SECOND EDITION

THE CATHARS

MALCOLM BARBER

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The Cathars

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2nd edition

Malcolm Barber

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To Paddy McNulty and Jim Holt

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Series editor's preface to the first edition

The spread of Catharism in Western Europe in the twelfth century is one of the most fascinating and significant episodes in the history of medieval Europe. Although heresies of various kinds were a consistent feature of the history of the Byzantine Empire throughout the Middle Ages, Catharism was the first organised and theologically coherent heresy to develop in Western Europe since the time of the Late Roman Empire. The seemingly monolithic Catholic Church, the papacy and its priesthood, were challenged in ways which were novel and very threatening. After initial attempts at debate and persuasion, their reaction ultimately took the forms of violence and persecution. The development of techniques of institutionalised repression associated with the Inquisition shaped many aspects of the history of the succeeding centuries.

Although the heretical movements of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were geographically widespread – there was even an outbreak in England – they became most deeply entrenched in northern Italy and south-western France. In the midst of the extensive literature on medieval heresy published since the great upsurge of interest in the 1960s, no accessible book for the student and general reader has ever been devoted specifically to Languedoc, the region where Catharism undoubtedly left its deepest imprint, and which is to this day most closely associated with it. This book is therefore a very welcome addition to *The Medieval World* series. The history of Catharism is a complex phenomenon, whose development and decline requires familiarity with, among other things, Catholic and Cathar theology, the peculiarities of Occitan society, the Crusades and the procedures of the Inquisition. Professor Barber's book covers all these themes, moving forward from a thorough analysis of the relationship between Languedocian Catharism to eastern European heresies to the place of Catharism in south-western French society and the organisation of the Cathar Church. Extensive quotations from contemporary sources are inserted at key moments in the text. While the book's core is beyond doubt the central chapters devoted to the Cathar Church, the Catholic reaction and Catharism's decline, Professor Barber adds a very illuminating final chapter on the twentieth-century idealisation of the Cathars and their exploitation by the tourist industry.

Malcolm Barber is not only a scholar who has written extensively on the Cathars and Catharism, but also one with an exceptionally wide interest in many aspects of the medieval Church and its institutions as well as the general history of medieval Europe. As a result, he writes with vigour and authority, not just about Catharism and the society of south-western France, but about matters such as the canon law background to persecution, evolving papal authority, the violence and strategy of the Albigensian Crusade and the rigour of the Inquisition. This is another excellent addition to *The Medieval World* series.

David Bates

Preface to the first edition

I came to the Cathars through the study of the Templars. Both were brought before the papal inquisitors, and both disappeared, at least partially through inquisitorial efforts, although it took a great deal longer to suppress the former than the latter. The major difference was that many of those accused of the various forms of dualist heresy known as Catharism were prepared to die for their beliefs, whereas the Templars were quite horrified by the charges laid against them and made every effort to avoid going to the stake. Romantics like to see connections between the two, but there were none: no fabulous treasure passed on to the Templars after the fall of the Cathar fortress of Montségur in 1244, no shared anti-Christian beliefs pervaded by esoteric eastern cults, no Grail hidden in a mountain cave on behalf of a secret alliance. Inevitably, some of the accusations against the Templars derive from those against the Cathars – they were after all, embedded in the minds of those who pursued dissent – but the interest lies not in a fruitless search for a non-existent conspiracy, but in comparison between the ways these two central elements of thirteenth-century life both succumbed to the power of an establishment determined to put an end to them.

I am deeply indebted to many friends and colleagues for their help and advice. This generosity remains an integral part of the academic world, and I doubt if there has been a single decent historical work published which has not benefited in this way. Two long-standing friends, Bernard Hamilton and Paddy McNulty, read the typescript; Claire Dutton, Ann Peal, Mark Pegg, and Andrew Roach allowed me to plunder their excellent theses; Michael and William Sibly provided me with a copy of their translation of the chronicle of Peter of Les-Vaux-de-Cernay long before it was published;

Karen Carroll of the National Humanities Center, North Carolina, edited the typescript and deciphered my degenerate handwriting. Many others helped in a wide variety of ways, including Tom Asbridge, Craig Atwood, Elizabeth Barber, David Bates, Anne Curry, Peter Kaufman, Bob Kendrick, Linda Paterson, Walter Wakefield, and Joe Wittig. I owe particular thanks to the Library staff of Reading University and the National Humanities Center. The final result, however, with all its imperfections, is the author's responsibility, but would not have been possible without the time to pursue research. I am therefore very grateful to the Leverhulme Trust, the National Humanities Center, and the Lilly Foundation, the first for a grant to help cover teaching costs, the second and third for the award of a Fellowship which allowed me to spend the academic year, 1998–99 in the privileged environment of the NHC, a truly civilised institution.

Malcolm Barber

Author's preface to the second edition

The last decade has seen the intensification of the controversies which have always beset this subject, so that almost every single facet from the alleged Bogomil origins of dualism in the West to the very existence of a 'Cathar Church' has been vigorously debated. This has therefore become one of the most fragmented and least consensual subjects in the whole medieval period: the interpretation, chronology and authenticity of the essential documents which underpin the history of 'Catharism' have been challenged at almost every point. If all this deconstruction were fully accepted, we would come close to denying the existence of Catharism as a form of developed dualism in the West in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the underlying argument of this book would be exposed as an enormous fantasy. I would not have written the book if I had thought that, but nevertheless *caveat emptor* is a not inappropriate warning for those about to embark on this subject. I have not changed my fundamental views, but I have tried to provide pathways through these discussions not only in the text, but also in the notes and the further reading. This guidance is not complete; if it had come even close to that, the text would have collapsed under the weight of the notes.

In addition to those who gave generous help towards the first edition, I should like to include my grateful thanks to Peter Biller and Rita Tyler.

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Plates

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Abbreviations

CEI	J. Berlioz and J.-C. Hélas, eds, *Catharisme: l'édifice imaginaire. Actes du 7e colloque du Centre d'Études Cathares/René Nelli, Carcassonne, 29 août–2 septembre 1994* (Carcassonne, 1998).
CF	*Cahiers de Fanjeaux.*
Chanson	*La Chanson de la croisade contre les Albigeois*, ed. and trans., E. Martin-Chabot, 3 vols (Les Classiques de l'Histoire de France au Moyen Age) (Paris, 1931, 1957, 1961). English trans. J. Shirley, *The Song of the Cathar Wars. A History of the Albigensian Crusade. William of Tudela and an Anonymous Successor* (Aldershot, 1996).
Doat	Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *Fonds Doat*, vols 21–7.
Heresis	*Heresis. Revue d'hérésologie médiévale. Centre d'Études Cathares/René Nelli.* Since 1983.
HGL	C. Devic and J. Vaissète, eds, *Histoire générale de Languedoc*, ed. A. Molinier, vol. 8 (Toulouse, 1879) (reprint Osnabruck, 1973).
HH	J. Hamilton and B. Hamilton, ed. and trans., *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World c. 650–c. 1450*, with the assistance of Y. Stoyanov (Manchester Medieval Sources) (Manchester, 1998).
MGH	*Monumenta Germanica Historica. Scriptores.*
Pelhisson	*Chronique de Guillaume Pelhisson (1229–1244), suivie du récit des troubles d'Albi (1234)*, ed. and trans., J. Duvernoy (Paris, 1994). English trans. W. L. Wakefield, *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France, 1100–1250* (London, 1974).

PL	J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina*, vols 181, 182, 185, 189, 195, 204, 210, 211, 214, 215, 216.
PVC	P. Guébin and E. Lyon, eds, *Petri Vallium Sarnaci Monachi Hystoria Albigensis*, 3 vols (Paris, 1926, 1930, 1939). French trans. P. Guébin and H. Maisonneuve, *Histoire albigeoise* (Paris, 1951). English trans. W. A. Sibly and M. D. Sibly, Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay, *The History of the Albigensian Crusade* (Woodbridge, 1998).
RF	J. Duvernoy, ed., *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318–1325)*, 3 vols (Toulouse, 1965). French trans. J. Duvernoy, 3 vols (Paris, 1977–78).
RHG	*Recueil des Historiens de Gaul et de France.*
RIS	*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores.*
WE	W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans, trans., *Heresies of the High Middle Ages. Selected Sources* (New York and London, 1969).
WP	J. Duvernoy, ed. and trans., *Chronica Magistri Guillelmi de Podio Laurentii* (Paris, 1976). English trans., *The Chronicle of William of Puylaurens. The Albigensian Crusade and its Aftermath*, trans. W. A. Sibly and M. D. Sibly (Woodbridge, 2003).
WT	William of Tudela (see *Chanson*, of which William is the author of the first part).

Introduction

Catharism was the greatest heretical challenge faced by the Catholic Church in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The attempt by the Cathars to find an answer to the fundamental religious and philosophical problems posed by the existence of evil, combined with their success in persuading large numbers of Christians in the West that they had solved these problems, shook the Catholic hierarchy to its very core, and provoked a series of reactions more extreme than any previously contemplated.

The Cathars would not accept that an omnipotent and eternal God could have been responsible for the material world; for them, this world was the work of an evil creator. Such a creator was either a being fallen from the perfection of Heaven who had seduced a proportion of the angelic souls there and then entrapped them in matter, or he was a co-eternal power, quite independent of the Good God of the Spirit. The only release for those souls encased in the material prison of the body was through the Cathar ceremony of the *consolamentum*, which was the means by which they could return to their guardian spirits in Heaven. The Cathar Church was organised into dioceses, whose bishops presided over an order of succession consisting of elder and younger 'sons', deacons, and *perfecti* and *perfectae*, equivalent to ministers of the Church. Most of the lay supporters of the Cathar Church, known as *credentes*, took the *consolamentum* when near death, for the ascetic rigours of the life of the *perfecti* were too great for most people to be able to sustain. There would be no arbitrary Last Judgement; the world would end when the last of the angelic souls had been released, thus once more disentangling the spiritual and material worlds. Given the imperfections of most people's lives this process would not necessarily be completed rapidly, for some souls would need to transmigrate through a variety of material vessels (including animals) before entering the body of a person who understood the importance of the *consolamentum*.

Catharism represented total opposition to the Catholic Church, which was viewed by the Cathars as a false and fraudulent organisation which had prostituted itself for power and ill-gotten wealth. The sacraments through which the Catholic Church claimed to open the way to salvation were quite valueless, since they were founded upon the claim that Christ really had lived on earth, had been crucified, and then resurrected, events clearly impossible, since God could not have taken on material form in the first place. For Catholics therefore, there could be no compromise with the Cathars, manifestly working to subvert the faithful at the behest of the Devil; it was the responsibility of all Catholic leaders, ecclesiastical and lay, to strive to overcome this heresy with all the strength at their command. This would have been true at any point in the history of the Latin Church, but it was particularly pertinent to the reformed papacy which, since the 1050s, had been working to reassert its leadership of the universal Church. By this means it was attempting to infuse both clergy and laity with a new set of moral values. Repression of Catharism was not therefore a question of choice, nor was there any option of toleration, for it was a positive obligation upon those charged by God to lead His Church on earth. The principal weight of this obligation naturally fell upon the pope, as the holder of the see of Saint Peter, first of the Apostles and the rock upon which Christ's Church had been founded.

The origins of Catharism remain controversial. Most historians accept that the dualist Bogomil Church, established in parts of Macedonia and Bulgaria from at least the 930s, played a role in the formation of western Catharism, although tracing possible links with earlier dualistic religions such as Paulicianism, and beyond that to the Manicheans and the Gnostics, remains a virtually impossible task. The most important means of transmission to the West seems to have been through Thrace and Constantinople, although it is unlikely that this was the work of any single individual or group or that dualistic belief spread to the West by only one route. Indeed, by the mid-twelfth century there are signs of this heresy in several areas, in particular the Rhine Valley, the Champagne region, the plains of Lombardy, and the mountains, hills and river valleys of western Languedoc. There is, though, little agreement on the extent and importance of Bogomil influence, and still less on the chronology of its spread. Evidence for the presence of Cathar adherents in the Rhineland can be found in the 1140s, but some historians remain convinced that forms of proto-Catharism can be discerned possibly as early as the first half of the eleventh century. Whatever its origin, initially the predominant manifestation of this belief in the West took the form of mitigated or moderate dualism, which is based on the idea of some kind of fall from grace by the Devil, rather than absolute dualism, which claimed the existence of two quite independent and co-eternal powers. However, by the late twelfth century, most of the Cathars of Languedoc and some of those of northern Italy had been converted to absolute dualism, probably by the Greek Nicetas, who reorganised the Cathar Church at St Félix-de-Caraman, a bourg situated about half-way between Toulouse and Carcassonne, where the Cathars held a council either in 1167 or in the mid-1170s.

By this time the papacy and many leading members of the Catholic hierarchy had become convinced that Catharism represented a dire threat to orthodoxy. Their fears were not allayed by the failure of missions sent to convince the Cathars of their errors, and by the evident futility of condemnations at Church councils like that of the Third Lateran in 1179. The accession of the dynamic Pope Innocent III in 1198 brought matters to a head. Although he never entirely lost faith in the power of persuasion, he became convinced that he would have to use force in the form of a crusade if the problem was not to become insoluble. In 1208, following the murder of the papal legate, Peter of Castelnau, by a vassal of Count Raymond VI of Toulouse, he called upon the faithful to assemble in order to crush the heresy in Languedoc, offering full remission of sins to those who would take part. Although he was unable to convince King Philip II of France that participation was in his best interests, for this most pragmatic of Capetian rulers remained deeply involved in his uncompromising conflict with the Angevin, King John of England, he did inspire two powerful northern armies to descend upon Languedoc in 1209. The more important of these attacked Béziers from the east, having travelled down the Rhône valley and, following the capture of the city and the massacre of a large proportion of its population, went on to force the submission of Carcassonne and its lord, Raymond Roger Trencavel. The leading lay power of the region, Raymond VI of Toulouse (died 1222), had temporarily avoided the consequences of the previous laxity of his father and himself towards heresy by joining the crusade at the last moment. It was a short respite. In late August 1209, Simon of Montfort, an important baron from the western region of the Ile-de-France, was chosen as the leader of the crusade, and from then until his death in June 1218, while besieging Toulouse, he waged a relentless war on the heretics and those whom he perceived to be *fautors* or protectors of heresy. During that time he came into conflict with all those lay powers with interests in western Languedoc, most spectacularly with Peter II, King of Aragon, whom he defeated and killed at the battle of Muret (south-west of Toulouse) in September 1213.

Papal control over these events was quite limited. Assailed by special interests, which included his own legates on the one hand and the secular powers of Languedoc on the other, Innocent III became increasingly uneasy about the course of the crusade. At the Fourth Lateran Council, held in November 1215, he determined to protect the interests of Raymond VI's son, the future Raymond VII, on the grounds that he bore no responsibility for the situation, and he therefore reserved to him the Provençal lands of the house of Toulouse. This proved to be the catalyst for a southern revival for, while the younger Raymond attacked Beaucaire, his father re-invaded his Toulousan lands, inciting revolt in his principal city at the same time. This resistance gathered strength after Simon of Montfort's death and was only finally extinguished by the crusade of King Louis VIII (1223–26) and the occupation of royal troops which followed. In April 1229, Raymond VII had no alternative but to accept the harsh terms of the Treaty of Paris under which he was left with only a small proportion of his Toulousan lands. Most importantly, his daughter, Jeanne, was to marry one of King Louis IX's brothers, and their offspring would succeed to the inheritance of the house of Toulouse.

Despite the reluctance of Philip II to become involved, the chief beneficiary of the Albigensian Crusades had evidently been the Capetian monarchy, now politically dominant in Languedoc in a manner quite unthinkable only a generation before. Yet the problem of heresy remained, albeit displayed less overtly than in the days before the crusades. These were the circumstances which led Pope Gregory IX to designate specialist inquisitors, whose sole purpose was to investigate heresy on a systematic basis, probing the façade of opposition in community after community until fissures were opened up to reveal the heretics and those who had helped them. From the early 1230s until the demise of Catharism in Languedoc a century later, the persistence, courage and, occasionally, corruption of the inquisitors, played a major role in uncovering and eliminating the followers of Catharism. During this time they suffered many vicissitudes – in

May 1242, for example, two inquisitors and their staff were murdered while they were staying overnight at the village of Avignonet – but in general they operated in a far more favourable political environment than those clergy who had tried to combat heresy in the pre-crusade days. Ultimately, a combination of political change and inquisitorial determination, helped by a developing economy, ground down the Cathar Church in Languedoc. It was no longer possible for the Cathar leadership either to organise itself effectively or maintain its ideological coherence when survival became the chief priority; when their last important refuge in the Pyrenees, the castle of Montségur, fell to royal forces in March 1244, the elimination of the Cathar Church as a coherent force was no longer in doubt. In the second half of the thirteenth century, isolated *perfecti* continued to operate but, after Montségur, adherents of the Cathars usually had to look towards northern Italy, where many of the heretical leaders had taken refuge, if they were to find spiritual comfort or receive the *consolamentum*.

Catharism was not easily overcome. Even after the defeats of the thirteenth century, it was still possible for two notaries from Ax on the western edge of the Sault Plateau in the central Pyrenees to organise a limited revival in the early 1300s. Peter and William Autier spent at least two years in Lombardy studying with the Italian Cathars as well as with their own compatriots in exile, before returning home and, at great personal risk, attempting to spread the Cathar belief once again. Although restricted in geographical extent, this revival was sufficiently strong for the inquisitors (now better organised and more institutionally consistent than ever before) to feel it necessary to engage in an all-out drive to bring it to an end. Peter Autier himself was executed in April 1310, although the traces of his influence can still be found in the 1320s. William Belibaste, the last surviving *perfectus* from the Autier period, was eventually caught and burnt to death in 1321.

No longer a living force in the Latin West after *c.* 1330, nevertheless, the resonances of the Cathar era can still be felt today. Catharism was no minor deviation from orthodoxy; on the contrary, it presented itself as the only true Christian community in a corrupt world dominated by a mendacious Catholic Church. Even the most cautious historians accept that it had a continuous impact in the Latin West for nearly two centuries between the 1140s and the 1320s, while some argue that its effects were felt well before this time, possibly as early as *c.* 1000. Not surprisingly, others have been attracted to it since, all with different motives. Among these have been Protestants seeking a provenance with which to counter the Catholic charge of innovation; southern patriots railing against north French domination; romantics lamenting the loss of a cultured civilisation; and commercial interests from local *maires* to exploitative publishers and authors who see the opportunity to profit from the religion of anti-materialism. Even more than most historical subjects, the Cathars are viewed today through the many-layered filters of the more recent past.

chapter 1

The spread of Catharism

Dualism

> *Of course you all know how this heresy – God send his curse on it! – became so strong that it gained control of the whole of the Albigeois, of the Carcassès and most of the Lauragais. All the way from Béziers to Bordeaux many, or indeed, most people believed in or supported it. When the lord pope and the other clergy saw this lunacy spreading so much faster than before and tightening its grip every day, each of them in his own jurisdiction sent out preachers. The Cistercian order led the campaign and time and again it sent out its own men. Next the bishop of Osma arranged a meeting between himself and other legates with these Bulgars at Carcassonne. This was very well attended, and the king of Aragon and his nobles were present. Once the king had heard the speakers and discovered how heretical they were, he withdrew, and sent a letter about this to Rome in Lombardy.*
>
> *God grant me his blessing, what shall I say? They think more of a rotten apple than of sermons, and went on just the same for about five years. These lost fools refused to repent, so that many were killed, many people perished, and still more will die before the fighting ends. It cannot be otherwise.*[1]

This is part of the introduction of an extended poem, written in Provençal, the first third of which is by William of Tudela, who describes himself as a 'clerk in holy orders'. He was originally from Tudela in Navarre, and the poem covers the period just before and during the Albigensian Crusade, between 1204 and 1218. He is a generally reliable source, pro-crusader in approach, but with an awareness of the suffering of the victims of the crusade as well.

The cursed heresy is Catharism and the early-thirteenth-century followers in the region to which William refers believed in a version of it known as absolute dualism. According to the *De heresi catharorum*, written by an anonymous but knowledgeable Lombard, perhaps towards the end of the twelfth century, this party of Cathars 'believe and preach that there are two gods or lords without beginning and without end, one good, the other wholly evil. And they say that each created angels: the good God good angels and the evil one evil ones, and that the good God is almighty in the heavenly home, and the evil one rules in all this worldly structure.' Lucifer is the son of this god of darkness and he ascended to heaven, where 'he transfigured himself into an angel of light', and persuaded the angels to intercede with God on his behalf and have him appointed steward of the angels. In this capacity he seduced some of the angels and, in the great battle which followed, they were expelled from Heaven with Lucifer. The angels were made up of body, soul, and spirit and 'the souls were seized by Lucifer and were put into the bodies in this world'. Christ, the Son of God, 'came to save only these souls'. 'They explain that human bodies are in part animated by those evil spirits whom the devil created and in part by those souls that fell. Those souls do penance in these bodies and, if not saved in one body, a soul goes into another body and does penance.'[2]

The Cathars of Languedoc had followed these doctrines since the assembly of a council at the village of St-Félix-de-Caraman, situated about half-way between Toulouse and Carcassonne, which was held either in 1167 or a few years later, sometime between 1174 and 1177.[3] It had been attended by leading Cathars from both 'France', that is the lands north of the Loire, and Languedoc, who had been converted by Nicetas, bishop of the Bogomil Church of Constantinople, from their belief in moderate or mitigated dualism. These moderate dualist Cathars, says the author of *De heresi catharorum*,

> *believe in and preach one only good God, almighty, without beginning, who created angels and the four elements. They assert that Lucifer and his accomplices sinned in heaven, but some among them are uncertain as to how their sin arose. Some, indeed, hold – but it is a secret – that there*

> *was a certain evil spirit having four faces: one of a man, the second of a bird, the third of a fish, and the fourth of a beast. It had no beginning and remained in this chaos, having no power of creation.*

Lucifer came down and was led astray by this evil spirit and when he returned to heaven seduced others.

> *They were cast out of heaven but did not lose the natural abilities which they possessed. These heretics assert that Lucifer and the other evil spirit wished to separate the elements, but could not. Thereupon, they begged from God a good angel as an assistant, and thus with God's acquiescence, with the aid of this good angel, and by his strength and wisdom, they separated the elements. And, they say, Lucifer is the God who, in Genesis, is said to have created heaven and earth and to have accomplished this work in six days.*[4]

Ultimately this change was very significant for Languedoc, for moderate dualism has recognisable similarities to the Catholic version of the Fall, but absolute dualism has no common ground with the Catholics at all. By 1209, having failed to make any inroads against the absolute dualists of the region, Pope Innocent III saw no feasible alternative to the use of force. For him, drawing on the ideology of the just war worked out by St Augustine in the early fifth century, this was a legitimate weapon in the face of unbending obstinacy.[5]

William of Tudela claims that this heresy was rife all the way from Béziers to Bordeaux, but he only hints at how it might have arrived there in the first place when he refers to a meeting at Carcassonne between the bishop of Osma and those he calls 'Bulgars'. The name Bulgar derives from the Bogomil heretics of the Balkans, in particular those of Thrace, Macedonia, and Bosnia, but by William's time it was extensively used to describe Western heretics, reflecting a widespread perception that their beliefs and organisation had originally derived from these regions. However, the process by which it occurred is by no means self-evident. The Bogomils did share some characteristics with two earlier eastern heresies – Paulicianism and Messalianism – both of which were present in the Balkans as a result of Byzantine policy which aimed to break up opposition in the imperial heartland of Asia Minor by the physical removal of disaffected populations to other regions. The Paulicians were strengthened in the eighth century when the Isaurian dynasty – the so-called 'iconoclast emperors' – attempted to suppress the use of icons, an attitude which, from the 730s, persuaded them to tolerate those equally unsympathetic towards the externals of Christian worship. Moreover, when the Emperor Constantine V reconquered Armenia from the Muslims in the 750s, Paulicians from the region were among those resettled in Thrace, depopulated by plague a few years before. With the ending of the Iconoclast regime in the mid-ninth century, Paulicians were persecuted once again, suffering serious military defeat when their fortress at Tefrice in the theme of Armeniakon in eastern Anatolia fell to Basil I in 878; even so, they were not eliminated, for some were recruited into imperial armies, where their presence was regularly reported down to the twelfth century, while the removal by the Emperor John Tzimisces of further communities from the eastern frontier to Philippopolis in Thrace during the 970s added to their presence in the Balkans.[6]

Both sects found their origins in the East: the Messalians in fourth-century Edessa and the Paulicians in Mesopotamia in the mid-seventh century. Both gained adherents throughout the Byzantine Empire, for during the fifth century Messalians could be found in Syria, Cappadocia and Asia Minor, while by the early ninth century the Paulicians claimed to have seven churches extending from the Euphrates in the east to Corinth in the west.[7] Neither accepted the Judeo-Christian belief in the creation of the world by God; both sought an explanation for evil in the existence of matter, a key component of which was the human body. However, while the Messalians thought that a demon inside each body needed to be expelled by intense prayer, the Paulicians were part of the dualistic tradition, in that they believed in the eternal separation of God and Matter. These are the 'Two Principles' which ultimately came to characterise the absolute dualists of Languedoc and northern Italy from the 1170s onwards.

The origins of Paulician belief are therefore a matter of importance to historians seeking the inspiration of medieval heresy in the West. Byzantine writers almost invariably called them 'Manichaeans'. Manichaeism was the work of a Persian called Mani, put to death by the Zoroastrian establishment in 276 AD. Systematic dualism originated with the Gnostics of the first century for whom matter was intrinsically evil, but Mani himself seems to have been subject to a variety of ideas drawn from Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Babylonian Mandaeism (in which he had been brought up). Among the identifiable elements is the influence of Marcion, the son of the bishop of Sinope, who died in 160 AD. Marcion's dualism took the form of rejecting the God of the Old Testament, since he was responsible for the evil in the world, so that this God therefore had no connection with the New Testament at all. In Mani's cosmology, Darkness and Light were quite separate in origin, but the capture of some particles of Light by the aggressive forces of Darkness (which took the form of a composite creature with a lion's head, dragon's body, bird's wings, fish's tail, and beast's feet) meant that God had been obliged to undertake a series of actions to undo this catastrophe. The consequence was a long and, as yet, unresolved conflict, in which God sent a series of 'evocations' to create a material world in which to imprison the forces of Darkness. In reaction to this the power of Darkness invented man, self-propagating like the demons, in order to ensure that the particles of Light remained imprisoned, in this case in the human body. Jesus Christ was one of these divine 'evocations', sent to bring the message of dualism. Mani himself was the last of these, possessed of the final revelation which was intended to make these beliefs universally accepted. The ultimate goal was a return to the complete separation of Light and Darkness.[8] Like their counterparts in the Orthodox Church, for many Latin clerics these ideas were not lost in the obscurity which the passing of ten centuries might have brought. St Augustine had, for about nine years, been an 'auditor' among the Manichaeans, which meant that the word was deeply embedded in the vocabulary of all literate men in the medieval West.[9] Many ecclesiastical writers were therefore ever ready to see 'Manichees' at the root of all 'heretical depravity' without feeling the need for further investigation.

Not surprisingly modern historians have neither been so easily convinced nor have they found such ready unanimity. It is notoriously difficult to trace the path of ideas over centuries, especially when those ideas run counter to prevailing orthodoxy and are therefore subject to vilification, distortion, and suppression. Some historians – among them Dmitri Obolensky, Steven Runciman, and Hans Söderberg and, more recently and tentatively, Yuri Stoyanov – while fully aware of the propaganda value of the Manichaean label to the orthodox, have been prepared to accept the essential continuity of dualism, tracing it from Gnosticism and Manichaeism to the Paulicians and thence to the Bogomils and the Cathars.[10] Söderberg's view is especially clear-cut: absolute dualists derived from Persian Manichaeism, and mitigated dualists were influenced by Egyptian and Syrian Gnosticism. For him the Cathars gave 'a Christian clothing to the myth of the combat between the two powers'; between them and Gnosticism there existed 'an uninterrupted, traditional chain'. Arno Borst sees this more in terms of context than continuity, pointing to the fundamental nature of the problem of the existence of evil. Thus there is a common element in the religions of the first millennium before Christ seen in both Persian Zoroastrianism and the cults of ancient Greece, which was the inherence of evil in matter which imprisoned the soul. Thereafter Pauline Christianity, heavily influenced by the Greek perspective, emphasised the duality between God and the world, while a range of Christian heretics, including Marcion in the second century and the Spaniard Priscillian in the fourth century, threatened the orthodox with their dualistic beliefs. Two heresies – the Messalians and the Paulicians – proved more durable, stamping their presence on the minds of the Byzantine theologians of the early middle ages.[11] It is entirely understandable that medieval churchmen should see contemporary dualists as Manichaeans, but Manichaeism as such disappeared in the Byzantine Empire after the persecution of the Emperor Justinian (527–65), although it persisted further east. Some historians – such as Bernard Hamilton and Yliva Hagman – therefore reject the idea of ultimate Manichaean derivation, pointing out that the Paulicians, the Bogomils, and the Cathars all saw themselves as 'good Christians'.[12] As Hamilton expresses it: 'The Christian dualists were not an alien graft on a Christian stock, but dissenters who had broken away from the Orthodox Church and interpreted the Christian faith in an exceptionally radical way.' In this view the founder of the Paulicians, Constantine of Mananalis, was therefore the first Christian dualist and the originator of a new heretical movement.

The Bogomils

Neither position, though, solves the problem of the possible links between the Messalians and Paulicians and the Bogomils; to make any progress in this direction it is necessary to find out what is known about the Bogomils themselves. The first detailed description of dualist heresy in Bulgaria is by Cosmas the Priest, whose *Discourse* or *Treatise against the Bogomils* can be dated between 969 and 972. Cosmas may have been a bishop, or at least held a position of authority within the Church; it is evident that he felt a responsibility to protect 'the simple and ignorant' from the hypocrisy of the heretics, while at the same time deploring some of the behaviour of the Orthodox clergy. His account is based on his own observations and owes little or nothing to previous tradition.[13] Cosmas places the appearance of the heresy in the reign of the Tsar Peter (927–69), preached by a priest called Bogomil, the first to do so in Bulgaria.[14] A letter of Theophylact Lecapenus, Patriarch of Constantinople, written at Peter's request sometime between 940 and 950, confirms that a heresy based on dualist belief had been troubling the ruler, although its content depends much more upon Theophylact's theological knowledge of Manichaeism and Paulicianism (or that of his staff who probably drafted the letter) than any direct experience, and it is not absolutely certain that he is referring to the Bogomils.[15] Cosmas was fully aware of the persecution of the heretics which this exchange suggests, but he says, 'How can they deserve any compassion, even if a host of them suffer, when they claim the devil as creator of mankind and all the divine creation? And because of their great ignorance some call him a fallen angel, and others call him the "steward of iniquity".' Indeed, they say that 'it is by the devil's will that all exists: the sky, the sun, the stars, the air, mankind, the churches, the cross; all that belongs to God they ascribe to the devil; in short, everything that moves on the earth, whether it has a soul or not, they ascribe to the devil'. The Devil's dominion over the material world was evident in Matthew 4:9, where he offers Christ, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' In 'the parable of the two sons' (that is, the Prodigal Son) in Luke 15, the elder is identified as Christ, the younger, 'who deceived his father, the devil'. They call the Devil Mammon, says Cosmas, saying that 'it was he who bade men take wives and eat meat and drink wine'. Those who marry are 'servants of Mammon' and their offspring are 'the children of Mammon'. The corollary of this is the condemnation of the basis of Orthodox belief, together with the symbols of the Christian religion. They could not accept the idea of the redemption of the human race through Christ's death and resurrection, nor the role of the prophets, John the Baptist, or the Virgin Mary. These people rejected the cross, icons, relics, and saints, 'wagging their heads like the Jews when they crucified Christ'. They claimed that 'the Eucharist is not really, as you [the priests] claim, the body of Christ, but a simple food like all others'.

Cosmas regarded the heretics as hypocrites, especially as they often concealed their beliefs by attending church and taking part in the sacraments and the liturgy. Most infuriating to him, though, was what he saw as their deliberate obstinacy in misinterpreting important biblical passages. Their presentation of the accounts of Christ's miracles in the Gospels was a case in point.

> *How, indeed, are they not the enemies of God and man, they who do not believe in the Lord's miracles? Because they call the devil the creator, they do not admit that Christ performed any miracles. Although they hear the evangelists proclaim out loud the Lord's miracles, they 'twist them to their own destruction' [2 Peter 2:16], saying, 'Christ did not restore any blind person's sight, he cured no cripple, he did not raise the dead; these are only parables. The evangelists present sins which were cured as if they were diseases.'*

Cosmas says nothing about any kind of structured organisation, so probably none existed at this time, although it is clear that there was an elite group of travelling preachers who relied upon the support of sympathisers and converts. 'People who see this great humility of theirs, who think that they are good Christians and able to direct them to salvation, approach them and take their advice about their souls' salvation; while they, like a wolf about to snatch away a lamb, at first pretend to sigh, and answer humbly.' They pray eight times every twenty-four hours, reciting exclusively 'Our Father', but they do no work; instead 'they go from house to house and eat the goods of others, those of the men they have deceived'. They confess and give absolution to each other, women as well as men, an action quite contrary to Paul's command that women were not to teach or have authority over men.

Again, there is no consensus on the derivation of these ideas. For Obolensky the influence of the Messalian and Paulician heresies is evident. Messalians believed in intensive prayer, an ascetic lifestyle, and the enhanced role of women, while Paulician dualism denied the whole basis of Orthodox Christian belief and the formal ecclesiastical structure that went with it.[16] Hamilton rejects Messalian influence since there is no evidence to suggest that this was a living faith after the seventh century, and accords only a relatively small role to the Paulicians since, although both saw the devil as the evil creator, as well as agreeing on some specific points such as their refusal to accept the Eucharist, the Bogomils differed fundamentally in believing in only one God and not in two co-eternal deities. Moreover, there was no ascetic tradition among the Paulicians; for Hamilton this was much more likely to have been drawn from Orthodox monasticism, although with a quite different motivation. If there was an external influence from eastern dualism, then he suggests it was possibly from Zurvanite Zoroastrianism with which the Bulgars had previously come into contact and which had great similarities to the mitigated dualism of the Bogomils.[17] Nevertheless, although historians differ over influences most agree that this was a new heresy and that Cosmas is describing a set of beliefs quite specific to his time and place. Bogomil was the true founder of an original Church which, by the mid-eleventh century, when contemporaries began to use the term 'Bogomilism' to describe his legacy, had had a profound influence far beyond Macedonia.[18]

However, no completely convincing explanation has ever been put forward for the appearance of the heresy at this particular time. Most historians attribute its success to the prevailing religious, political, and social instability, and there is no doubt that the cultural foundations of 'Bulgaria' were still in the process of formation in the mid-tenth century. Conversion to Christianity was relatively recent and still incomplete, dating from the mid-ninth century, although no systematic missionary work seems to have been undertaken until the entry of Clement, Naum, and Angelarius, in 885, disciples of St Methodius who, together with his brother Cyril, had evangelised the Slavs of Moravia.[19] They may, too, have made an inadvertent contribution for in their concern to ensure the permanence of their efforts, they established a school at Ochrida, where the translation of the New Testament and other texts into Old Slavonic greatly facilitated Bogomil propagation of their own interpretations of these materials.[20]

The situation was complicated by the ambiguities of the links with Byzantium, for the political and military relationship oscillated between subservience and sometimes violent Slav resistance. This turmoil was compounded by the attempt of Khan Boris (852–89) to ally with the Carolingian Louis the German, which would have opened the way for the papacy. The result was forceful Byzantine intervention in 864, compelling the Khan to accept Greek Orthodoxy. It is not surprising to find Paulician missionaries from Tefrice at work in Bulgaria shortly after – probably around

870 – since the conflicting religious currents offered evident opportunities for proselytisation.[21] As a consequence historians have often taken up positions based on a view derived either from a 'religious' or a 'social' explanation, approaches which have become equally characteristic of the modern presentation of Catharism.[22] For Obolensky, the spread of heresy was essentially a consequence of the inability of the Orthodox Church to establish itself effectively in the face of the religious, social, and economic unrest of mid-tenth-century Bulgaria, a situation which could at least be partly explained by the deficiencies of the ecclesiastical establishment. Cosmas himself is very critical of the contemporary Church, especially its monastic and eremitical strands, although quite unwilling to accept that there was any external justification for the heretics' behaviour.

Cosmas, nevertheless, saw this religious dissent as encompassing incitement to social revolt. 'They teach their followers not to obey their masters; they scorn the rich, they hate the Tsars, they ridicule their superiors, they reproach the boyars, they believe that God looks in horror on those who labour for the Tsar, and advise every serf not to work for his master.'[23] Obolensky's interpretation of this passage is wary: 'one should beware of attributing too much importance to the social anarchism of the Bogomils or of seeing in them Slavonic communists of the Middle Ages.'[24] However, in contrast to Obolensky, Dimitur Anguelou identifies the prevailing socio-political climate as the key to understanding the spread of Bogomilism at this time. 'Although in its form it represents a heresy, at its base it was a social movement, directed against feudal oppression.' For him, Bogomilism was essentially a grass-roots movement, which appealed to an oppressed and overtaxed peasantry and an impoverished urban proletariat, which felt little affinity with a wealthy Church and a boyar class which held almost all the economic and jurisdictional power. Violence, pillage, and torture by soldiers exacerbated their already precarious situation. In Anguelou's view, the hierarchical concept of Orthodoxy simply provided an ideological justification for the existing state of feudal domination.[25] Anguelou's Marxist interpretation seems too schematic to be entirely realistic, but equally Obolensky is too dismissive. The rejection of those who possessed material power seems entirely consistent with the other information provided by Cosmas. However, if this is the case, a transformation in the extent of its social acceptance was not the least of the mutations which Bogomilism underwent in the course of its transfer to the West.

Cosmas had hoped that his warnings would alert his contemporaries to the danger and that the heresy would therefore be eliminated before it could make further inroads. But his efforts were in vain. By the early twelfth century Bogomilism was not only common in Bulgaria, but had also been identified by Byzantine writers in Thrace, in western Asia Minor in the theme of Opsikion, and, most importantly, in Constantinople itself. Anna Comnena, daughter of the Byzantine emperor, Alexius I (1081–1118), wrote the *Alexiad*, her panegyric of her father, in the 1140s.[26] She was as concerned to emphasise his intellectual gifts as to demonstrate his military prowess; for her, Alexius's debates with heretics made him 'the thirteenth apostle'. She identifies Philippopolis in Thrace and Constantinople as the two major centres of heresy in her father's time. Alexius encountered the heretics of Philippopolis in 1114, when he went there to campaign against the Cumans; in Anna's view, this city was 'a meeting-place . . . of all polluted waters', for practically all its inhabitants were either Paulicians (whom she identifies with Manichaeans), Armenian monophysites, or 'so-called Bogomils'. According to Anna, despite the obduracy of three of the leaders, Alexius managed to convert many thousands of the 'Manichaeans' and settle them in a new city near Philippopolis called Alexiopolis or Neocastron.[27] The emperor's confrontation with heresy in Constantinople is undated, although internal evidence places it earlier, sometime between 1101 and 1104.[28] Here his main opponents are quite specifically Bogomils, whose heresy Anna believed was previously unknown, although she conceded that it apparently existed before her father's reign, 'but was unperceived (for the Bogomil sect is adept at feigning virtue)'. Their dogma, she says, is 'an amalgam of Manichaean and Massalian teaching', which had 'deep roots: it had penetrated even the greatest houses and enormous numbers were affected by this terrible thing'. Their leader, Basil, was tricked into confessing his beliefs and publicly burnt to death in the Hippodrome.[29]

However, Anna could not bring herself to describe Bogomil beliefs in detail, but instead refers the reader to the *Panoplia Dogmatica* by the monk Euthymius Zigabenus, commissioned by her father to produce a systematic description of all heresies, together with refutations. His section on the Bogomils seems to have been based directly on Basil's testimony, since he had actually been responsible for interrogating him, so the two writers effectively complement each other.[30] His description is, in essentials, consistent with that taught by Bogomil and his disciples although, as might be