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THE REFORMERS AND THE HERETICS: The Reforms of the mid-eleventh century Catholic Church and the rise of Catharism

By

Matthew David England

An Honors Capstone

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Honors Diploma

to

The Honors College

of

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Abstract

This Paper examines the connections between reforms in the Catholic Church in the Eleventh Century and the rise of the Cathar Heresy. This is shown by explaining how the Cathar through their theology and action would appear as a moral alternative to the Catholic Church because of Church corruption. This paper will also explain how some of the Church reformers and the Cathars shared similar belief about of the morality of clergy. The failures of the Catholic Church's reforms will be shown to provide a major reason for why Catharism was popular among the common people in Western Europe. This paper will also examine heretics called Radical Gregorian and show them as the midway point between the Catholic Reformers and the Cathar Heretics. The paper will also explain how the Cathar in their words and actions practiced Donaism. This information will then be combined with the reason why Catharism gained prominence in Southern France and Northern France to determine why Catharism emerged in the late Twelfth century.

Introduction

In the year of 1143 near the town of Cologne, Germany, a new heresy first appeared in the historical records. This Heresy would soon become the most widespread case of Heresy for the Catholic Church since Late Antiquity and would not be surpassed until the Reformation in the Sixteenth century. This heresy called, by most historians, Catharism was consider a heresy for a variety of reasons. The most prominent reason was that the Cathar theology was based upon the idea of there being two equal in power gods, one that was good and one that evil, instead of one singular god. The Cathars also structured their priesthood differently than their Catholic counterparts along with having a different requirements for a person to get into heaven. The Church also did not like the Cathars as they held great sway over the populaces of Southern France and Northern Italy in the late Twelfth and early Thirteenth century. This combination of the heresy being both popular and holding ideas very different from the Catholic Church lead to a crusade being declared on the Cathars in Southern France. The important questions about the Cathar are both their origins and the reason they gained a numbers of followers. An answer to this can be discerned by first examining the name of the Cathars themselves.

The term Cathar, is a term of unclear origins. Some theorize the word comes from the Greek word *Katharos* (pure) or the German word *Katze* (cat), the reasoning being that cats were associated with sin, perversion, and witchcraft in medieval Europe. However, the Cathars never actually called themselves as that, instead referring to themselves in a variety of different terms. Some of the terms that the Cathars called themselves include adherents, believers, Friends of

God, Good Men, Good Christians, and the Known.¹ Of the terms, the Cathars used on themselves, the one that best describes the appeal of Catharism to a common people would be the term Good Christians. The common folk had little trust and confidence in the Catholic Church. This lack of trust toward the Church would allow for a group appearing as moral Christian to gain followers and supporters

The appeal of Catharism through moral superiority played an important role in the formation and spread of this heresy. While the first recorded account of the Cathars' existence was in the year of 1143 by a Catholic priest at a monastery near Cologne, Germany, the writing makes it clear that the Cathars had existed earlier than 1143.² Therefore, what were the origins of the Cathar Heresy? By looking a century before the first confirmation of Catharism in the historical record, hints emerge. The programs of reform occurring in the middle of the eleventh century that began under the reign of Pope Gregory VII in 1049 lead to new concerns about corruption.³ The reforms were important in revealing the corruption of the Catholic Church to the common people of Medieval Europe and to alienating them.⁴ This alienation soon allowed for the appearance of various heresies that appeared to offer an authentic take on Christianity. The end point for this study is likely the Albanese Crusade in the early thirteenth century as that

¹ Jenifer Kolpacoff Deane. *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition: Critical Issues in History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 29.

² Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 25-26.

³ Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2015, 135)

⁴ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 146-147.

was a major turning point for Catharism, as it saw the near destruction of Catharism in Southern France.

The problem with studying the mid-Eleventh century Catholic Church reforms and the Cathars' rise to prominence is while there a decent amount of primary sources on the topic; most of them are heavily biased. The bias in the primary documents is due to the sources' origins in the Catholic Church. Catholic clergy members, who had an obvious bias against the Cathars and chronicled the Cathars' history. Another notable contemporary source for information on the Cathars were the records of the Inquisition which suffered both from Catholic bias and coercion of Cathars. There is however some surviving Cathar sources, but most are more concerned with their theology, dogma, and ritual than with the sect's origins.

Most modern historians seem to agree on various aspects of Catharism, such as their origins and relationship with the Catholic Church. An example of this is in Kevin Madigan's argument that the corruption of the Catholic Church revealed to the commoner through the actions of church reformers in the mid-eleventh century was a major factor in both the creation and popularity of Catharism.⁵ Historians also share another notable consensus related to the origins of Catharism. This consensus involves the Cathars' relationship with another dualist heresy, the Bogmils. The Bogmils were a heretical group from Eastern Europe who had a similar theology to the Catharism based on Dualism and had contact with the Cathar during the 1160s and 1170s. Deane focuses on the Cathars and shows the idea that they were a part of or directly descended from the Eastern Christian Heresy called the Bogomil, was a historically shaky explanation for the origins of Catharism. The reason for this historical shakiness is the fact that

⁵Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 146-147.

all recorded instants of contact between the two groups gives the appearance that both group started out separately with some differences between the groups' theology. ⁶

The idea of the Cathars' formation and spread was a response toward people's distrust of the Catholic Church is one that reappears in most of the secondary sources for this paper. The writing of two scholars cited in this paper heavily supports this idea. Carol Lansing shows how the common people were alienated from the Catholic Church around the time Catharism first appears.⁷ Malcom Barber also relates how the perceived corruption of the Catholic clergy helped the spread of Catharism, as the book asserts that the main appeal of Catharism was behavior of Cathar priests, appeared less corrupt than the Catholic Clergy.⁸

Based on this research, a conclusion can emerge on the connection between the mid-Eleventh century reform of the Catholic Church and the rise of Catharism. This connection being that the Church's reforms caused alienation toward themselves due to them revealing their corruption to their constituents. This reveal weakened the authority and trust said constituent had toward the Church and made them much more open to the idea of Heresies like Catharism. This openness toward Catharism from an alienated constituent was help by the Cathar priesthoods appearing much more moral and devote compared to the Catholic Clergy. This appeal of Catharism combined with a region facing both weak political authority and very corrupt clergy

⁶Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 30-32.

⁷ Carol Lansing, *Power & Purity: Cathar Heresy in Medieval Italy*, (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1998), 40.

⁸ Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars : Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages, The Medieval World* (New York : Longman, 2000,) 105-106.

made the regions of Southern France and Northern Italy hotbeds for Catharism. How Church reforms lead to the rise of Catharism is it important to explain why these reforms happened in the first place.

Church Corruption and the Causes of Reforms

To understand the cause for mid-eleventh century Church reform, which led to the Cathars' emergence, it is a good idea to understand why the church needed to be reformed. The Church experienced two major forms of corruption in the early Eleventh century, these being the act of simony, clerical marriage, and concubinage. Simony refers to the act of purchasing a church or ecclesial office from the lord who owned the land where the office was located.⁹ Simony was also problem in the issues of their qualification and relationship with the lord who gave them their title. An example of these issues relating to Simony appears in a letter of complaint from the Viscount of Narbonne against the Archbishop of Narbonne in 1056. Several things are notable in this letter, first is that the Viscount describes mostly the great wealth of the previous archbishop and very little of his faith and moral behavior. The second, main issue of the letter is more how the Viscount sold the title archbishop to the son of a relative of his wife and how that decision has cause him a great deal of trouble with the archbishop.¹⁰

The other major type of corruption occurring in the Catholic Church in the early eleventh century was that many clergymen had either wives or concubines. One of the more prominent

⁹ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity* 119-120.

¹⁰ Berengar, "Complaint of Berengar, viscount of Narbonne, against Wifred, archbishop of Narbonne, presented before a church council in Toulouse," in *The Crisis of Church and State 1050-1300*, ed. Brian Tierney (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1964,) 29-30.

reasons was that the minimum age for a priest's ordination was thirty, meaning in that time period they were likely already married and having kids by this point in their life.. Before the reforms, most of the clergy in Western Europe in the year of 1050 had at least one spouse. Reformists felt marriage was tainting the clergy.¹¹ The fact that most priest had wives and/or concubines combined with many of the ecclesial offices having being bought from nobles rather than promoted through their own faithfulness set the stage for the reform of Church canon law in the mid-Eleventh Century.

Another cause for these reforms was the result of a shift in focus of the Church from Old Testament law to the life and Acts of the Apostles that began in the 1040s. The reason for this shift is unknown, but several theories have appeared on this topic ranging from the fact that the New Testament better justified the Church's secular power or priests simply wanting the Church to become more like the primitive earlier church. The priests who studied the Acts of the Apostles concluded that the apostles with their communal lifestyle and renouncement of private property lived like contemporary monks and should serve as the basis for how priests should live. These readings also lead the Reformers to conclude that there is nothing in either the Scriptures or the canon law that justified simony or clerical marriage. This reformist movement then started gaining power in the church and starting with the reign of Pope Leo IX in 1049, who before becoming pope had already made a name for himself as a reformer in Lotharinga.,¹²

The first of the reformer popes, Pope Leo IX, program for reforming the church is shown early in his reign at the councils in Rhiems and Mainz. Leo's decree at Council of Rheims has a

¹¹ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 128.

¹²Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 124-126.

condemnation of simony, non-priests holding ecclesiastical offices, and fees for things such as Baptism or visiting the sick.¹³ The Council of Mainz saw Leo with the backing of the Holy Roman Emperor condemning both simony and clerical marriage. Leo also held trails outside of Rome with the purpose of punishing and revealing the corruption of clergymen to their constituent. While Leo started the church reforms with condemning both Simony and Clerical marriage, it was up to his successor to enforce these condemnations. The first notable enforcement of Leo's reforms was a church synod in 1059, which changed Canon Law to ban clerical marriage along with the Vatican telling the common people that they should refuse to attend any mass done by a married priest. This idea of ignoring clerical actions due to the corruption of the priest was rather close to a group of heresies referred to as Neo-Donatism, which would play a major role in both future papal reformers and future heresies.¹⁴

While the popes that succeed Leo IX were mostly reformist, a major push for reform did not come until 1073 with Gregory VII becoming Pope with a reputation of being a very aggressive reformer.¹⁵ Pope Gregory started his career in the Vatican as a sub-deacon who served as one of the pro-reformist advisors for Pope Leo IX.¹⁶ Gregory continued to serve as one of the more outspoken voices for reform in the Vatican after Leo's death before being becoming

¹³ Pope Leo IX, "Decrees of Councils of Rheims in *the Crisis of Church and State 1050-1300*, ed. Brian Tierney (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 31-32.

¹⁴ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 128-129.

¹⁵ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 134.

¹⁶ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity* 126.

pope himself in 1073.¹⁷ Gregory's reform policies were a continuation of Leo's reform program. These policies show up in a letter from Gregory to Otto a bishop from Cologne, the letter's content shows that Gregory two main goals of his moral reforms were to rid the church of both simony and clerical marriages. Another aspect of Gregory's reform program was a concern over the common people finding out about the extent of clerical corruption. As he states in the letter that he would respond much more severely to the reports of corruption if the public were aware of them.¹⁸ This concern of the public reacting negatively to clerical corruption helps explain the emergence of the Cathars.

The reforms of Catholic Church that occurred between the reigns of Pope Leo the Ninth and Pope Gregory the Seventh were mixed successes. One of the reformers' main successes was in both the establishment of a scriptural basis for reforming the church and changing canonical law so that both the act of simony and clerical marriage were considered illegal under the church's law. Another success was that reformers won the war of ideas related to simony and clerical marriage, in that it succeeded in convincing the populace of Western Europe that the acts were as sinful and unpriestly as the reformers themselves thought them to be. Another success of the reforms was it created a church more focused on its purity, seeking to insure that all of the priests were as equal in their pureness and humbleness as the monks living in monasteries.

¹⁷ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 135.

¹⁸ Pope Gregory VII, "Letter of Gregory to Otto, Bishop of Constance, December 1074," in *The Crisis of Church and State 1050-1300*, ed. Brian Tierney (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 48-49.

The reforms were however not successful in clearing the church of its corruption. Many rural churches were unaffected by the changes in canonical law. The Church focused more on insuring that the reforms were ideologically sound than trying to enforce them. This failure of the Church to enforce the reforms while informing the common folk about the corruption occurring in their local churches would serve as a major cause for the reemergence of heresies in the Eleventh and Twelfth Century.

The main reason for why the mid-Eleventh century reforms caused a rise in heresy was the church reformers' success in spreading a message of a corrupt church to the populace and opened then to Neo-Donatism and anti-clerical preachers like the Radical Gregorians.¹⁹ Pope Leo IX's method of dealing with corrupt priests in France, Germany, and Italy was to hold public trials that often exposed local corruption.²⁰ This was compound by Pope Gregory the seventh and his advisor dabbling in the heretical idea called Donatism. Donatism meant that any priest found to be sinful or corrupt would have any of the ceremonies that they had done like baptism or confession rendered null and void, along with them being incapable of conducting mass. Theses Donatist ideas showed up in Pope Gregory's proclamation that French churchgoers should not go to any masses conducted by a corrupt priest. Gregory's advisor Cardinal Humbert was much more open on his Donatism with him stating that sacraments conduct by a priest accused of simony are invalid. Overall, the revelation of church corruption and church leader spreading the idea of ignoring corrupt priests would set the stage for a resurgence in heresies.²¹

¹⁹ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 145-147.

²⁰ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity* 126.

²¹ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 175

The Radical Gregorians

The first wave of heresies that arose after the mid-eleventh century church reforms was a wave of radical preachers, referred to as the Radical Gregorians, which took advantage of the people's alienation with the Church. Tanchelm of Antwerp was the first of the radical preachers to emerge in Twelfth century Europe. Tanchelm of Antwerp's exact beliefs are unknown due to the main primary source of information on him, the accounts of the canons of Utrecht, was more concerned with the problems he caused than anything related to what he preached. Some conclusions can however be based on accounts of his style of preaching.²² Tanchelm was anticlerical in his preaching, and decried the corrupt church and dressed in monk habits to show his apostolic style of living. The issues of an unreformed Church were an important reason for Tanchelm's success as a radical preacher; as seen by the fact his most receptive audience was in Antwerp, where the only pastor in town was found to be guilty of living in sin with his niece. Tanchelm also shared some similarity to the later Cathar heresy, beyond his style of preaching, in that he was able to preach rather freely in the county of Flanders thanks to the protection granted to him by Count Robert the Second. A situation rather similar to the protection granted to the Cathars by various members of the nobility in Southern France and Northern Italy²³

Another Radical Gregorian was Henry the Monk, known also as Henry of Lausanne. Henry the Monk operated in the region of Toulouse and his teachings were very Donatist in

²² Barber, *The Cathars*, 30-31.

²³ Jeffrey Burton Russel, *Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages*, Oakland, CA: University of California, 2005, 56-60

nature.²⁴ Henry's teachings were more radical in nature than the Donatism practiced by the Church reformers. He argued both that corrupt priests should be wiped out and that sinful Christians should confess to each other rather than a priest.²⁵ An unknown monk records Henry's teachings in a tract against their "errors," providing some details on his teachings. Henry's teaching included some more conventional Donatist beliefs such as an unworthy priest cannot consecrate the Body of Christ and some that promoted a more apostolic Christianity in that he felt that both that Bishops and priest should not have wealth or that Churches of wood or stone should not be build. His preaching also included some more radical ideas such as that "merely the agreement of the persons concerned constitutes a marriage."²⁶ Another radical aspect of Henry's preaching was that he considered true Christianity as a one that follows only the New Testament, not the Old.²⁷ Henry was also the longest lasting Radical Gregorian preacher thanks to the protection granted to him by Count Alfonso Jordan.²⁸ While there is no known connection between Henry and the later Cathars, their ideas had a very similar focus on anti-clericalism and apostolic living.

²⁴ Barber, *The Cathars*, 31.

²⁵ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 176.

²⁶ Unknown, "A Monk's Description of the Errors of Henry," in *Heresies of High Middle Age*, ed. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 116-117.

²⁷ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*. 176.

²⁸ Barber, *The Cathars*, 31-32.

One other radical Gregorian preacher of note was Peter of Bruys, who while sharing some similar beliefs with his contemporary Radical Gregorians he was even more radical. This radicalness appeared in Peter more violent preaching style. Peter was similar to Henry the Monk in that both declared that true Christians did not have to follow the rules and laws set forward in the Old Testament, but only of the New Testament.²⁹ Another similarity was that both were very heavily against an organized and hierarchical church, as seen in a letter written by the later Cluny abbot Peter the Venerable in the early 1130s. This letter listed the radical preachers' beliefs and then showed how they were heretical. The letter described Peter's preaching as heavily radical in that he denies, "infants presented before the age of understanding can be saved through the Baptism of Christ." Peter was also against the construction of churches and temples, that crosses should not be used as symbol to represent Christ, denied the Eucharist, and that people should not pray or make offering on behalf of the dead.³⁰ Like the two other Radical Gregorian preachers, Peter's ideas took advantage of the anti-clerical feeling among the common people and presented these anti-clerical ideas were heretical against Catholic Theology. This combination of ideas would be similar to what the Cathar would be preaching in a couple of decades

So what is the connection between the Radical Gregorian heresies and the Cathar heresy? The answer is that while there are no direct historical connections between the two groups of heretics, their similarities show common anti-clerical ideas and groups in twelfth century Europe.

²⁹ Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 176.

³⁰ Peter the Venerable. "The Teachings of Peter of Bruys," in *Heresies of High Middle Age*, ed. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 120-121.

Both groups were both very anti-clerical in their rhetoric and were interested in restoring the church to a state similar to how the apostles allegedly had it. There are also many overlaps between the teachings of the Radical Gregorians and the Cathars. For example according to Bonacurus's "Description of the Catharist Heresy", the Cathar considered the symbol of the Cross to be "the sign of the beast of which one reads in the Apocalypse and is an abomination in a holy place."³¹ An idea of the cross being a bad symbol for Christianity was something preached by Radical Gregorians like Peter of Bruys.³² The similarity between the two heresies end on the topic of theology because where the Radical Gregorian's theology differences from the mainline church are either unknown or not mentioned, the Cathars had a very different theology from the mainline church in that the Heresy was Dualistic in nature. Meaning the Cathars believed in two gods rather than one. While the Radical Gregorians and Cathars had different theologies, they both gain influence and followers through their preaching of anti-clerical and Donatist ideas showing both the prominence of anti-clericalism feelings in the populace post mid-eleventh century church reforms.

The Emergence of Catharism

From this anti-clerical and Donatist sentiment, Catharism emerged in Western Europe; however, little information on the exact time and place of the emergence exists. The first confirmed account of the Cathars was in the Rhineland of Germany in the year of 1144 near the

³¹Bonacurius "The Teaching of the Catharist Heresy," in *Heresies of High Middle Age*, ed. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 172-173.

³² "The Teachings of Peter of Bruys", 120-121.

city of Cologne. This account was an appeal from the Prior Ederwin to the renowned abbot and spiritual leader, Bernard of Clairivux, for advice on how to respond to this heresy.³³ Rather interestingly, the account described two different heretical groups in the region with one being the Cathars and the other being a group of Radical Gregorians. The Cathars perceived themselves as the one true church in that they continued to imitate the practices, beliefs, and lifestyles of the Apostles. The account also described the Cathars as divided into the Elects; those baptized into the Cathars' ranks and living a frugal lifestyle, and the Believers, those who shared the beliefs of the Cathars while continuing their pre-Cathars lifestyles. The other heretical group described was simply a group of Christians who were heavily Donatist and Anti-clerical in their practices.³⁴

The question now is where this group of apostolic-like Christian came from, as Bernard's account provides no information about where these heretics came from. One theory on this comes from a late Thirteenth Century inquisitor named Anselm of Alessandria's writing on the emergence of the Cathar heresy in Italy. These theories tried to connect the Cathars with an ancient dualistic religion called Manichaeism that spread into Eastern Europe, where it then spread to France through contact between the dualistic heretics and French merchants in

³³ Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 25.

³⁴ Eberwin of Steinfeld, "An appeal from Eberwin of Steinfeld against Heretics at Cologene," In *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 128-131.

Constantinople.³⁵ The Manichaeists in Eastern Europe likely refers to a dualistic sect in Eastern Europe called the Bogmils. The Bogmils first emerged in the middle of the Tenth Century in Bulgaria. Described by Comas the Priest as a heretical group with a dualistic theology, denial of various orthodox beliefs, and against state authority. Cosmas also described the Bogmils as composed of groups of wandering preachers that showed a disregard for the rulers of the material world.³⁶ The Bogmils were still a prominent heretical group in Eastern Europe in the 11th Century and it would make sense for some of their ideas to spread to Western Europe, but there little is evidence of a direct connection between them and the Cathars.

The reasons for why the Bogmils were the predecessors of the Cathars appear during events that occurred during the earliest meetings between the Cathars and the Bogmils. These meeting occurred during the 1160s and 1170s, when the Bogmil Bishop Papa Nigteas visited various Cathar communities in Southern France and Northern Italy. What these meetings tell us is that the earliest contact between Cathars and the Bogmils occurred at least a couple of decades after the earliest known Cathars.³⁷ One of the meetings between Nigteas and a Cathar community was at the council of St Felix-de-Caraman, where Nigteas met with various representatives from the various Cathar communities in France and Italy. The meeting shows some of the differences between the groups. A description of the council mentions how Nigteas converted some of the

³⁵ Anselm of Alessandria, "Origins of the Italian Cathars," In *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 168-169.

³⁶ Barber, *The Cathars*, 12-17.

³⁷ Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 31.

more moderate Cathars toward Absolute Dualism, which suggests dualism was not unifying trait among the early Cathars.³⁸ Another point of note is the fact that a number of texts of Bogmils and early dualistic sects origins were used by the Cathars such as *Vision of Isaiah*, however most of these texts dealt with the Cathars' theology which was both not the heresy's main appeal or well-known outside of the Cathars priesthood.³⁹

The main appeal of Cathars was their focus on a moral priesthood. This appeal appears in the records of several inquisitors such as the one of Peter of Les-Vaux de Cernay. Peter's records show that the average Cathar knew little of the theology, for example his interrogation of a man named Izarn in Castelsarraïsn. Izarn shows the appeal of the Catharism when he describes his respect for the Cathar elect because they appear to him as both faithful and truthful. Izarn also knew little of the Cathar theology, except for their belief that marriage was evil and Izarn didn't really believe in that.⁴⁰ Only one part of the Cathar beliefs seem to be of much appeal to the common people is the idea of *Consolamentum* or that the baptism guarantees a person's status in heaven.⁴¹

The majority of Cathar believers knew little of the Cathar theology compared to those in the higher levels of the Cathar hierarchy, as seen by the differences between the lifestyles of the

³⁸ Barber, *The Cathars*, 71.

³⁹ Barber, *The Cathars*, 33.

⁴⁰ Peter of Les-Vaux de cernay, "Extracts from Depositions of Witness from Castelsarraïsn," *In The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade: a sourcebook*, ed. Catherine Leglu, Rebecca Rist, and Claire Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2014), 154.

⁴¹ Barber, *The Cathars*, 106.

two groups. The Cathar religion was composed of three groups: the Elects or the priests of the Cathars sect who live apostle-like lifestyles, the Believers, or people who are a formal part of the Cathar sect, and the Listeners or non-believers who attend Cathar services. The lifestyles of the Elects were ones of voluntary poverty and abstentions from things such as sex, meat, alcohol.⁴² The Elects also practiced a lifestyle of wandering town-to-town preaching and performing Cathar ceremonies to the believers and listeners in town and staying at the homes of Believers.⁴³ The Believers on the other hand saw little change in their lifestyle, living their lives much like they when they were Catholic.⁴⁴ The question then is why did Catharism thrive in some regions, but not others? The answer appears by looking at the two most prominent regions for Catharism, Southern France and Northern Italy.

The Reason for Catharism prominence in Southern France

The region of Southern France was one of the more prominent regions of Europe with a Cathar population with a variety of people from different social classes compared to the mostly lower class Cathars in Northern France and Germany. One of the more prominent reasons for the Cathars' prominence was the fact that Catholic Church was weaker in Southern France than the rest of Europe. The reason for this was that Southern France was relatively decentralized due to both the nobility only giving minimal respect to the French Kingship and that local inheritance laws greatly weakened the size and power of local duchies. The region also saw a lack of companionship between the Southern French nobility and the local clergy, the reason for this

⁴² Sean Martin, *The Cathars*, (Harpenden, Herts: Summersdale Publishers Ltd, 2005), 53-54.

⁴³ Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 34-35.

⁴⁴Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 42.

was that both the church in this region had little power or prestige in the region.⁴⁵ The other cause for the Cathars prominence was not just that the local clergy were weak in authority, but they were also weak in morality. This weakness of morality among the Catholic Clergy in Southern France was cited by Catholic writers like William of Puyalurens as the main reason for why the Cathar were able to gain prominence in Southern France.

The issue of a corrupt Clergy was major issue in Southern France as described by William of Puyaluren. He blamed the emergence of Heresy in southern France on corrupt, apathetic clergymen. His account gives some examples of clergymen like Fulcarnd of Toulouse who lived like a nobleman, even if he could not collect tithe, or Fulcarnd's successor, Raymond of Rabstens, who was considered guilty of simony. This was not the only problem with these priests, as Fulcarnd did not have the resources to visit his fellow clergymen to uphold a moral standard. Priests like this led to the clergy in this region to become an object of scorn.⁴⁶ So much so that a common saying in Southern France emerged that stated it was better to be a Jew than being a Catholic priest. The region's clerics were also both poorly educated and impoverished compared to the clergies in Northern France. Looking at the weak and corrupt clergy in Southern France clarifies why Catharism took hold in the region.

The politics of Southern France also allowed for the emergence of Catharism in a multitude of ways beyond just the regions lack of royal or noble authority. One reason was that Cathar had won the hearts of local merchants by convincing the nobility of Southern France's

⁴⁵Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 36-38.

⁴⁶ Barber, *The Cathars*, 58-59.

more mountainous regions to stop attacking merchants and travelers in their territory.⁴⁷ However, the main reason for the Cathars to emerge and thrive in Southern France was thanks to the various issues caused by the decentralization that occurred in this region. An example of how decentralization leads to the emergence of heresy appears in the life and times of Count Raymond the Fifth of Toulouse. Raymond's reign highlighted the political chaos in the region by the fact he often switched allegiance from either France to England, depending on which was more beneficial to him, and the fact he had deals with nearby counts who sought to gain some of his land. Therefore, when Catharism arrived in the region, Raymond had bigger things on his plate than dealing with a bunch of preachers. This means that in the case of Toulouse, the reason for Catharism's emergence was not just because of its appeal to the people, but also because the rulers were too busy to deal with it.⁴⁸

The Reason for Catharism's Prominence in Northern Italy

The other region of Europe with a prominent Cathar population is the region of Northern Italy. Compared to the Cathars in Southern France, the Cathars in Northern France were more cosmopolitan and stayed prominent until the end of the Thirteenth Century. Similar to Southern France, the Northern Italian Cathars were also composed of a variety of social classes. This is seen by the fact that in the years 1268 to 1269 in the city of Orvieto, the Inquisitor sentenced eighty-five people for heresy where a good portion of them were from the city's upper class such as guild leaders and city council members.⁴⁹ The reason the Cathars were as prominent in

⁴⁷ Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 36-38

⁴⁸ Barber, *The Cathars*, 44-49.

⁴⁹ Lansing, *Power & Purity*, 4.

Northern Italy's also stemmed from political decentralization and anticlericalism. A difference was that Northern Italy political decentralization and anticlericalism had a more direct cause compared to Southern France.⁵⁰ Compared to Southern France, there are actually accounts of the emergence of the Cathars in Northern Italy, such as Anselm of Alessandria's account on the origins of the Italian Cathars. The problem with these sources is they present the inaccurate theory that Bogmils and Manichaeism were responsible for the Cathar emergence.⁵¹ The truth is that Italy by the late Twelfth Century had seen several heretical sects emerge in the region.

After Catharism emerged in Northern Italy, the region would also see the rise of other heretical sects with similar in beliefs and practices. These groups, while having no connection to the Cathar sect, show the prominence of anti-clericalism and Apostolic Christianity in Northern Italy. One of these sects was the Speronist, founded by Hugo Speroni around 1177 and had a strong anti-clerical bent to them. As described by a refutation of the Speronist's beliefs by Hugo's former friend, Master Vacarius, the Speronists believed in many things similar to the Radical Gregorian and the Cathar. For example, the Speronists were heavily anti-old testament described by Vacarius as citing the "many defects and various defects of the Priest of Old Law," .He was also against the construction of churches, the Cross be denied as a symbol of Christianity, and the giving of last rites.⁵² Another sect in Northern Italy with similarity to the

⁵⁰ Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 42-44.

⁵¹ Anselm of Alessandria, "Origins of the Italian Cathars," 168-169.

⁵² Vacarius "The Letter of Master Vacarius against the Errors of Hugo Speroni," In *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 152-156.

Cathars were the Humiliati, unlike the Speroni or the Cathars, this group accepted the Catholic clergy and even asked the pope for permission to continue their practices. The similarity of this group to Catharism was that the members of Humiliati sect practiced a simple and humble lifestyle like those of the Cathar elect.⁵³

The relationship between Catharism and local politics in Northern Italy was different from Southern France. The reason for the decentralization of government in Northern Italy was a result of conflicts between the Holy Roman Empire and the Papal Authority, which both alienated the people from both the Holy Roman Empire and the Catholic Church. The conflict between the Empire and the Church also led to local rulers being too distracted with local conflicts to deal with any Heresy that popped up in the region.⁵⁴ Church authority was also lower in Northern Italy than the rest of Europe because the Bishopric in the regions weakened themselves through land disputes with the local nobility and other parts of the Church. In the case of the Northern Italian city of Orvieto, the bishops were in conflict with the canons of the Cathedral over land and power that did not focus on preserving their own authority.⁵⁵ This occurred as a Cathar preacher first arrived in the city of Orvieto, making it likely these disputes are the reason for the city's Cathar population.⁵⁶ These cases displayed how Catharism emerged in Northern Italy due to people alienated with a squabbling and weak Catholic clergy.

⁵³ "The Origins of the Humiliati," In *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 158

⁵⁴ Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 42-44.

⁵⁵ Lansing, *Power & Purity*, 24.

⁵⁶ Lansing, *Power & Purity*, 30.

Overall, by looking at the two regions with the largest Cathar populations and influences, generalizations on the Cathars' origin appeared. Catharism thrived in regions with little in both central political or religious authority. However; the reason why Catharism was able to continue on and spread was that lack of central authority made it easier for the clergy to be corrupted and ignored, as seen by the bickering clergyman in Northern Italy or the weak and powerless clergymen of Southern France. The lack of political centralization in the regions also allowed the Cathar to thrive; but without both the corrupt regional churches and the emerging anticlericalism, Catharism would not have taken root in these regions. The importance of anti-clericalism and Apostolic Christianity in the emergence in Catharism is shown by how the Cathar was divided into three groups with the majority of them unaware of the Dualistic theology of the sect. This fact makes it apparent that most people who convert to Catharism did primarily as a response to the corruption or some cases powerlessness of Catholic Church. This idea of anti-clericalism and modest Christianity being the main draw of Catharism appears in the various unifying factors of Catharism in different regions.

While historians most often portray Catharism as a single unified sect, in fact regional differences existed. Some historians have found so much variations between the various Cathar groups that some argue that Catharism is a term used to describe a bunch of different groups with similar beliefs and practice than one giant heresy.⁵⁷ For example, an unnamed Franciscan friar wrote the various beliefs of Cathars from Albanese, Bagnolo, and Concorezzo, Italy that displayed some of differences and similarity among Cathar group in Southern Italy. The differences among the Cathars were mostly relates to theological issues like those of the Cathars

⁵⁷ Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 30.

from Concorezzo, who were much less dualistic than the others and had different ideas on the nature of Christ. The three groups' similarities show up in their shared principals based on Donatism. The ideas of Donatism appears in this document in that all three groups shared the same belief on the topic related to the church's power in secular manner and who can makes up the priesthood. For example, all three Cathar sects agreed on the idea that the church's hierarchy cannot have both good and wicked people, along with an agreement that the church should have little to no control of our secular world.⁵⁸

Donatist Beliefs in the Actions of Cathars

The ideas of Donatism appeared in the Cathars' actions and rhetoric. This shows up in a variety of sources on the Cathars, which shows them as very willing to break apart the sect to free its hierarchy from corrupted or wicked priests. Similar to the church, the Cathars were willing to excommunicate a priest who strayed too far from the mainline Cathar belief and morality. An example of this appears in Anselm of Alessandria writings on the origins of the Italian Cathars. Where it shows how David, the Cathar bishop of Desenzano's, excommunication occurred because he did not follow the moral standards of a Cathar priest. This excommunication was the result of David's sexual relationships with two different Cathar women along with preaching in his sermons "that no man and woman was capable of sinning from the waist down;" which was against both Cathar doctrine and beliefs on what a priest should say and act.⁵⁹ This

⁵⁸ "Tenants of the Italian Cathars," In *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Walter L.

Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 358-359

⁵⁹Anselm of Alessandria, "Origins of the Italian Cathars,"170.

shows that Cathars were not only applying their Donatist beliefs to just criticize the Catholic clergy, but to also insure that their clergy remained moral than.

The Cathars' quest for a priesthood was composed of the most pure men and women on earth, shows also a schism among the Cathars in Northern Italy and southern France. This event might also explain the variations in how dualistic were the various sect of Catharism. The origins of the schism can found in the events of the Council of St. Felix, when Papa Nictreas declared that the rules of the Bogmils Church of Bulgaria were invalid due to this a priest being recently discovered to "had made a bad end". The Rules of the Church of Bulgaria refers to the code of morals and beliefs used by priest of the Bogmils in Bulgaria and then appropriated by the Cathars in southern France. The problem was then caused by Papa Nictreas' announcement was that due to the Cathars' and Bogmils' Donatist beliefs; the actions of an unknown priest had caused Southern French Cathars prefects to no longer be prefects. Nictreas' solution was for the Cathar priest to adopt the rule practiced by the Bogmils in Constantinople, which all of the prefects as the council adopted to protect their legitimacy.⁶⁰

Where Papa Nictreas' declaration of the de-legitimization of the established Cathar theology and his offer of a new theology based on the Rules of Constantinople were full heartily adopted by the Cathars in Southern France, the reaction to this in Northern Italy was much more different. The reason for this is while Nictreas convinced the Italian Cathars who came with to convert to the Rules of Constantinople he immediately vanished afterward. Nictreas' disappearance was followed by the appearance of a Bogmils priest from Bulgaria named Petracius. Petracius revealed to the Italian Cathars that either a bishop who consulted Nictreas or

⁶⁰ Martian, *The Cathars*, 64-65.

Nictas himself was guilty of being with a woman and committed various acts of immoralities. This led to a crisis in of Italian Cathars leadership deciding to seek re-consultation from the East, but not everyone agreed with it, leading to splinter groups forming in the Italian Cathar community like the Cathar in Florence. The Cathars in Desenzano stay with the rules of Constantinople, the Cathars in Concorezzo went with the rules of the Bulgarian church, and the Cathars in the Trevisian march went with the rules of the Bogmils church in Slavonia.⁶¹ The divisions of the Cathars in Italy show a negative effect of the Cathars Donatism in that if the discovery of a major leader or influence of the Cathars living in sin occurred, the Cathars would have to throwout their rules and theology introduced by said figure.

The Cathar's Donatism did not just appear in how they interact among themselves, but also in how they interacted with the Catholics. From most of the historical records on the Cathar, the relationship between the two was very hostile in the matter of Cathar church actions and rhetoric. Before the situation between the two Christian sects reaches the level of violence, the two often-held debates between each other over which Christian group was the most correct and virtuous.⁶² An example of these debates can found in the Bishop of Albi's 1165 account of the Cathars in Lombardy. The debate shows the Cathars negative views on the Catholic priesthood. The Cathars described the ordained priests who did not live like how the apostle Paul had command as no better than "raving wolves," "hypocrites seducers," and "lovers of salutations in the marketplaces". The Cathars then went even further referring to the higher ups of the Catholic Church as those who "desire to be called rabbis and masters, displaying golden rings and

⁶¹ Martian, *The Cathars*, 66-69.

⁶² Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 25-26.

gleaming raiment.”⁶³ This document portrays the Cathars’ Donatism in that they saw corrupted priests as men not deserving of the title of priest and show disdain toward the wealth displayed by the upper levels of the Catholic Church .

Conclusion

What this all proves is that the rise of Cathars and similar heresies with an anti-clerical focus were an unintended consequence of mid-eleventh Church reforms. The reasoning is that mid-eleventh century church reform both revealed the extent of clerical corruption to the common people and created an environment in which ideas like Donatism, believing that sacraments are null if the priest conducting them is found to be corrupt or sinful, could thrive. The connection between the Emergence of the Cathars and the reform can be proven by first looking at the how both the ideas of and the reasons for the mid-eleventh century reforms of the Catholic Church created an environment ripe for heresy. This can also be proven by showing how the radical Gregorian preachers served as predecessors for the Cathars. Shows how the common European in the early Twelfth century was receptive to anticlerical and Apostolic Christian ideas. The next step to proving this idea is by showing how Catharism’s main appeal was in its both anticlerical ideas and focus on a simpler and less corrupt version of Christianity. The final part is to show how the Cathars beliefs and action were influenced by a type of Donatism similar to that of the reformers. The evidence for this appears in how common people felt about the Cathars, how the most prominent areas for Catharism were usually where the

⁶³ Bishop of Albi “The Heresy of the Cathars in Lombardy,” *In Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 191

Church was more corrupt or weak-willed compared to the rest of Europe, and how the Cathars treated members of the Catholic Priesthood in their writings and actions.

The significance of this argument, that eleventh century Church reforms allow the rise of heresy like the Cathars in the twelfth century, is that it shows how this new era of heresies in the High Middle Ages was not so different from say the Reformation in the 16th century. The similarity then between the two groups that created splinter religious groups from the Catholic Church was that they were both a response by the people against the corruption going on in the Catholic Church. This conclusion leads to a rather interesting path in further research, that being why the heresies of the High Middle Ages failed to create permanent separate dominations from the Catholic Church, which the Reformation succeeded in doing so. Overall, by studying the connection between Church reforms and the rise of heretical groups one can see the idea of unintended consequences being an important historical factor. The reasoning for that is it shows how the mid-Eleventh century church reforms started as an effort to help the church appear more godly and less corrupt, but in turn show this corruption to the common people which leads to them being alienated from the church and supporting various heresies rather than the Catholic Church.

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