he had become a heretic, that is after he had received the consolamentum, told her that she must never again touch him.<sup>81</sup> If these perfects were willing to go these lengths to maintain their purity, can one believe they would willingly engage in any form of sexual activity?

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<sup>80</sup>This account is quoted in René Nelli, La Vie Quotidienne, p. 305. Nelli only identifies his source as an inquisitorial record and I have been unable to locate it.

<sup>81</sup>Henry Charles Lea, op. cit., I, 97, citing Lib. Sententt Inquisition Tolosan, pp. 111, 115.

Not only the orthodox observers, but the Cathars themselves, in their extant sources, make abundant mention of their claim to chastity. Two examples of how they felt about sexual activity among their consorted should suffice. In an early thirteenth-century treatise written by an Albigensian heretic, we find him, or her, expressing the Cathar beliefs by commenting on Scripture.

"Know you this, that no fornicator or unclean or covetous person, (which is serving idols) hath inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." [Eph. 5:5] Wherefore, we say that if the present kingdom, whose king we know to be iniquitous, were the kingdom of Christ and of God, never would it have such inhabitants nor would it be destroyed.<sup>82</sup>

Out of context this passage seems to be more of a Cathar argument for the evil God's creation of this physical world. However, the remainder of the treatise has sufficient examples to show its intent was to condemn fornication. Another Cathar writing, also from the thirteenth century, explicitly announces their position by saying:

This Church [Cathar] refrains from adultery and all uncleanness, for our Lord Jesus Christ says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." [Matt. 19:18] ...And again He says: "From the heart come forth evil thoughts, adulteries, and fornications, and these are the things that defile a man." [Matt. 15:19-20]<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>"Hoc scitote, quod omnis fornicator aut immundus aut avarus, quod est idolorum servitus, non habet hereditatem in regno Christi et Dei.' Ideoque dicimus quod, si presens regnum, cuius regem novimus esse iniquum, esset regnum Christi et Dei nunquam tales possessores haberet nec corrumpetur." Christine Thouzellier, Un Traité cathare, p. 93.

<sup>83</sup>"Aquesta gleisa se garda de avotrar e de tota socura: car lo nostre Segnor Yesu Christ dis 'Non avotraras.' ...E dereco dis: 'Del cor sallon malas cogitations, avoteri e fornicacions, e aquestas cosas socan l'ome.'" Theo. Venckleer, op. cit., 824.



From this evidence some conclusions concerning sexual behavior among Cathar perfects can be drawn. The reliability of accusers is questionable, either because they wrote before Catharism had defined itself or because hostile influence more than observation had formed their testimony. Many accounts concern individual perfects, not the perfects as a group, and these show Cathar condemnation of sexual activity. Even Bernard of Clairvaux, a man who spent considerable time and effort attempting to eradicate a heresy he thought abominable, perverse, and a threat to the Church, did not accuse the perfects of sexual activity, deviant or otherwise. He objected to their living with women because this provided opportunity for temptation and gave a bad example, not because he knew them to have yielded to the temptation. Cathar sources, as well as Bernard Gui and James Capelli, categorically deny such accusations. In many other sources it is unclear whether the writers are referring to the perfects or to ordinary believers, and so those are not particularly useful. On the evidence in available sources, it is safe to conclude that the Cathar perfects did not, as a group, engage in sexual activity. That some of the perfects followed their instincts to natural conclusions is not surprising. Cathar perfects, like Catholic priests, were not all able to live as perfectly as they believed they should. Nevertheless, the perfects knew their salvation depended, in part, upon chastity, and as a group they adhered to this chastity in principle and in practice.

CHAPTER IV  
THE BELIEVERS

Before beginning our examination of the moral, or immoral, behavior of the Cathar believers let us define just what, or who, a "believer" was. The believers were not just those people who agreed with the doctrines of the Cathar Church. They were active participants in the religion and its ceremonies, people who resolutely intended to receive the consolamentum prior to their deaths, so that they might attain salvation at the end of their present physical existence. They were "active" rather than "passive" believers, but they were not Cathars in the fullest sense of the word, that is, they had not become pure.<sup>84</sup> The contemporary sources almost unan-  
imously identify as a believer anyone accused of being a Cathar who was not a perfect. Thus, not all accusations hurled at Cathar believers are accurate in identifying their subjects. No twelfth or thirteenth-century person who believed in or supported the Cathar faith was a believer until he had taken steps to identify himself as such. An historian studying the morality of Cathar believers must keep this definition in mind when he examines a source, especially since the sources themselves often were not aware

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<sup>84</sup> For support of this differentiation see the following letters: Everwini Steinfeldensis praepositi ad S. Bernardum, PL 182:676-80; and Epistola ecclesiae Leodiensis ad Lucum papam II in Edmond Martene and Ursin Durand, Veterum scriptorum et monumentorum historicum, dogmaticarum, moralium amplissima collectio (Paris: Montalant, 9 vols., 1724-1733), I, 776-78.

of, or did not make clear this distinction.

"The credentes or simple 'believers' were evidently allowed to be very loose in their morals...."<sup>85</sup> This is a statement by Jeffrey Russell and as we have seen above he is not alone in this view.<sup>86</sup> Yet no historian has taken sufficient steps to support this judgment by examining the primary sources and many merely refer their reader to another modern sourceless author. One wonders just why this should be so. The answer to this question, I suspect, is an easy one: the sources supporting this accusation, sources specifying believers, as an entity, are practically nonexistent.

Amid the numerous sources accusing the Cathars of immorality, I have been able to find only three contemporaries of the Cathars who made direct accusations against the believers as a group. The first of these, Walter Map, has been classified above as a gossipier with little or no experience with Cathars. However, I include his account because it fills a lacuna of other accounts and does make a serious charge. Walter wrote in 1182 that after the masters (perfects) had engaged in lascivious acts they:

...also say, and teach the novices, that it is perfect charity to do or suffer what brother or sister may have desired or sought, namely, to

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<sup>85</sup> Jeffrey Russell, Religious Dissent in the Middle Ages (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971), p. 55.

<sup>86</sup> See the comments by Maycock and Guiraud in chapter II.

soothe one another when burning with passion....<sup>87</sup>

Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay provides us with most of the evidence and he was not at all reluctant to express his opinions regarding the behavior of the believers. He wrote:

Those who were known as believers were absorbed in usury, robbery, murder, lewdness, perjury, and all sorts of perversities. They felt, in truth, more secure and unbridled in their sinning because they believed that they would be saved, without restitution of ill-gotten gains, without confession and penance, so long as they were able in the last throes of death to repeat the Lord's Prayer and receive the imposition of hands by their officials.<sup>88</sup>

Rainerius Sacconi, the one-time heretic become Dominican friar who appeared in our study on the perfects, is chronologically the last contemporary witness who specifically identified the objects of his accusations as Cathar believers. In writing on the false penance of the Cathars, Rainerius observed

...that many of them who have been infected by the errors set forth above often grieve when they recall that they did not indulge their passions more frequently in the days when they had not yet professed the heresy of the Cathars. Moreover, this is why many believers, both men and women, no more fear to

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<sup>87</sup>"Dicunt etiam magistri docentque novitios caritatem esse perfectam agere vel pati quod desideraverit et petierit frater aut soror, extinguere scilicet invicem ardentes...." Walter Map, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>88</sup>"Qui dicebantur credentes haeticorum, dediti erant usuris, rapinis, homicidiis et carnis illecebris, perjuriis et perversitatibus universis. Isti siquidem ideo securius et effrenatius peccabant, quia credebant sine restitutione ablatorum, sine confessione et poenitentia se esse salvandos, dummodo in supremo mortis articulo Pater noster dicere, et manuum impositionem recipere a magistris suis potuissent." Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, op. cit., PL 213:547.

give themselves to sister or brother, daughter or son, niece or nephew, relation by blood or marriage, than to their own wife or husband....That they do not feel contrition for sins committed before the profession of their heresy is clearly proved by the fact that they make restitution to no man for usury, theft, or rapine....<sup>89</sup>

One other statement of Rainerius seems apposite, but we must read it with caution. In explaining the Cathar custom of "breaking bread" he said that the ranking member in the ceremony "...breaks the loaf, or loaves, and distributes the bread to all those at the table, not only to Cathars but also to their believers, to thieves, adulterers, and murderers."<sup>90</sup> By this statement, Rainerius seems to be accusing the believers of being thieves, adulterers, and murderers since non-believers would not be permitted to participate in the ceremony. On the other hand he might have been making a distinction between believers and miscreants.

These three accounts comprise the body of contemporary sources on Catharism specifically identifying believers. With one exception, other accounts are far too ambiguous in their designations to be

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<sup>89</sup>"...quod multi ex eis, qui infecti sunt erroribus memoratis, saepe dolent dum recolunt quod non adimpleverunt saepius libidinem suam tempore quo nondum professi fuerant haeresim Catharorum. Et haec est etiam causa quare multi credentes tam viri quam mulieres non timent magis accedere ad sororem suam vel fratrem, filiam seu filium, naptem vel (nepotem), consanguineam vel cognatum quam ad uxorem et virum proprium....Probatur etiam manifeste quod non dolent de peccatis suis, quae ante professionem haeresis suae commiserunt, pro eo quod nulli homini restituunt usuram, furtum aut rapinam...." Rainerius Sacconi, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>90</sup>"...frangit panem, sive panes, et distribuit omnibus discumbentibus, non solum Catharis sed etiam credentibus suis, latronibus, adulteris et homicidis," Ibid., p. 65.

useful to this study. The one exception is Guibert, Abbot of Nogent. Guibert wrote in 1114 and, although his accusation is not specifically aimed at believers, the possibility he was referring to believers is great enough that his charges must be considered. He wrote that

...You may see men living with women without joining in marriage and name, in such a manner that man does not dwell with woman, male with female, but men are known to lie with men, women with women...<sup>91</sup>

Contemporary accusations and confessions of sexual immorality among Cathar believers were made and damning, but can they be applied generally to the company of believers? Accusations against and confessions by individuals to inquisitors can be found; whether these accounts involved believers, much less perfects, or even Catholics unfortunate enough to find themselves accused of heresy, is an unanswerable question. Even these records are extremely rare and such confessions might easily have been invented merely for the purpose of escaping punishment or death. This invention can be assumed, and was assumed although perhaps unconsciously by Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, for he wrote that "they ceased to sin, not from love of virtue, but as the poet says, from fear of punishment."<sup>92</sup> We know from the inquisitor's manuals that a good inquisitor was to elicit specific

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<sup>91</sup>"...et certe cum per Latinum conspersi sint orbem, videas viros mulieribus cohabitare sine mariti conjugisque nomine, ita ut vir cum foemina, singulus cum singula, non moretur, sed viri cum viris, foeminae cum foeminis cubitare noscantur...." Guibert of Nogent, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>92</sup>"Sique ipsi, non virtutis amore, sed, secundum poetam: Oderunt peccare mali, formidine poenae." Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, *op. cit.*, PL 213:545.

answers to his questions, and it seems reasonable that the Cathars, perfects and believers, as well as unfortunate Catholics, confessed to acts which they did not commit, or beliefs which they did not profess, in order to escape torture or death by fire. We know, for instance, that some heretics quickly returned to Catharism after their having lapsed during their ordeal with the Inquisition.<sup>93</sup>

The evidence of general and condoned sexual immorality among Cathar believers remains inconclusive and unconvincing. Admittedly I have not been able to examine each and every inquisitorial record, but those I have examined provide no support for such accusations. I am inclined to agree with Henry Charles Lea, who after an exhaustive study of the Inquisition wrote concerning allegation of orgies, wanton intercourse, and infanticide, that

The candid and intelligent inquisitors who had the best means of knowing the truth admit that they have no foundation in fact; and in many hundreds of examinations and sentences which I have read there is no allusion to anything of the kind, except some proceedings of Fra. Antonio Secco among the Alpine valleys in 1387.<sup>94</sup>

There are no sources which credit the believers with pure and chaste lives and thus refute the statements of Rainerius, Peter, and Walter Map. The reason for this is twofold. In the first place no one was interested in writing about an average community of people who lived average lives according to the moral expectations of the day. We do not find such descriptions of people today nor do we

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<sup>93</sup>Célestin Douais, Documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'Inquisition dans le Languedoc (Paris: Renouard, 2 vols., 1890), II, 8.

<sup>94</sup>Henry Charles Lea, op. cit., I, 101.

find them of faithful Catholic communities of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It is only the exceptional individuals, the saint and notorious sinner, who merit recognition. Why would we expect to find narratives about the ordinary believers if they were merely persons living according to ordinary moral standards? In the second place, since all of our accounts come from Catholic hands whose duty it was to discredit the heresy and the heretics, we can hardly expect to find them praising those same people for living a life according to Christian moral standards.

In spite of counter-motivation to credit Cathar believers with upright living we are fortunate in having some few examples which may do just that. Although one may conjecture whether or not the objects of the accounts are perfects or believers, the possibility, or even probability, that they are believers is enough to warrant including such statements in this study. The first comes from William of Puylaurens, who in his chronicle related a story he had heard concerning Cathar behavior. Fulk, bishop of Toulouse from 1206 to 1231, was questioning the knight Pons of Ademar-de-Rodelle why the Cathars were not expelled from his lands. Pons responded that this could not be done, for his people were raised with the Cathars, had relatives among them, and saw them live honestly. William commented on this story that the reason accusations against the Cathars were so little heeded was because they appeared to live pure lives.<sup>95</sup> This source does not identify the Cathars as believers

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<sup>95</sup>William of Puylaurens, *op. cit.*, p. 224.



or perfects and, excepting William's comment, provides only second-hand information. But William was a chronicler of the Crusade and a notary of the Inquisition and he was unlikely to have included the story, or support it with his comment, if he thought it had no truth or importance. In any event it supports the following account of Ralph of Coggeshall about an unfortunate young girl who fell into the hands of one of the Catholic faithful.

It seems that one Master Gervais of Tilbury, a cleric of his lord William, archbishop of Reims ca. 1180, was out walking in a vineyard one day and came upon a young girl.

He greeted her and attentively inquired whose daughter she was and what she was doing there alone. And then, after admiring her beauty for a while, he at length, in courtly fashion, made her a proposal of wanton love. She was much abashed, and with eyes cast down, she answered him with simple gesture and a gravity of speech: "Good youth, the Lord does not desire me ever to be your friend or the friend of any man, for if ever I forsook my virginity and my body had once been defiled, I should most assuredly fall under eternal damnation without hope of recall." As he heard this, Master Gervais at once realized she was one of that most impious sect of Publicans....<sup>96</sup>

There are many unanswered questions in this account. We cannot be

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<sup>96</sup>Quam salutans, et unde et cujus esset filia, et quidam ibidem sola ageret, diligenter inquirens, cum ejus pulchritudinem diutius attendisset, hanc tandem de amore lascivo curialiter affatur. Cui illi simplici gestu et cum quadam verborum gravitate respondit, vix juvenem respicere volens: 'Numquam velit Deus, O bone adolescens, ut tua amica, sive alicujus umquam hominis existam, quia si virginitatem amissem et caro mea semel corrupta esset, aeternae damnationi proculdubio absque omni remedio subjacerem.' Quod audiens magister Gervais intellexit protinus hanc esse de illa impiissima secta Publicanorum...." Radulphi de Coggeshall, Chronicon anglicanum (ed. Joseph Stevenson, Rolls Series, LXVI; London: Longmans, 1875), p. 122.

sure the girl was a perfect or a believer, or even if she was a Cathar. If she was, the circumstances, her age, and seeming innocence, would indicate she was either a believer or a mere follower, for the Cathars, at this early date, did not accept children into the ranks of the perfect. Even if she had been perfected, the mention of her virginity indicates she had not engaged in sexual relations earlier. If, then, she was a believer as I suggest, her conduct certainly refutes the accusations made above by earlier writers. Regardless of her position in the Cathar Church, the real importance of this story extends well beyond the two persons involved, for it shows that a person was accused of being a Cathar not because of her immorality, but because of her dedication to a moral life. If adherents of Catharism could be identified by their high moral standards, could they simultaneously be accused of debauchery?

I have said that neither the orthodox nor the Cathar sources claim unusually righteous or moral behavior among the believers. But Cathar rituals do make it clear that believers were expected to observe what their contemporaries considered a normally strict way of life.

In a Cathar ritual the believer, prior to receiving the consolamentum, would say: "Brothers and sisters, if I have said or done anything against God and my salvation, pray to the Lord God for me, that he have mercy on me."<sup>97</sup> This supplication indicates that the

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<sup>97</sup>"Fratres et sorores, si dixissem vel fecissem aliquid contra deum et salutem meam, rogate dominum deum pro me quod ipse michi parcat." Dondaine, Un Traité néo-manichéen, p. 156.

believer considered a life style according to Catharist doctrine and standards of moral living to be a prerequisite for those who wished to be saved. As a modern historian has put it:

The faithful, then, were by no means lacking in a sense of moral and religious obligation....In fact their whole lives were supposed to be a preparation for the consolamentum...."<sup>98</sup>

Any conclusions we might draw concerning the behavior of believers must come from the sources here cited. They are contradictory to be sure, but all other sources are entirely silent on the subject. The lack of evidence convicting believers of immoral behavior, the prejudices of the witnesses who do mention it, the evidence of morality among believers--if indeed they were believers--and the Cathar ritual itself all tend to indicate that the believers led lives no more or less moral than did their Catholic contemporaries. On the basis of the contradictory sources absolute conclusions cannot yet be drawn on the subject of believer morality. An important aspect of the problem, and one which will surely support the conclusions drawn above, concerns not the moral standards accepted by Cathar believers, for we have seen that that was similar to, or identical with, orthodox standards, but the believer's attitude to deviations from these standards. Were actions which outsiders considered normal to Cathars considered by the Cathars themselves sin? If the believers of the sect thought that a deviation from the standard imperiled their

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<sup>98</sup>Jacque Madaule, The Albigensian Crusade, an Historical Essay (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967), p. 43.

salvation at the end of the present incarnation, it would necessarily follow that they would make every effort to follow that moral standard.

The basis then, on which we might posit the moral behavior of Cathar believers, is the answer to the question of whether or not adulterous, incestuous, and lascivious sex behavior was considered a sin, an act detrimental to salvation. Nelli is the only scholar I know of who has dealt with the question in any depth. His conclusions have been summarized above with the thesis that, although physical acts could not be a sin against the good God, the creator of the spirit, all commerce with those aspects of existence having to do with the evil creation must be overcome and avoided. Therefore incest, adultery, and lasciviousness were indeed "sins" which blocked the Cathar from the salvation he sought. If a believer is defined as one who is an active participant in the Cathar Church and has taken steps to provide for his salvation, then his deviation from Cathar moral standards would be a sin which he, as a member of the community of believers, would avoid. The followers of Catharism, persons who had not ritually joined the Church and had not taken steps to insure their salvation and were fated to incarnation, would not fall into the purview of this study. As outsiders they could commit the deeds of which Cathars were accused with neither fear nor contrition because a deviation from Cathar moral standards would not yet adversely affect their impending salvation. This interpretation of the sources, if accepted, must lead to the

conclusion that statements accusing Cathar believers of immoral, lascivious, and unnatural sexual behavior are ill-founded and inappropriate.

## CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I have endeavored to cite all the available sources which have direct bearing on the question of whether or not the Cathars, perfects or believers, engaged in activities outside the standards of moral behavior accepted by their Catholic contemporaries. In particular I have examined for the perfects, allegations of the endura, infanticide, and any form of sexual activity, within or outside religious ceremonies, for the believers such unnatural sexual behavior as sodomy, homosexuality, and excessive licentiousness. The sources cited herein are, to my knowledge, the only ones that provide pertinent evidence. Other sources, which often mention such behavior, are spurious, ambiguous for one reason or another, and fall outside the limits of this study. From these sources, then, as well as logical reasoning and historical perspective I draw my conclusions. The perfects and believers have been treated separately and conclusions must observe this separation.

Evidence concerning the perfects offers little difficulty. The endura seems rarely, if ever, to have been practiced during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Rainerius Sacconi is the only source who directly alleged the practice and his statement was in total opposition to that of James Capelli. Even if we are to credit Rainerius' accusation, we must note that he was speaking of perfects who were ill. Nowhere do we have a source accusing healthy

perfects of taking their own lives merely to hasten salvation. Many stories are accessible and well documented of Cathar perfects who heroically martyred themselves by walking unassisted into the flames or committed suicide while imprisoned awaiting either inquisitors or death.<sup>99</sup> If we were to consider these perfects as suicides, we would be entirely correct. We could not, however, assign to the suicide a religious connotation; for it was committed as a lesser of two evils. The Cathars committed suicide rather than deny their faith and in this they were following the examples of the early Christian martyrs. None of these reported events can be considered endura. Most Cathar believers waited until they were certain of death's imminence before they received the consolamentum. This deathbed elevation to the rank of perfect minimized their opportunity, or temptation, to commit a mortal sin, and enabled them to avoid the strict asceticism required of the perfects. The fact that most Cathars died shortly after becoming perfected is thus easily explained and it is not necessary to believe that they intentionally starved themselves to death. If a believer were anxious enough to hasten his arrival in the spiritual world by suicide he would not wait until late in life to commit it. From this evidence, or lack of evidence, I think it safe to conclude that the endura was not practised during the twelfth and thirteenth

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<sup>99</sup>One good example is Caesarius of Heisterbach, Dialogus miraculorum, V, xxi (ed. Joseph Strange; Cologne, 2 vols., 1851), I, 302.

centuries, and that Cathar customs were misconstrued by those unfamiliar with them as ritual suicide.

The charge of infanticide among the perfects deserves less consideration. We have no charge of infant ritual murder after the eleventh century and none reliable before then. Similar charges have been made against religious sects throughout history: Christians accusing Jews of killing Christian children to use their blood in rituals and Romans accusing Christians of the same. The charge of infanticide is not based on factual evidence, is not recorded by any reliable source, is totally contradictory to Cathar doctrine, and is therefore to be rejected utterly.

The final charge against the perfects concerns their sexual activity. In this thesis I have differentiated between sex during religious ceremonies and sex during the perfects' day-to-day living. From the evidence presented I conclude that the perfects maintained chaste lives ritually and ordinarily. James Capelli, Bernard Gui and Bernard of Clairvaux are but a few of the contemporaries well acquainted with Cathars who, although not hesitant to denounce the perfects on other charges, found no reason to accuse them of immoral behavior. We have evidence of unchaste and even grossly licentious Cathar perfects. We have similar evidence concerning individual Catholic priests of the time, as of our own time, and yet few moralists charge the Catholic clergy as a whole of being grossly immoral and unchaste. The lack of evidence against the perfects, coupled with the sources which indicate their strict



asceticism and chastity, must necessarily lead us to conclude that charges of sexual perversity against them are also false.

In addition to the sources which enable us to make the above conclusions, one other factor has commonly been neglected by historians of Catharism, the climate of reform during the twelfth century. Many reform movements were initiated within, as well as outside, the Catholic Church during the centuries under examination. Pope Gregory VII, Saint Francis, and Peter Waldo, to name a few, tried to purify the institutional Church and reawaken Christian fervor. All of these movements aimed at a spiritual renewal of the Church, a return to the apostolic purity which their advocates thought had been tarnished. The Cathar Church can, in many ways, be considered a part of this reform movement; in fact, many historians of heresies have concluded that the Cathars, like other heretical movements, had their origins at least in part in a spirit of reform.<sup>100</sup> The Cathar Church had no power structure, no organized hierarchy, no administrative apparatus. Its strong appeal and rapid growth may be seen as a reaction by society to the laxity and corruption of the orthodox clergy. Having no power structure, the Cathars had to depend upon preaching and example for their growth and popularity. Their power came from moral persuasion; Cathar perfects lived a spiritual life as the populace thought the Catholic clergy should have been doing. The fact that some of the

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<sup>100</sup>Wakefield and Evans, op. cit., p. 7.

orthodox clergy were visibly corrupt, debauched, and lax in their spiritual duties is commonly accepted and evidenced by the proliferation of reform movements. If the popularity of Catharism were partly or wholly a reaction to this corruption of the Catholic clergy, any immoral behavior on the part of the Cathar perfects would have detracted from this popularity, not have supported it. A Cathar Church led by perfects as morally corrupt as many of the orthodox clergy they were reacting against would surely not have grown.

When we try to arrive at conclusions regarding the believers, we find the situation less discernible. The task is not, however, an impossible one, and the evidence allows us to advance conclusions with some degree of certitude.

We have only three sources which support the accusations of immoral behavior among the believers: Walter Map, Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, and Rainerius Sacconi. Although many other sources make similar accusations, they are either aimed at individuals or aimed so generally that we cannot be sure of their target.

Walter Map was an Englishman writing a collection of legends and gossip. He had, as far as I know, never been to Southern France and had never personally encountered the Cathars. All his tales repeat hearsay and gossip. And, if we are to give credence to his accusations against the believers, we must also believe his other statements: about black Cathar cats of marvelous size who climbed down ropes, fish which disappeared, people who emerged

from houses burnt to the ground without even having had their clothing scorched, and houses that would not burn because of Cathar magic.<sup>101</sup> Walter's reliability as an historical source is open to question.

We have commented earlier on the account of Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, the man who made the harshest accusations. We must take into account Peter's rhetorical exaggerations and his position. He was a young Cistercian monk, probably about twenty, who was following the crusading armies of Simon de Montfort. In zeal if not in act he was a warrior against Catharism and as such he surely believed it was his obligation, as well as his ambition, to destroy a heresy he thought advancing the downfall of Christendom. His whole account reflects his enthusiasm for his task and reveals his bias.<sup>102</sup> Although this does not prove his observations wrong, it does argue extreme caution in dealing with him.

Rainerius Sacconi seems to have been the most knowledgeable witness of Cathar activity, for he himself had been a Cathar for seventeen years.<sup>103</sup> To him we owe much of our knowledge about the beliefs and practices of the Cathars. This familiarity is not a valid reason for giving credence to his accusations of immorality however, for by the time he wrote his summa he had left the Cathars, and had become a Dominican friar and zealous inquisitor. His

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<sup>101</sup>Walter Map, op. cit., pp. 61-63.

<sup>102</sup>Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, op. cit., PL 213:541-712.

<sup>103</sup>Rainerius Sacconi, op. cit., p. 66.

attitude towards the Cathars had changed from sympathy to hatred and he made no secret of a desire to exterminate them. He wrote his summa to inform Catholics of the danger of Catharism. Surely so eager an apostate would not be above embellishing his account of his former confrères to further his objectives.

The three main witnesses against the believers wrote in circumstances that, at the least, undermine their credibility. On the other hand, we have Catholic accounts asserting Cathars' high moral standards, the writings of the Cathars themselves declaring the necessity of pure living, and an example of inquisitors using this very purity as a means to discover the heretics. Evidence does exist of Cathars living immoral lives, but again I must reiterate the distinction between believers and "followers." None of the accusations makes this essential distinction, and while immoral activity imperiled the believers' salvation it was not immediately detrimental to those not active in Cathar rituals. In this elementary distinction, I think, lies the answer to the dilemma of contradictory evidence.

The believers most assuredly led lives as moral as those of their Catholic contemporaries, but many of the followers of Catharism did not and they were mistaken for believers by outsiders who did not perceive the distinction. The Cathar was faced with two courses of action. He could either take steps to insure salvation at the end of his present physical existence, steps which included becoming a believer and a perfect through ritual and the

leading of an ascetic and upright life, or he could continue as a mere believer in the religion and do as he wished, worrying about salvation in his next incarnation and knowing full well that his salvation would eventually be insured.

The evidence and its interpretation lead me to conclude that many historians have erred in their statements regarding the immoral behavior of Cathar perfects and believers. Those historians who have treated committed Cathars, those believers and perfects who accepted and participated in the Cathar Church and its rituals, as less moral than committed Christians are incorrect and their error should not be transmitted to future students.

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