

The Problem of Cathar Apocalypticism

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Of all the heresies in the Middle Ages, none posed more of a threat to the Catholic Church in either perception or reality than did Catharism. Though there is no consensus among scholars about actual numbers of those committed to Cathar teaching, there is no question that in certain areas of Europe, especially Southern France and Northern Italy, Catharism had wide popular appeal and the support of significant local figures. The phenomenon of Catharism made a great impact on the Catholic Church. The anxiety caused by this heresy led to the “professionalization” and standardization of inquisitorial procedure under the control of the papacy. It was against Cathars that the Dominican mission first took shape. Yet despite endless speculation about the origins of the heresy, widespread interest in the details of Catholic suppression, thorough analysis of the relationship between Catharism and national/regional identification, and some attention given to the social background of adherents, little serious modern study has been done on what the Cathars actually believed.¹

The neglect of Cathar theology reflects in part the interests of modern historians. But it stems also from two other causes. The first is the limited

¹ Malcolm Lambert, the leading modern authority on Catharism, argues that practice and not doctrine were what attracted most adherents (1998:158). He does identify the question of evil and how to escape from it as the heart of Cathar teaching, and suggests that divisions within Catharism arose over determining the origin and place of evil (1998:55). In general, however, Lambert treats Cathar belief only in the context of specific Cathar groups or texts. There are several older works that attempt to piece together Cathar beliefs. The most thorough is Arno Borst's *Die Katharer*. Two other attempts are C. Schmidt's *Histoire et Doctrine De La Secte Des Cathares Ou Albigeois* and Ignatius von Dollinger's *Beiträge zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters*. All three works are primarily descriptive and not analytical. More recent analysis is often provided on the details of specific Cathar texts, as in Christine Thouzellier's introduction to her edition of *Livre Des Deux Principes*.

number of sources available for a study of Cathar doctrine. Despite the survival of a few actual Cathar documents, there is not a great deal of information about what Cathars believed. Much of what has survived is evidence gathered by authorities of the inquisition, which must be treated with great caution. The second reason for scholarly neglect is the fact that, aside from an agreement on dualism, Cathar theology seems more diverse than systematic. There were at least three major sects within Catharism, each with its own unique teaching, and inquisition registers can leave the impression that there were as many understandings of Catharism as there were Cathars. A full treatment of Cathar doctrine lies outside the scope of this article, which seeks to provide an analysis of Cathar apocalypticism. But in the process of examining the apocalypticism of the Cathars, it will be necessary to consider a number of other elements of Cathar belief. As the relationships between Cathar beliefs are examined, I hope a certain logical coherence in Cathar doctrine will emerge, a pattern that may provide a useful tool for future considerations of Cathar theology, and which will at least point to the need for, and value of, such future studies.

I will begin by defining apocalypticism, then give a brief summary of the eschatology held by the Catholic Church in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, the period when Catharism was at its strongest. Next, I will examine the elements of Cathar thought used to create their apocalyptic vision. Then I will attempt to reconstruct a Cathar eschatology, and will compare this Cathar apocalyptic eschatology with the medieval Catholic model. I will follow by examining elements of Cathar writings which seem to undermine the thesis I am proposing in this article. Finally, I will attempt to draw some general conclusions about Cathars and their theological beliefs which may be useful for further studies of Cathar doctrine.

As it is used here, apocalypticism is a form of eschatology characterized by “the vivid expectation of a violent end to human history and the present world - an end preceded by conflict and the persecution of God’s faithful ones, centered on the resurrection of the dead and divine judgment, and culminating in the punishment of the wicked and the transformation of the cosmos into a glorious new home for the just” (Daley 1998:3). Modern historians have often identified strong apocalyptic currents in Western Europe around the year 1,000, but in fact apocalyptic eschatology appears to have been widespread throughout the Middle Ages: “Medieval folk lived in a more or less constant state of apocalyptic expectation” (Bernard McGinn 1998:74-5). The “pervasive” apocalypticism which was so characteristic of medieval

Europe was linked with a series of reform movements beginning around the tenth century. A desire for a purified Church and a sense of the immediacy of the need for such a Church was correlated in a number of religious movements with a certain “nonliteral millenarianism.” The hope for an apocalyptic transformation of the Church rose steadily after the Gregorian reform movement lost momentum. In addition, later Western apocalypticism was fueled by a growing fascination with history. By the twelfth century some of the appeal of apocalypticism was related to a concern to interpret events in light of God’s action (Bernard McGinn 1998:74-78,81). Though apocalypticism varied according to the interpreter and the interpreter’s specific concerns, a general sense of apocalyptic expectation was a significant part of religious experience, both inside and outside the Church, in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries.

Medieval Catharism seems to have had all the ingredients necessary for an apocalyptic sect. As dualists, whether radical or mitigated, Cathars were naturally drawn to Johannine literature, an important New Testament source for apocalyptic thought. As the Cathar movement became, increasingly, the target of persecution, it would seem natural that they would find appealing the apocalyptic hope of an immanent judgment of their enemies and vindication of their own righteousness. Catharism flourished in an age in which more and more people in the West, both in and outside the bounds of Catholic orthodoxy, were turning their attention to apocalyptic prophecies. And while the exact relationship between Bogamism and the origins of Catharism continues to elude scholarly consensus, there is no question that Catharism was heavily influenced by the Bogamils, who did, in fact, have a well-developed apocalyptic eschatology.² But in spite of these factors, there is no evidence at all of true apocalypticism in surviving Cathar teaching. The problem of Cathar apocalypticism is, precisely, that none exists.

Catharism failed to become an apocalyptic religion because a number of important elements of Cathar doctrine were uncongenial to such a development. It is of course not accurate to speak of “Cathar Doctrine” as if its adherents were committed to a heretical systematic theology. Cathar beliefs

² Arno Borst, in his chapter “*Erlosung und Ende*,” suggests that the Bogamils were the primary influence on Cathar understandings of salvation and eschatology (1953:167V.). The Bogamils were a Manichaean sect originating in the Balkans in the eighth century. Their beliefs spread through Asia Minor and into parts of Europe, and endured in places such as Herzegovina and Hungary until the fifteenth century (Cross and Livingston 1983:184).

varied widely from one Cathar to another. Cathar doctrine here refers to a spectrum of beliefs shared by many Cathars. Within this spectrum there were a number of logical and theological obstacles to the development of apocalypticism among Cathars. Not every Cathar adhered to every teaching which ran contrary to apocalyptic eschatology, but all Cathars adhered to some such teachings. It is these counter-apocalyptic Cathar beliefs that this paper seeks to examine.

The opposition to apocalypticism was drawn from a wide range of theological issues, including ontology, cosmography, soteriology, eschatology, and exegesis. In attempting to analyze the lack of apocalyptic beliefs among the Cathars, I will first examine each of these areas with a view to understanding Cathar objections to orthodox apocalypticism, and then attempt to construct a general Cathar eschatology. Finally, I will consider the evidences for apocalypticism found within Cathar literature and consider their impact upon the thesis of this paper.

The fundamental theological division among Cathars was over the nature of their dualism. Were there two equal principles, one evil and the other good, or was there, as in Catholic orthodoxy, a good Creator whose creation was later corrupted by an inferior and created being? While there is evidence for several distinct Cathar sects, and for considerable latitude within Catharism in general, the most important division was between the mitigated and unmitigated dualists. Unmitigated dualists believed in two equal and opposite first principles, a basic ontology which militated against a belief in an apocalyptic ending to history. Radical dualist Cathars taught that there were two principles, a good god and an evil god, who were alike in their power, and their eternal nature. “[T]here are two gods or lords without beginning and without end, one good, the other wholly evil” (Anon., *De heresi?* 1991:164). The two gods had always existed and would always exist. Since radical dualists usually attributed a spiritual creation to the good god and a physical creation, including the creation of this present world, to the evil principle, a certain parallelism in some of these systems demanded that this physical world be as eternal as the good god’s spiritual heaven. Thus “an eternity or sempiternity and antiquity ...” are ascribed to some of the creations of the evil principle (Anon., *Liber de duobus* 1991:558-559). “The present world ... will never pass away or be depopulated” (Anon., *An Exposure* 1991:232). For such Cathars the present world must eternally remain as it is. Contrary to Catholic orthodoxy, these Cathars saw the elements of creation as irredeemable, for the world was never good. There could be no cataclysm-

mic destruction of an old heaven and earth to make way for a new, since the current earth was by definition eternal, and the heaven which was of interest to the Cathars had no relationship whatsoever to the present world.

Other Cathars, however, did not insist on an eternal world. The present “transitory world” was the work of the evil principle who created the four elements, and all that was visible and mutable (Moneta 1991:308-309). Any unchangeable and eternal creation was spiritual, and the work of the good god. Here this present world was indeed passing away. But its mutability was a sign of its status outside the realm of the good god; there was no place for it in redemption. Even the Cathars who believed in a coming destruction of this present world mentioned it only as a foil for the eternity of the the good god’s heaven.³

The origin of each particular element of creation was critical in Cathar thinking. Cathars were fairly united in the belief that the traditional elements of apocalyptic destruction were not available for use by the good god. According to a Cathar text which originated among the Bogamils, Satan “made fire ... also thunder, rain, hail, and snow ...” (Anon., ‘The Secret Supper’ 1991:460). Fire was the handiwork of the evil god; it could have no purifying role in punishing evil or dissolving creation for the good god’s purposes. And, as will be discussed in detail below, all Cathars, regardless of the form of dualism they held, saw destruction, punishment, and killing as aspects of the evil principle. The redeemed had nothing to look forward to in any *dies irae*, and any cosmic intervention by the principle of good would have to find other materials with which to work.

Unmitigated dualists were thus limited in their possibilities to develop an apocalyptic eschatology by their most basic assumptions about reality. But such an eschatology had other difficulties as well, difficulties which were as relevant to mitigated dualists as to their extreme co-religionists. Cathar cosmography also led Cathars to discount the possibility of the intervention of God in history. The belief that physical matter in the current world was the creation of an evil being was not limited to absolute dualists; some Cathars who believed in only one good God assigned the creation of matter

³ “Since there are many persons [who believe the present heavens will perish] we ... will affirm ... the better and wholly imperishable heavens For the present heavens shall pass away after great violence and, being on fire, shall be dissolved and vanish like smoke, and it is not to be believed that [the true heaven] shall grow old, or growing old, shall be changed” (Durand 1991:508-509).

to an evil spirit. One particular sect of mitigated dualist Cathars assigned the creation of the four elements to God, but asserted that all visible things, including this world, were the work of Satan (Rainerius Sacconi 1991:343).

The widespread assumption that physical matter is the product of evil led to a belief in a multi-structured universe. Such a universe lacked agreed-upon boundaries. What was consistent was that the world humans know was not the limit of reality. The “standard” universe consisted of two worlds, each with a heaven and earth, one belonging to the good principle, the other to the evil principle. One inquisitor’s manual reports “the heretics professed to believe that there is another new and visible land” (Peter 1991:238). These two worlds mirror one another. In some cases the details of sin and redemption even play out in both places. The Cathar John of Lugio taught that “the good God has another world wherein are people and animals and everything else comparable to the visible and corruptible creatures here; marriages and fornications and adulteries take place there, from which children are born. And what is even more base there the people of the good God, against his command, have taken foreign women to wife, that is, daughters of a strange god or of evil gods, and from such shameful and forbidden intercourse have been born giants and many other beings at various times” (Rainerius Sacconi 1991:340). “In that land of the living,” and inquisitor writes, “there are cities and outside them castles, villages, and woodlands, meadows, pastures, sweet water and salt, beasts of the forest and domestic animals, dogs and birds for the hunt, gold and silver, utensils of various kinds, and furniture ... They shall eat and drink, play and sleep, and do all things just as they do in the world of the present” (Anon., ‘An Exposure’ 1991:233). It was in this other world that Christ was born and crucified, in which the prophets prophesied, and in which many of the events narrated in the Old Testament took place (Peter 1991:238; Moneta 1991:312; Rainerius Sacconi 1991:338,342-343). In other cases, this world is the dark image of the better world. “[S]ince there are many ... who pay little heed to the other world and to other created things beyond those visible in this wicked world, which are vain and corruptible, which as surely as they come from nothing shall return to nothing, we say that in truth there exists another world and other, incorruptible and eternal created things” (Durand 1991:497-498). In either case, the work of the good god takes place in the other realm. The story of salvation involves not redemption in and of this world, but merely escape to the other place, where the good god reigns. Another version of the same idea involves a division of the universe into good spirit and evil matter. In a text

borrowed from the Bogamils the “land of tribulations” (the present world) is contrasted with heaven, where could be seen “great brilliance, many angels, beautiful groves and singing birds,” where “joy without sadness was ... neither hunger nor thirst existed ... nor cold nor heat, but most moderate temperatures ... flesh born of corruption could not stay there” (Anon., ‘Vision of Isaiah’ 1991: 457). Once again, evil matter (the realm of the world) is outside the scope of God’s salvation. However understood, this present world had no place in any Cathar hopes for the future work of God. Uncreated by God (or by the good god) it lay outside the sphere of the work of salvation or the influence of good.

This insistence on the reality of another world was closely tied to Cathar beliefs about the origins of human souls. The majority of Cathars believed that human beings were the souls of fallen angels. The angels had been condemned to leave their bodies in God’s heaven and to be imprisoned in human bodies on the earth. This imprisonment was repeated through cycles of human lives until individual souls merited liberation from the prison of the earth. Those redeemed souls returned to heaven to resume their rightful place and the restoration of their angelic bodies, crowns, and garments. Within Catharism there were variations on the theme; either all of the fallen angels would be saved, or only some. Some believed God created no other souls aside from the fallen angels, some believe God did create other souls which could also hope to be saved. What is consistent is the continued devaluation of the earth in absolute terms. The earth is merely a prison, and salvation an escape from it. Cathars who looked forward to their return to God’s heaven and the resumption of their lost garments and crowns had no further interest in the relationship between God and evil matter.

Indeed, for many Cathars, if earth played any role at all in the work of the good god, it was as the realm of punishment, be it temporal or eternal. Simply put, earth was hell. One Cathar text describes “this world” as “the last lake, the farthest earth, and the deepest hell,” while another asserts that “hell and eternal punishment are in this world only and nowhere else” (Anon., ‘An Exposure’ 1991:232; Rainerius Sacconi 1991:338). Even the most optimistic assessment made it purgatory, where the fallen, who would one day be redeemed, served their sentence. It was also the place where those who would not be saved were permanently trapped. Usually the work of the evil one, the earth was the appropriate environment for the demonic. If God’s New Day ever occurred, it must occur somewhere else, for the earth’s part in salvation history was as the realm of the damned.

It was the concept of earth as a place of suffering that allowed the Cathars to make sense of their own persecution. “Now we must speak of the tribulation and persecution and death which the apostles and their heirs had to suffer in time to come, doing good and forgiving, and how they must also endure in their own time. In just that way true Christians now are seen to act, those called heretics now, just as they were in the time of Paul ... It is made quite clear in Holy Scripture, as we pointed out in the preceding, how our Lord Jesus Christ showed through His words that in His name His disciples would bear tribulations and persecutions and even death in days to come” (Anon., *Liber de duobus* 1991:585). The Cathars saw their own suffering in direct continuity with the suffering of the New Testament Church. But despite drawing such inferences from clearly eschatological passages, no surviving Cathar document draws any eschatological conclusion from the New Testament linkage of suffering and end times. To the Cathars the point was simply that true followers of God suffer in this world.

The sentencing of fallen angels to the purgatory/hell of the earth was the extent to which most Cathars believed God punished sin, and even this was frequently attributed to Satan.⁴ Suffering on the earth was the province of the evil principle or his minions. So the punishment of sin in the Old Testament was almost universally attributed to the evil god. Even John of Lugio, who placed the flood and some other punishments of sin found in the Old Testament in another world, believed “when God inflicts punishment for sins upon His creatures, he does evil and does not comport himself as God but rather serves his adversary” (Rainerius Sacconi 1991:342-343). Most Cathars resolutely denied the role of the good god in the punishment of sin. It was the evil principle who “caused the goods of others to be plundered by force and ... even caused most bloody murders,” when Israelites were encouraged to attack their foes in the Old Testament. The Old Testament deity “cannot be a true creator who, in the temporal world, caused the manifest and merciless destruction of so many men and women with all their children.” In contrast, Jesus had commanded the love of one’s enemies. “Therefore, it is evident that the Father of Jesus Christ did not cause the manifest destruction of so many men and women with all their children in this tem-

⁴ Revelation 12 tells of Satan’s tail knocking a third of the stars from the heavens - this was commonly understood by the Cathars as referring to fall of angelic souls to their earthly prison (e.g. Anon., *De heresi* 1991:164). The one Cathar text which attributes the forthcoming destruction of Satan to God is discussed below.

poral world” (Anon., *Liber de duobus* 1991:563-64). The very elements of destruction were appropriate to the evil principle, not God - “sin, penalties, desolations, error, fire, punishment, chains, and the devil ... are the names either of the chief principle of evil or of his effects” (Anon., *Liber de duobus* 1991:559).

Cathar assumptions about the nature of reality led to a consistent exegesis of Biblical apocalyptic prophecy. Scripture passages universally understood within the Catholic tradition as referring to eschatology were interpreted by Cathars as speaking of the past.⁵ In some cases, specific verses were believed to have been prophecy when recorded by the Biblical writer, but had already seen fulfillment. One Catholic author records, “They assert that the Blessed Sylvester was the Antichrist of whom one reads in the Epistle ‘The son of perdition,’ is he ‘who is lifted up above all that is called God.’ From that day, they say, the Church was lost” (Bonacursus 1991:173). In other cases, the words of Scripture were understood as referring to ancient times. For some mitigated dualists the seven seals mentioned in Revelation had corrupted the earth, while the prophecies in the twelfth chapter of Revelation about the dragon cast down to earth were commonly interpreted as addressing events of the remote past. (Peter 1991:238; Anon., *De heresi*, 1991:164; Anon., *An Exposure* 1991:232; Moneta 1991:309). Such historicizing exegesis may have given rise to some unique Cathar doctrines, but in most cases it was a way of avoiding contradictions between Scripture and elements of Cathar thought, a process necessary for a group which wished to claim the Scripture as authority.⁶

⁵ In addition to direct assertions that certain apocalyptic Scriptural passages spoke of history and not the future, there was a form of ahistorical exegesis which moved in the same direction. Biblical apocalyptic which described conflict between God and Satan was drawn upon as evidence of dualism and applied to eternity, especially the eternal past, while ignoring the future-orientation of the context. See, for example, ‘The Secret Supper’ (1991:462-464).

⁶ I believe that in this instance exegesis usually followed doctrine rather than giving rise to it, though doubtless the process was interactive. The difficulty with assuming that Cathar doctrine arose entirely through this new understanding of Scripture is that in many cases the obvious reading of particular passages, especially in St. John’s Revelation, is to take it as future-oriented prophecy. For a group whose general exegetical method inclined towards literalism, the transformation of prophecies into history is best explained as being driven by doctrinal necessity.

Historicizing exegesis was critical for the development of one unusual aspect of Cathar thought. The Cathars denied a final judgment not because they believed God would not judge sin, but because they believed the judgment had already taken place; “the ‘future’ judgment has already been made and will not be made again” (Rainerius Sacconi 1991:338). It had taken place when fallen spirits were condemned to be trapped in physical matter on earth. For some this condemnation was eternal, and this world was hell. For others the condemnation was only temporary, and the number and identity of those to be saved was already determined by the good principle. “No soul will be saved other than the spirits who fell, who... will all be saved, ... other souls created by the devil, the evil principle, will be condemned This condemnation ... is here in the darkness of this world, that is, to sustain hunger, cold, weariness and the like ... souls will not be condemned, that is, by a second condemnation, because they are already damned. Thus they deny that future day when ... souls will be condemned because it is already past” (Anon., ‘Brevis summula’ 1991:356). The appeal of apocalypticism lacked a certain urgency for Cathars who believed that all the important decisions had already been made.

There is a difficulty in making positive statements about Cathar eschatology since there is little eschatological content to their surviving works. The extant comparisons with Catholic eschatology are often limited to merely noting the lack of a Cathar equivalent for various tenets of traditional Catholic eschatology. The diverse witnesses to Cathar thought do point to an eschatology, but it was an eschatology that was purely personal. While Catharism appears to lack the corporate eschatology of the Christian Church on which an apocalypticism could be based, there was, in fact, a Cathar equivalent to Catholic teaching about the future state of individual souls. It is this equivalent which can be compared to Catholic doctrine, an equivalent which is worth examining because it sheds light on the reason apocalypticism was incompatible with Cathar beliefs. It is important to note, however, that this evidence survives, primarily in inquisition registers, and that it has survived there solely because Cathar teaching on the subject contradicted Catholic doctrine. Other elements of the Cathar understanding of the eternal fate of the individual may well have existed which were acceptable to the inquisitors, but these would not have been recorded in their manuals.

As discussed above, some Cathars did believe in eternal punishment. Those who did believe in hell placed it on this earth. Others saw earth as a

purgatory, or a combination of purgatory and hell, a place of punishment from which some would be released. Until that time human life consisted of spiritual beings trapped in flesh, doomed to live out existence after existence in the cycle of reincarnation. It is here that Cathar teaching, despite its insistence on reincarnation and (occasionally) radical dualism, was in some ways comparable to Catholic doctrine.

The great difference in personal eschatology between Catharism and Catholicism is revealed in one of the central expressions of Cathar dualism, common to mitigated and unmitigated dualists alike, which was the denial of the bodily resurrection of those to be saved. Because what was to be saved was the spiritual soul created by God (or the good principle), and because salvation was escape from the prison of the body, which consisted of matter which was evil either by nature or by corruption, bodily resurrection had no place in Cathar hopes for the future. And this denial of bodily resurrection underlines some of the basic objections against traditional eschatology from within Cathar teaching. The earth has no role in God's plan of salvation as the resting place of bodies until the end times. Just as material bodies have no place in ultimate salvation, so the material earth has no place either. While the denial of a bodily resurrection does not exactly eliminate the possibility of the development of Cathar apocalypticism, it is consistent with the dominant trends of Cathar thought which placed salvation in the realm of the good god, entirely outside the realm of this world. And it is these trends which kept apocalypticism from developing within Catharism.

So what did Cathars believe about future reality? Cathars expected the souls of the redeemed to return to their natural home in God's heaven, where they would resume their garments and crowns which had been laid aside when the fallen angels were condemned to earthly existence. Cathars differed as to when this anticipated return would take place. Some Cathars came close to the idea of a final judgment when they believed Christ would return to take all the souls of the saved to heaven at once, though even in this scenario there is very little judgment to be made, since the fate of the souls had already been determined. Eternity for the saved would be lived out in God's land, where the sufferings of the human world were absent, and where many of the good things of the earth would be available for the blessed. Some Cathars expected that God would triumph over Satan in the future, but these Cathars believed Satan was not the evil principle, but merely the evil god's agent. No overturn of the evil order was to be anticipated. Cathars also differed on the future of the earth. Some emphasized its eternity as the evil

counterpart of God's eternal creation, others emphasized its material mutability in contrast to the eternal and spiritual creation of God. For the latter, earth would run down at some time in the future. But none of the Cathars really cared whether the earth continued eternally or faded from existence.

Thus far I have argued that apocalyptic eschatology was alien to Cathar theology. Yet there are passages in surviving Cathar literature, or medieval inquisitorial reports of Cathar beliefs, that seem to point to some elements of traditional apocalypticism within accepted Cathar doctrine. A Cathar inquirer, for instance, asks John about signs of the Day of Judgment, and is answered with a description of universal judgment, the destruction of the present world, and the advent of the glorious rule of God (Anon., 'The Secret Supper' 1991:463-464). Another Cathar text teaches "the true Lord God is about to destroy, together with all his powers, this mighty one who daily strives against God and His Creation" (Anon., '*Liber de duobus*' 1991:554-555). Yet another Cathar text suggests that the souls of the saved must await the final action of Christ to enter into their fully restored glory (Anon., 'Vision of Isaiah' 1991:453,456). But these statements are not unequivocal evidence of apocalyptic belief among Cathars. The '*Liber de duobus principii*' that predicts the destruction of Satan also indicates that Satan is an agent of the evil principle, not the evil principle himself (1991:556). The same source charges the author's enemies with falsely teaching that the world will be destroyed (Anon., '*Liber de duobus*' 1991:539). Cathars did not share a common belief about the timeframe in which the souls of the saved would return to heaven; some held the spiritual resurrection occurred immediately after death, others in the remote future. Having Jesus gather the souls of all the elect (souls which have already left this earthly existence) does not, I think, necessarily count as apocalypticism. The only strong case for Cathar apocalypticism comes from the 'The Secret Supper,' which will I will analyze in more detail. 'The Secret Supper' contains a description of end times events which consists largely of a catena of various apocalyptical passages from the Bible. The difficulty in assessing its value as a witness to Cathar belief is the fact that the document is not a Cathar creation, but a Bogamil text which had its literary origins among apocryphal writings outside Western Europe (Walter L. Wakefield 1991:447-449). In evaluating how much significance should be attached to the "Secret Supper" when making conjectures about Cathar theology, two specific questions need to be explored. The first is: to what extent does this document reflect actual Cathar beliefs as opposed to Bogamil theology? The second is: how would this document

have been interpreted by Cathar readers? As a Bogamil product, the 'Secret Supper,' if it does indeed present an apocalyptic interpretation of eschatology, is atypical of all surviving Cathar texts. There is not a single document produced by the Cathars themselves which shares its ideas or values, nor is there any evidence for Bogamil-like eschatology in Cathar material witnessed to by Catholic inquisitors. Under these circumstances one must be very cautious in assuming that the 'Secret Supper' actually reflects Cathar belief. This caution is extended if one takes into consideration the way in which 'The Secret Supper' would have been understood by the Cathars who circulated it in the West, and what they meant to assert by claiming the document as their own. The apocalyptic teaching of the 'Secret Supper' comes from stringing together a series of clearly eschatological passages from the Revelation of St. John. There are other examples of Cathar texts which consist chiefly of Scriptural quotations, such as the Cathar treatise incorporated in Durand of Huesca's *Liber contra manicheos*, or the "*Liber de duobus principiis*." The language of Scripture, at least in the work preserved by Durand, is allowed to express ideas not actually held by the Cathar author, or used to express ideas which are inconsistent with other portions of the document. In one obvious example, a Cathar writer asserts the principle of monotheism - yet the author was an absolute dualist who elsewhere clearly speaks of two gods (Walter L. Wakefield 1991:495). Cathars attempting to claim Biblical authority were unquestionably willing to affirm the teaching of acceptable Biblical books even, it seems, while they were denying the apparent meaning of the Biblical text. One is then forced to ask: how were these eschatological passages in the 'Secret Supper' understood by Cathars? 'The Secret Supper' presents various apocalyptic verses largely without commentary or explicit interpretation. Yet when Cathars, in their own literature, interpreted such eschatological passages they clearly and consistently rejected their apocalyptic implications. Indeed, considering the universal habit of historicizing exegesis among Cathars, it is not altogether clear that a Cathar could not interpret the text in an unapocalyptic manner. I am thus suggesting that 'The Secret Supper' provides no firm basis for claiming that the Cathars did indeed accept some elements of apocalyptic eschatology.

Considering the universal nature of apocalyptic expectations in Europe at the very time that Catharism achieved its greatest successes, any analysis of Cathar eschatology must explain the remarkable lack of any trace of such eschatological influence. The answer may lie in the role apocalypticism played in Western society in the Middle Ages. Medieval apocalypticism was closely

tied to the issue of social and religious reform. Apocalyptic expectations in the Middle Ages emerged in the midst of the Gregorian reform of the Church. These expectations rose in intensity as the influence of that movement faded. Cathars were not interested in reforming the Church or society, only in escaping from the world. The problems of the world provided no impetus to hope for a Day of the Lord when wrongs would be righted. For the Cathars the earth was hell, and there was no hope for amendment. Believing that neither society nor the earth were God's creation to redeem, Cathar hopes for redemption included neither society nor the earth, and so apocalyptic expectations exercised no attractions for them.

This article has tried to demonstrate that despite all the influences which might seem to indicate apocalyptic eschatology would be a natural element of Catharism, there is a logic behind the failure of such an eschatology to develop. Cathar dualism led naturally to a devaluation of the present world and a lack of interest in seeing the world transformed or redeemed by God. The acceptance of dualism does not require the rejection of apocalypticism. Historically, other dualists have held apocalyptic doctrines, including the Bogamils. But the rejection of apocalypticism by the Cathars does go hand in hand with their basic dualism.

The study of Cathar eschatology in this paper has indicated that Cathar theology was profoundly and consistently dualistic. Of course no one has ever questioned that Cathars were dualists, but the coherence of Cathar theology despite the great variety of its expressions points the way towards the conclusion that Cathar theology in all its manifestations genuinely expressed the beliefs of Cathars. The aspect of Catharism most neglected by modern scholars has been Cathar belief. The vitality of Cathar theology as a vehicle for expressing belief may indicate that some of the appeal of medieval Catharism was in the ideas it expressed. Its dualism may have made better sense of the world to average men and women than did the competing Catholic answers to life's questions. At very least Cathar theology deserves a more thorough and intensive study than it has yet received.

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