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# The War Against Heresy in Medieval Europe

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# The War Against Heresy in Medieval Europe

## **Abstract**

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## **Comments**

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## The War Against Heresy in Medieval Europe.<sup>1</sup>

'There must be heresies', St. Paul had said, and in the early christian centuries, as everybody knew, a multitude of heresies had repeatedly torn the church apart so that its survival as a unified body had been seriously in doubt. The greatest writings of the greatest of the Fathers - St. Augustine especially - had been composed in the struggle against them, to define Christian teaching for all time, and to caution their successors against the errors associated with the names of Pelagius and Donatus, Mani and Arius, and a host of others. Catholics continued to regard heresy as a menace to the church. But by the tenth century, and for some centuries before, there was no lively apprehension that heresy was widely disseminated in the world, or that the faith was actually endangered by it. No surviving writer suggested on the eve of the millennium that the propagation of heresy among the people of Western Europe was active, or that any of the heresies of antiquity had survived. There were occasional references to heresy as a theoretical danger, but that is all.

This changed quite suddenly in the early part of the eleventh century. Ademar of Chabannes, writing in the 1020s and '30s, is the first substantial author who clearly believed that heretics were active in his lifetime. His voluminous writings, still being searched, bear ample testimony to that. Several of his contemporaries agreed with him, including King Robert I of France, who burned about fourteen people - different numbers are given by the sources - both men and women, at Orléans in 1022, the first since antiquity to meet this fate. They were followed by an unknown, but not small number at Milan in 1028, and another group, again of unknown size, was hanged on the orders of the Emperor Henry III at Goslar in 1052. There are grounds for suspecting, though no warrant in the sources for positively affirming, that these were not the only people who met violent deaths as suspected heretics, and with greater or lesser degrees of formality, in those decades, which also saw other accusations of spreading heresy, some of which we shall have to look at more closely.

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<sup>1</sup> Warfare against heretics, analogous to warfare against unbelievers was permitted... Peters, Inquisition, 56

In the following centuries, the conviction that heretics were active among the people became increasingly widely shared, sporadically at first, but by the end of the twelfth century almost universally. Catholic historians, recording and no doubt reflecting the perceptions and observations of both ecclesiastical and secular authorities as well as of scholars and teachers, reported the presence of heresy and the activity of heretics in more and more parts of Europe, attributing to them first the denial of fundamental elements of Catholic teaching and practice, and then the propagation of increasingly radical and comprehensive alternatives. By the end of the twelfth century the belief that heresy constituted not only a theoretical but a real and present danger to the faith had become itself a test of Catholic orthodoxy. The growing fear of heresy was expressed in, but not assuaged by, a battery of measures for its detection and suppression. War was held permissible against heretics as against unbelievers. The Albigensian crusade, launched against the County of Toulouse in 1209, was only the first, though the most notorious, bloody and consequential, of the wars against heresy - in the literal sense rather than the metaphorical one in which I use the phrase as the title of this lecture - which marked the history of the thirteenth century, and whose essentially political character became ever more brazen. In principle responsibility for the prosecution of heresy belonged to the bishops, but they were increasingly urged to action by kings and popes, who instructed them to make regular inquisition for heretics and their supporters on the pain of themselves being identified as such. When that failed, inquisition for heresy was taken out of their hands and entrusted to special agents directly armed by papal authority with sweeping powers to enter and interrogate whole communities, and to impose upon those they found to be recalcitrant heretics, their families and their supporters, a draconian array of penalties ranging from penance, such as the greatly feared obligation to wear distinguishing marks on the clothing, to imprisonment, confiscation and disinheritance, to death. To describe its powers and procedures Lea needed eight chapters, 260 pages, of his great book; for its activities 'in the several lands of Christendom' eight chapters, 560 pages, dealing with the whole of Latin Europe except Scandinavia and the British Isles; and for its extirpation of the exuberant variety of movements, sects and cults in thirteenth century Italy - the Italy of *The Name of the Rose* - inspired with varying degrees of directness and accuracy by the teaching and visions of Francis of Assisi and Joachim of Flora, another three chapters and 180 pages: it is as good a way as any to remind you briefly how from the beginning of the thirteenth century the war against heresy

was waged in its many forms for the rest of the middle ages, though perhaps reaching its peak in the reign of Pope John XXII, who died in 1322. That the ultimate penalty was exacted in a relatively small proportion of cases - 6.5% of those recorded by Bernard Gui for example<sup>2</sup> - only underscores the impossibility of imagining the number of lives devastated, of families destroyed, of communities traumatised, in the pursuit of heresy. Behind them all, though to degrees that varied with the circumstances of particular inquisitions and the temperaments of particular inquisitors, lay, as Colin Morris puts it, 'the effective introduction, on an international scale, of procedures of enquiry which dispensed with the existing ideas of legality'<sup>3</sup>, and in particular the protections of permitting the accused to know the names of the witnesses and the nature of the charges and evidence against her, and to have the opportunity of challenging them, and of calling witnesses on his own behalf.

Lea's present librarian, Edward Peters, has described brilliantly how the myth of a monolithically organised and centrally directed engine of Romish tyranny, 'The Inquisition', with its fanatical friars, its torture chambers and its *autos da fe*, has been shaped and elaborated by the successive aberrations of the European imagination - the sectarian and national hatreds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the anticlerical enlightenment of the eighteenth, the lurid romanticism and semi-suppressed eroticism of the nineteenth - to remain set in the popular entertainment, and much of the historiography, of our own time. Among the resulting distortions not the least is that in fixing our gaze on the bloodiest and most spectacular manifestations of the war against heresy, the myth of The Inquisition distracts us from the manner in which the inquisitors and their activities, but still more the socio-legal culture of which they were both products and props, permeated the texture of everyday life, penetrating, and staining indelibly the fabric of social relations. Europe was changed by its war on heresy, and how those changes relate to the great transformations in society, culture and political structures which brought the new civilization into being in those centuries, are questions that must remain central to our study of its history. Lea's was the greatest single attempt to answer them - in the English language there is no rival even within sight - and though since his time the enormous volume of materials which the inquisitors have left, as well as the societies

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<sup>2</sup> Given, 69

<sup>3</sup> 474

in which they worked, have commanded the attention of an ever-growing and ever more skilful and sophisticated body of scholars, you may wonder by the time I release you this evening how far we have advanced from where he left us in 1888.

Among the changes which restructured Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries Lea rightly identified as fundamental those which separated the property, the powers and the personnel of the church from lay society more comprehensively, more permanently and more obviously than ever before. Monasteries, cathedrals and other churches were endowed with land and its revenues on a massive scale, up to a third of the whole in some regions, and took the lead in opening it up for profitable cultivation. The clergy - and, crucially, not only the monks - paid for it by accepting the obligation of celibacy, and underwriting the reconstruction of the secular aristocracy on the basis of the conjugal, dynastic family created and sustained by the sanctification of matrimony, and initially ferocious and always firm control over the marriage of even quite distant kin. They secured in return not only the material but the social basis for a renewed and reinvigorated ecclesiastical hierarchy which laid secure foundations for its own authority and its own perpetuation in new systems of university education, and new syntheses of learning, the law and theology, to assume its leading place among the restored and aggressive monarchies of Latin Christendom. In this massive accretion of wealth and power to the Church Lea had no difficulty in detecting the consequences foretold by the most famous dictum of his occasional correspondent Lord Acton, and presenting in his opening chapter a coruscating account of the corruption which inevitably accompanied it. Reaction followed. 'When men began to reason and to ask questions, to criticise and to speculate on forbidden topics, it was not possible for them to avoid seeing how woeful was the contrast between the teaching and the practice of the Church, and how little correspondence existed between religion and ritual, between the lives of monk and priest and the profession of their vows.'<sup>4</sup> In one region after another critics began to raise their voices, and to find a ready following in movements which 'were the natural outcome of antisacerdotalism seeking to renew the simplicity of the Apostolic Church.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I, 57

<sup>5</sup> I, 89

Far more ominous, however, were those who became known as the Cathars. They infiltrated from the Balkans, appearing first in Aquitaine early in the eleventh century but by the end of the twelfth deeply entrenched in the countryside of the Languedoc and the cities of Lombardy, with outposts in the Rhineland and Flanders, not Christian heretics (though they called themselves Christians) but followers of the teachings of Mani which Augustine had identified as the most dangerous of ancient errors, and the emperors had persecuted with corresponding ferocity. These men and women - that women were among their elect was one of the plainest evidences of their depravity - held that this world was the creation of Satan, himself (in the purest version of this creed) eternal and uncreated, and therefore that the church, and all worldly institutions and authorities, secular and ecclesiastical, were nothing but the instruments of evil, and marriage and procreation the mechanisms of its perpetuation. Now Lea, so firmly in sympathy with the antisacerdotal heresies, on this found himself once more in agreement with Acton, though more in sorrow than in anger: 'however much we may deprecate the means used for its suppression and commiserate those who suffered for conscience' sake, we cannot but admit that the cause of orthodoxy was in this case the cause of progress and civilization. Had Catharism become dominant, or even had it been allowed to exist on equal terms, its influence could not have failed to prove disastrous.'<sup>6</sup>

In the three opening chapters here so crudely summarised Lea presented an account of the circumstances of the war against heresy and the enemy against whom it was conducted which has been contested in virtually every detail, but remains very largely unchallenged in its essentials. There is infinite variety, of course, in the balance which historians have struck between the achievements of the ecclesiastical reforms and their deficiencies, and in the tones in which both have been described. The history, character and doctrine of each of the heresies and heretics remain in dispute. But almost everybody has agreed that the failure of the Church immaculately to live up to the ideals which it proclaimed so successfully contributed generously if not indispensably to widespread reaction against it, and to the propagation of its apostolic ideals by other and unauthorised means. On the other hand, while few now discern its presence in western Europe before 1140 or so - a date to which we will return - there

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<sup>6</sup> I, 106 I have in mind A's characterisation of Catharism as 'not error simply, but criminal error erected into a system.'

is still very wide acceptance that Catharism offered an independent alternative to Catholicism, and one far more coherent and deeply rooted than any of the other challenges presented.

In the twentieth century the question how far dualist heresy<sup>7</sup> was imported into Latin Europe from the Balkans or Constantinople, if at all, and if so when, attracted attention quite disproportionately to its importance. On the other hand, as you might expect, there has been a great deal of somewhat inconclusive discussion of the social origins of these and other heretics, which might be briefly summarised as suggesting that heresy could, in propitious circumstances, appeal to people at any level of society, and did not necessarily or obviously do so to some very much more than to others; and that it could, and in my view quite certainly did, appeal to those who resented or resisted certain developments which were crucial to the social revolution to which I have referred - such as the sanctification of matrimony - but that it was neither necessary nor confined to such resistance.

All of these competing analyses rest on a shared assumption that heresy was coming from somewhere 'out there' - whether from Bulgaria if you were a pious Catholic, or the oppressed if you were a pious Marxist, the rising bourgeoisie in the towns if you were a Weberian or the scarcely civilised peasantry of the countryside if you were a twelfth-century intellectual. That assumes in turn the objective reality of the enemy - that there was a clearly defined boundary between orthodoxy and heresy, and that everybody knew where it was.<sup>8</sup> When you declare a war you expect people to know which side they are on. It would be harsh to blame Lea, a child of his confidently positivist age, for supposing that that was the case. We have become a great deal more conscious of the extent to which our observations and judgements are moulded by what we ourselves put into them, and that, as Edmund Leach puts it elegantly, *while our ability to control the world out there is severely limited, we have a virtually unrestricted capacity to rearrange the version of it which we carry in our heads*. In dealing with charges of heresy in eleventh- and twelfth-century Europe this is no

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<sup>7</sup> (and there is a degree to which all heresy, like Christianity, was dualist)

<sup>8</sup> cf. Fichtenau, *Scholars* 127: 'Heretics on the other hand were believers ... who had successfully made the transition to a different religious palace without becoming irreligious. Since they [apparently, all heretics, or Cathars] were already heretics, they had the difficult phase behind them, of course, the



abstract theory. Certainly I had been struck and puzzled, some years before I had Leach to rationalise it for me, by the impression I often received from the brief and fragmentary accounts we have of these proceedings, how often those accused seemed to be surprised by the suggestion that the simple precepts which (through the intermediacy of an educated leader) they had culled from the Gospels were contrary to the teachings of the Church.

The obvious response, perhaps, is 'They would say that, wouldn't they?', but it does not quite seem to fit, for example, the people who were interrogated in the New Year of 1025 by Bishop Gerard of Cambrai, before an imposing and no doubt intimidating assembly of dignitaries. They answered Gerard's questions straightforwardly, according to what is either directly or at second hand his own account, and without any suggestion of the dissimulation which was often associated with such dialogues in the twelfth century, revealing in doing so their adherence to a number of undoubted heresies, including the denial of infant baptism. They sat, or stood, patiently through a lengthy harangue, in which the bishop rebutted some (but not all) of their errors and a great many others besides until, 'as the day was wearing to a close' he brought the proceedings to an end with a well judged but scarcely economical peroration. When Gerard had finished the accused 'stood stupified by the weight of his discourse, as though they had never learned any better argument. Speechless, they could only reply that they believed that the sum of Christian salvation could consist in nothing but what the bishop had set out.' They were asked to confirm their acquiescence by putting their marks to a confession of faith - and refused, on the ground that since it was in Latin they did not understand it, and would not know what they were signing. It was translated and read to them; 'they confessed with a solemn oath that they abjured what had been condemned and believed what is believed with the faithful. To confirm this attestation each of them wrote a sign of the cross.... and returned to their families with the blessing of the bishop.' The obvious implication, which Gerard to his credit chose to ignore, was that if they had not been satisfied with what was read to them they would not have signed simply on the basis of his authority; if they had been the conscious and cunning enemies of the faith so often identified, rightly or wrongly, by his successors in later centuries nothing would have been easier than to

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stage during which they had come to doubt all matters of faith.' Whatever this means it seems to assume a modern process of individual doubt and conviction.

put their crosses to the Latin, and disclaim it later on the ground that they had not understood it.

One question that this raises is what exactly is meant by 'heresy'. Matthew Paris tells us that Robert Grosseteste (d. 1253) during his last illness defined heresy as 'a choice made for human ends, contrary to Holy Scripture, openly declared and stubbornly maintained.'<sup>9</sup> This is not quite how the canonists were putting it by Grosseteste's time, and we shall return to the difference, but it has been widely accepted as expressing the essence of the concept during our period. The essential points that it brings out are that heresy, thus understood, was a public matter - openly declared - and that error became heresy only when 'stubbornly defended' - that is, after it had been publicly corrected by the bishop of the diocese. In other words, it took two parties to make a heretic: unless and until the bishop took action the question simply did not arise. Heresy was not a simple fact: it expressed a relationship, between the extent to which the bishop insisted on conformity and the extent to which the potential heretic was disposed to withhold it. In other words, in assessing and explaining its appearance and dissemination in the eleventh and twelfth centuries we are dealing with two variables, not one - and nothing could be more obvious than, as between the beginning of our period and the end, as between one region or one diocese and another, simply as between individual human beings, the variability in the energy, the vigilance, and the competence of bishops and other dignitaries was enormous. For example, and we have time only for one, in 1208 a papal legate was called upon to settle a dispute between the the inhabitants of St.-Sever, in Gascony, and their lord, the abbot. It began when the townspeople refused to render to the monks the customary burial rights, and instead carried out burials on their own accoiunt, in the cemetery, and with proper headstones. They blockaded the church, to prevent women from giving oblations to the monks, handed the money over as alms to the poor. Most shockingly of all, they constructed their own clock tower outside the church, at whose foot, for some time, services were conducted by laymen, *ad minus catholicas*. They formed a sworn association, took charge of the keys of the town, appointed a town crier to replace the abbot in his capacity as spokesman of the community, instituted a municipal tax, which they imposed on the monks as well as themselves. The legate

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<sup>9</sup> RWS RG 292-3

declared all of these actions and innovations illegal, and ordained a return to the *status quo*, full restoration of all their losses of the monks, and so on. What he did not do was betray the slightest suggestion of the presence of heresy, in the land which had been characterised for three quarters of a century past as riddled with it, and at a moment when preparations for the Albigensian crusade were in full and well publicised flow. As Benoit Cursent, who describes the episode, remarks, for heresy not to exist it was necessary, and sufficient, not to mention it.

Among the many consequences of this obvious but persistently under-appreciated fact I want to devote the rest of this lecture to considering one of its implications for our sources. It goes without saying that our knowledge of heresy and heretics rests almost entirely on the assertions of their enemies. Neither Lea nor almost any of his less capable successors, myself among them, has overlooked that, of course. All have dealt with it in the same way, by assembling a list of documents which contain assertions or incidents of heresy, and examining each to consider what residue of truth may be secured when all due allowance has been made for the prejudices and preconceptions of the author, the quality of his information, the traditions and circumstances within which he was working, and so on. The sum of these residues is then assembled into whatever pattern of historical context, development, motivation and causation seems good to the historian, with due and conscientious allowance for their lacunae and his (they have almost all been his, oddly enough) own preconceptions and predispositions. Lea's second chapter contains what is virtually a canonical list of such texts, upon which his commentary has been commented in turn, much as in the twelfth-century schools, in more or less detail, and each in his own tradition, by Turberville and Volpe in the 1920s, Grundmann in the '30s, Runciman and Morghen in the '40s, Werner and Borst in the '50s, Manselli and Russell in the '60s, Lambert and me in the '70s, Fichtenau in the '90s, to mention only a random handful that could easily be doubled, or trebled. But if we cannot be sure that the heresy was indeed 'out there', in the Balkans or, as the chroniclers used to say, in the fields and at the cross-roads, in the weaver's shop or in the hall of the impoverished Occitan baron or of the rich Italian merchant, can we safely work on the assumption that it is 'in there', in the text over which we pore so scrupulously?

I am neither competent nor inclined to follow that question through all the ramifications that current critical and epistemological theory might suggest. There are plenty to do it better. It does, however, suggest the possibility of considering our texts, perhaps in a somewhat broader context, in respect of the second variable implied by Grosstesteste's definition - that is, of asking not what they tell us about heresy and heretics, but how worried Catholics were about popular heresy and heretics, and what they thought should be done about it.

To return, then, to where I started, I can detect no such anxiety in the tenth century. There was no contemporaneously recorded case of a heresy accusation - the strange episode of Vilgard of Ravenna is reported by the eleventh-century writer Radulphus Glaber - and a preliminary electronic search of Migne's *Patrologia Latina* reveals only a handful of references to the great heretics of antiquity. (I should add that this is by no means an exhaustive test, but it should be good enough to show up some smoke if there had been a fire of any size.) In and around the third decade of the eleventh century, as I have said, there was some serious persecution, and Ademar of Chabannes and Radulphus Glaber, both highly idiosyncratic characters with agendas of their own, were convinced, or at least anxious to convince us, that heresy was indeed resurgent, for the first time since antiquity. Current opinion is sharply divided as to the extent and nature of what they knew and described, but whether or not we take them at their word (which for my own part I would not), their anxiety on this point was not widely shared by their contemporaries. We have already noticed that Bishop Gerard of Cambrai dealt temperately, if loquaciously, with the group that was brought to his attention, and Wazo of Liège, writing about twenty years later, famously counselled his brother of Châlons against imitating 'the usual hasty fervour of the French' by handing some suspected heretics in his diocese to the secular arm for punishment.' Granted, that implies *a fortiori*, a less relaxed view on the part of the Bishop of Châlons, and perhaps of the French as well, but once again the *Patrologia* offers nothing to support it more generally. It shows the vocabulary of heresy in use in two eleventh-century contexts only: the long and widely reported series of disputes over the eucharist which raged around the life and trials of Berengar of Tours, and the great conflict between the reform papacy and its numerous antagonists which dominated the second half of the century. On this evidence the only heresiarchs of the eleventh century were Berengar and the anti-pope Guido of Ravenna, the *simoniaca*

*heresis* was added to the *ariana heresis* as an accusation that assisted bishops to discipline their clergy, and the Manichaeans were an occasional historical memory. No words were wasted on heresy among the people.

The storm that began in the 1050s when the Patarenes of Milan attacked the archbishop and his clergy as monsters of incontinence and corruption, steeped in the heresy of simony, raged through Europe well into the twelfth century, and left few corners untouched. In one place after another monks and hermits appeared to denounce the bishop and his clergy, calling on the populace - as Ramihrdus did at Cambrai in 1076 - to boycott their services according to papal instructions; in one diocese after another, with motives of varying degrees of purity, bishops expelled, or tried to expel, married canons from their cathedrals and married priests from their parishes. Such conditions, not to mention wider changes such as the rapid growth of the new monasticism and the cathedral schools in these decades, might seem ideally suited to foster not only popular heresy itself, which to a limited extent it did, but widespread anxiety about it, which so far as I can see it did not. Certainly there was concern that anticlerical agitation might be dangerous: as Marbod of Rennes complained of the hermit Robert of Arbrissel's blistering attacks on the incontinence and avarice of the Breton clergy is , 'this is not to preach but to undermine.' But it was expressed in the context of a wider confidence that Christianity had triumphed over its enemies. Jay Rubinstein has recently painted a most interesting picture of the young Guibert of Nogent, growing up in Picardy, and forming 'a remarkably naive view of eleventh century Europe - one that sees Christianization as complete, and senses no danger from heretics and no rivalry with Judaism'<sup>10</sup> - a view precisely echoed by Bishop Herbert Losinga of Norwich (d. 1119) when he wrote that 'the Catholic faith has fought, and has crushed, conquered and annihilated the blasphemies of the heretics, so that either there are no more heretics or they do not dare to show themselves.'<sup>11</sup> Guibert's confidence that would be shaken only when he became an abbot, and was thrown into contact with the lively and unruly scholarly and urban communities of Laon and Soissons. Even then, though he did interrogate some suspects whom he identified (wrongly) as 'Manichees', in 1114, it was his encounters with Jews, not Christian heretics, that convinced him that the faith was under siege.

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<sup>10</sup> p. 30

<sup>11</sup> q. Morris, *Papal Monarchy* 339

His younger contemporary Ordericus Vitalis, author of the widest-ranging and most voluminous chronicle of the age, showed a not unfriendly interest in the hermit-preachers despite their attacks on the hierarchy and the traditional style of monasticism practised in his own house at St. Eyroul, but none whatsoever in popular heresy or the threat of it, though it is hard to imagine that he did not hear about the episode in 1116 of which historians (including this one) have made so much, when Henry of Lausanne fomented a popular insurrection against the clergy of Le Mans, and presided for some weeks over what amounted to a commune there. By the 1120s Peter of Bruys had launched a spectacular career of anti-clerical agitation in Provence, marked by violence and the burning of crosses - which, apart from a contemptuous passing reference from Abelard, passed apparently more or less unnoticed outside the region until Peter the Venerable produced a lurid treatise about it more than a decade later.

Peter the Venerable's treatise *contra Petrobusianos*, now generally thought to have been completed in 1138-9, but probably drafted somewhat earlier, is indeed one of the first signs of a changing attitude. As Abbot of Cluny Peter may have felt that he had some general pastoral responsibility for the state of the church in Provence, to whose four bishops his work was addressed. One of them, the Archbishop of Arles, had already caused our old friend Henry of Lausanne, who had headed south after being driven from Le Mans in 1116, to be brought as a heretic before the Council of Pisa, in 1135, where he was convicted and instructed to retire to a Cistercian monastery, from which he soon escaped. It seems possible that his arrest on this occasion was the outcome of another treatise, addressed by an otherwise unknown monk named William to an unidentified prelate of this region, and describing a debate in which William had confronted Henry, and elicited from him an unambiguously and radically heretical statement of what we would see as fundamentalist, Bible-based Christianity. Henry's sojourn in a Cistercian house eventually drew Bernard of Clairvaux into the fray, when he undertook a preaching mission to the Languedoc in 1145 to undo the damage which Henry had inflicted on Catholic discipline and worship in the region now marked, in Bernard's words, by 'churches without people, people without priests, priests without the deference due to them, and christians without Christ... men dying in their sins, and souls everywhere being hurled before the awesome tribunal unreconciled by repentance, unfortified by communion. The grace of baptism denied,

and Christian children kept away from the life given by Christ....' A year or two earlier Bernard's attention had been drawn to Cologne, where two groups of heretics had drawn themselves by their quarrelling to the attention of the local clergy, one of whom, Eberwin of Steinfeld, wrote to Bernard for advice, describing what is now regarded by most historians as the first appearance in the west of dualist heretics from the Byzantine world, and elicited in return two of his most eloquent sermons. In short, during the late 1130s popular heresy, which up to this time had been perceived and treated as a local problem of little wider significance or interest, quite suddenly began to be treated by leading figures in Christendom as a general problem and a looming menace to the souls of the faithful. The most striking indication of it is that up to this time no evidence survives that such incidents were reported to the Pope; after it all of them were.<sup>12</sup> The change was neatly registered by the clergy of Liège, who wrote to Lucius II in 1145, because 'the divine ordinance has placed the Roman See at the head of the Catholic Church to watch over its members, and to be a refuge for those who are threatened with destruction', to tell him about some heretics discovered in their diocese; there is nothing to suggest that they had felt the need to do so when just the same thing had happened only ten years before.

Before considering the significance of this change and suggesting an explanation for it, let me briefly put it in context by completing my sketch of how the danger of popular heresy appeared to the leaders of Christendom. It is a more familiar story from this time forward, and can be reduced to that of two further turning points, roughly around 1160 and 1180. Up to 1140 or so action against heresy had been confined, by and large, to those who forced themselves on the attention of the clergy by preaching it, and its discovery resulted in death, by burning or otherwise, only in rather exceptional circumstances. In 1157, however, a Council at Reims demanded that not only the heretics (described as Manichees) themselves, but their followers should be punished by imprisonment, branding and exile; in 1163 at Tours, a Council presided over by Pope Alexander III demanded that the adherents of 'a damnable heresy that has been propagated in the region of Toulouse' should be searched out and destroyed; in the same year a group, including a young girl whose steadfastness moved the onlookers to pity, was burned at Cologne, having been found when their

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<sup>12</sup> I am ashamed to say that I have never previously noticed this contrast, and if (as seems extremely probably) anyone less has done so owe them an apology for overlooking it.

neighbours noticed that they didn't go to church on Sundays; and in 1165 Henry II caused 'rather more than thirty people, both men and women' to be stripped and driven from the city of Oxford 'with ringing blows into the intolerable cold, for it was winter... and they died in misery': apart from their leader they were 'simple and illiterate people, quite uncultivated peasants, Germans by race and language', whose evangelism had secured the conversion of one old woman. This amounted to the first mass execution for heresy in the middle ages, and for good measure Henry followed it up a few weeks later by the first secular legislation against it, proclaiming harsh penalties for anyone who gave aid or succour to these people - even though he must have known perfectly well that they were already dead.

In this flurry of episodes we see two momentous developments: a new readiness on the part of authority to go looking for heresy rather than waiting for it to show itself - but the old woman at Oxford may suggest still a degree of hesitancy about the propriety or public acceptability of doing so - and a quicker resort to capital punishment combined with a willingness to apply it on a much larger scale, and not only to the alleged preachers of heresy but to whatever popular following they had attracted. These are by no means to be thought of as specifically ecclesiastical developments; as I have shown in more detail elsewhere, they were very largely driven by what we now hail as the state-building activities of King Henry II, and in particular by the political requirements of the forty-year war against the County of Toulouse which he launched after the failure of his immensely expensive expedition against it in 1159. Nevertheless, though these developments are clearest and most dramatic where Henry's interests are visibly involved, that does not wholly account for them.

The last phase in the construction of the armoury and ideology that would support the war against heresy in the thirteenth century was also initiated as part of Henry's war against Toulouse, when, in 1177 he and Louis VII of France briefly abandoned their long hostility in order to assume joint sponsorship of a papal legation which was to root out from the city and the region the heresy of the good men - as it was still called, though Henry's courtiers were by now assiduously promoting it as a sect which had long festered secretly in the region, but had recently developed an elaborate international organisation with its own hierarchy and a radical dualist theology. The



party which entered the city in 1178 contained a number of experienced administrators from Henry's court, and promptly adopted and adapted the techniques which had been honed and perfected in England in the war against crime of the 1160s, to some of whose methods and propaganda archbishop Becket had taken exception. 'At the instruction of the legate... the consuls of the city and some other faithful men who had not been touched by any rumour of heresy were made to promise to give us in writing the names of everyone they knew who had been *or might in future become* members or accomplices of the heresy, and to leave out nobody at all, for love or money.'<sup>13</sup>

This was inquisition, the procedure which lay at the root of the legal revolution of this age, and which for better and for worse enabled the mechanisms of government, secular and ecclesiastical alike, to penetrate local communities with a hitherto undreamed of power and permanence. Its possibilities for good or ill were promptly displayed when among 'the very large number of names which had entered that catalogue' within a few days appeared that of Pierre Maurand, one of the most powerful men, and head of one of the most powerful clans, in Toulouse. He was promptly broken under public interrogation, and scourged naked and barefoot through the city to prostrate himself before the legate on the steps of his cathedral; he was compelled to raze one of his towers to its foundations, his possessions were confiscated, and he was dispatched on a three-year pilgrimage to the Holy Land, after which the legate proceeded to examine 'the great number of others who were [now] known to him either through public suspicion or private accusation.' In the following year the leaders of the mission reported to the Third Lateran Council, which decreed that 'heretics and all who defend and receive them are excommunicated. If they die in their sin they shall be denied Christian burial, and are not to be prayed for', making specific and elaborate reference to the heretics 'in Gascony, the territory of Albi and Toulouse....whom some call Cathari.'<sup>14</sup> Five years later this provided the warranty for the elaborate decree *ad abolendam*, in which Pope Lucius III and the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa effectively created the episcopal inquisition, demanding that every archbishop or bishop 'himself or by his archdeacon or by other trustworthy and fit persons' should visit once or twice a year any parish in his diocese in which

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<sup>13</sup> Hy C, BPH19

<sup>14</sup> H&A 169

heretics had been reported to reside', being prepared if necessary to put the whole neighbourhood on oath to uncover them, and prescribing the most draconian penalties for the heretics themselves and anybody who protected them or failed to report them. This decree was specifically applied to a long list of sects, headed by the Cathars, but also included elaborate and universally applicable catch-alls.

To look back from the 1180s is to see how the recognition, or proclamation, of popular heresy as a serious and a general danger to the Church and the faithful had opened the way to the elaboration of a set of ideas and of institutions which fuelled the war against heresy in the years to come. It also completed the formation of what I have previously called the persecuting society, not only because its victims included as well as heretics, Jews, lepers, homosexual men, prostitute women and many others, but because in order to persecute these groups it was necessary first, in varying degrees, to create them, by welding scattered fragments of reality into coherent abstractions - 'the Jew', 'the heretic' and so on - and classifying the resultant stereotype as a menace to christian society which must be ruthlessly extirpated. I have always insisted, and now do so again, that this was neither a wholly cynical nor a wholly deliberate or consciously co-ordinated process: we persuade others most effectively of what we have first persuaded ourselves, and transparent sincerity is a powerful asset in any cause. We have now, in the case of popular heresy, identified the late 1130s as the moment when that identification and classification of heresy (but not yet of the Cathar heresy) as a general and present menace, took place. It is an interesting moment at which to search for an explanation, a moment when the new scholastic culture whose adepts would form the clerical elite - and the power elite - of the new Europe was crystallising. It was at about this time, for example, that the arts curriculum was settling into its final shape in Paris and the first Gratian was completing his concordance of canon law in Bologna; it was in these years that Peter the Venerable put together his treatises not only on heresy, but on Jews and on Islam, thus, as Dominique Iogna-Prat has shown superbly, not only constructing a rampart to defend Latin Christendom against its foes, but defining it and them in the process. It was in 1141 that Peter Abelard was accused of heresy at Sens, in a confrontation whose roots stretched back for two decades and more through the bitter political and clerical factions of northern France, and Constant Mews has recently shown that one of the most powerful anxieties that Abelard had aroused was precisely that his

strictures on the abuse of spiritual power might undermine the spiritual authority of the French bishops just when they were peculiarly nervous of popular unrest in their cities and the papacy was under similar pressure in Rome. You may not find these coincidences especially suggestive, and it would certainly be premature for me to claim that they are anything more. They do, however, prompt the hypothesis that the first stirrings of the war on heresy are visible at a moment when the scholastic culture which defined, articulated and sustained the new social order which we call that of medieval Europe was becoming more self-conscious, and bracing itself in anticipation of challenges from its rivals both for cultural and for social power. The regularity of the intervals which separate that turning point from the others we have considered is also tantalising: it would be overly schematic to conclude that the class of 1140 was gaining influence by 1160, and in power by 1180, but it may suggest one of the dynamics that we should be looking for.