

Response Page

The following response by the author was posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Mark Gregory Pegg's review of Claire Taylor, *Heresy in Medieval France: Dualism in Aquitaine and the Agenais, 1000-1249*, Royal Historical Society Studies in History (The Royal Historical Society: The Boydell Press, 2011) and Claire Taylor, *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Medieval Quercy*. Heresy and the Inquisition in the Middle Ages. (York Medieval Press: Boydell and Brewer, 2011.)

H-France Review Vol. 12 (December 2012), No.160

The original review may be found on the H-France web page at:
<http://www.h-france.net/vol12reviews/vol12no160pegg.pdf>

6 December 2012

Response by Claire Taylor, University of Nottingham.

I thank Mark Pegg for reviewing my books and to H-France for the chance to respond to the review. I would first like to make a correction. It is necessary to understand thoroughly each other's arguments and to render them accurately, not to stretch them too far. As such, I suggest that Pegg has set up something of a straw man in the "traditionalist" ideal-type to which I apparently correspond. I have never argued that early eleventh-century western dualists, let alone Bogomils did anything like go "into hiding, only to emerge to spread the dualist faith once more after 1100." Rather, I see Bogomil influence in western heresy in c.1000, and Bogomil-derived ideas as being transmitted in the west for a couple of decades. I provide evidence of how and why this probably happened and, just as importantly, evidence that this was the sort of society in which dualist ideas would have resonance. I think it perfectly possible that Bogomils themselves came west in c.1000, but they must have been a temporary and marginal phenomenon, because easterners are not what the sources describe.

Rather, they describe people indigenous to the west sometimes *influenced* by foreigners and even easterners. But dualism then, unarguably, *died out*. I find no "Medieval Manichee" operating 'off grid' in the west for a hundred years. Perhaps this was because some of the social issues they addressed were now being taken seriously by reformers. That feels a little too neat for me, but the fact remains that there is no evidence for dualism for a century and the idea that it was in some way sleeping is not one I would find convincing. However, dualists came west *again*, or again influenced western travellers, and are next noted in the Rhineland in the 1140s. They spread a version of dualism into southern France and northern Italy more successfully than elsewhere because of the particular social dissonance being experienced. In the 1170s, at the highly divisive council of Saint-Félix, a different form of dualist authority, with a different lineage of Bogomil leaders, became influential in southern France. There was another Bogomil-initiated schism in 1223. This is the extent to which I find Bogomils in the west: being responsible, directly or second-hand, for the introduction of dualism in Europe in c.1000 very briefly, in c. 1140 more successfully, and thereafter interfering sporadically in its development.

Pegg's more central and valid point is that we must be able to make the link between societies and the ideas that arose out or resonated within them. The ideas had to take root. They did not do so everywhere, so why did they do so where they did? But this is my approach. He complains that the traditionalists consider that the people who had lived through crusade and inquisition "were in no way profoundly transfigured by these shocking events." My central thesis about both the Agenais and Quercy is that this is *exactly* what took place and my focus is firmly on the social structures he says that I describe so well and how it was fertile soil for such a radical and unsettling idea as dualism. Dualism absolves the individual for what is wrong in the world, and in the trauma of the crusade it was both a confrontational and comforting ideology to take up. This is in fact the central point of my second book, and I provide evidence for why, how, when and to whom this happened quite specifically. Rather than it being the case that I never articulate "any connection between ideas and society," I simply do not come to the same conclusions about the northern Languedoc as Pegg has come to about the heartlands of heresy. Finally in terms of correction, I have written of a Cathar "church," but I do not *think* I have ever called it a "Church" and in my second book, have also addressed the term critically.

Pegg asserts as though it were self-evident, that "the traditional narrative is no longer persuasive, a learned relic that, for more than a decade now, has failed every serious test." This is not the case just because he states it. Here and in his recent work he references himself as the authority for this *a priori* assertion, without demonstrating what *specifically* is wrong with the *specific* evidence that other historians use. He is frustrated that historians won't accept that people in the Languedoc were "transformed into heretics by their persecutors." This comment alludes to two features of the historiography. Firstly, it makes most sense when his own position the origins of heresy is set out, for which there isn't space in his review. I shall summarise it as I understand it. The good men and women were revered as lay Christians, with elevated status in the pre-Crusade Languedoc, but they found themselves displaced and dishonoured by the invaders in the crusade. Through being persecuted, they found themselves again at centre stage, and adopted dualist ideas to distinguish themselves still further, thus benefitting from this process of persecution.[1]

However this view is far from supported by the wider 'new school' scholarship of Monique Zerner *et al* with which he identifies, and so it is hardly a weakness of my work that I too don't give it much space. Secondly, his comment references the process of inquisition itself and is part of a critique that is more generally accepted: through the formulaic nature of the questions asked and the equally narrow range of responses that could be given, heresy was constructed in the courtroom. I have never denied that heresy "was partially constructed and understood" through the assumptions behind inquisitors' questions. If anything, I find this process rather more deliberate on the part of the inquisitor than Pegg does, and also starting around a decade earlier.

Pegg dismisses the statements made by thousands of witnesses because what they show us is merely "similar" to something else. But how unusual is this in court records where a whole movement, or conspiracy, is being uncovered? If we want to, we can dismiss any piece of historical evidence, or even a whole body of it such as inquisition documents, on the basis that it might not relate to a reality. It is almost impossible to prove definitively that a given medieval text corresponded to reality. We are forced to look to corroboration from other sources to convince us. We have such sources in abundance for medieval dualism: polemics and treaties, chronicles and narrative *chansons*, inquisitors' manuals, papal and other letters, a canon of texts

thought to originate with Cathars and their Bogomil antecedents, and tracts written by heretics-turned-inquisitors. How does Pegg account for the latter? Are they *all* lying? If we are to dismiss this entire corpus, we need to take it text by text just as the ‘traditional’ historians such as Jean Duvernoy and Bernard Hamilton have done in building the picture of ‘Catharism.’ Hilbert Chiu makes what seems a good case concerning Alan of Lille’s work, which I do not know well.[2] Lucy Sackville’s recent monograph relating to thirteenth-century sources is timely.[3] Furthermore, in a good many cases, as I have shown there is, so much else in the depositions that leaks through without being forced into the shape with which the inquisitor felt most at home. I find dualist, and other extreme positions, expressed within the deposition records that are far from formulaic and originate outside of the inquisitorial process and, more to the point, precede it.

That aside, Pegg is right to remind us that the terms ‘Cathar’ and ‘perfect’ are problematic, and I am not averse to the idea that historians might consent to drop them at some point. Many terms for medieval phenomena are essentially modern (‘feudalism,’ ‘crusade’). ‘Cathar’ and ‘perfect’ at least have the credibility of being found in sources contemporary with the phenomena they seek to describe. Eckbert of Schönau, who coined ‘Cathar,’ needed to come up with a new label because he knew that he and the Cistercians were encountering something new: contemporary Manichees. ‘Perfect’ was used by Peter of les Vaux-de-Cernay and those who took up arms against heretics and their protectors. It is true that labels can somewhat reify something otherwise a little indistinct. Abandoning or changing the label does not necessarily undermine the reality to which it refers, but it will render it indistinct again, difficult to examine, compare or contrast. This is why ideal-types are useful to historians as starting points, before they give way to specifics and varieties. In my work, I use Catharism in part because of the high profile of Waldensians in the northern Languedoc. The inquisitors called the former heretics, but a sentence such as, ‘inquisitors identified two types of heretics in Languedoc, ‘Waldensians’ and ‘heretics’,’ may be accurate in terms of how the inquisitors used the words, but less useful to the historian. The terms ‘good man’ and ‘good woman’ do not appear in the inquisitorial documentation I have drawn on except in the sense that deponents sometimes apparently ‘considered the heretics to be good men,’ which is not at all the same thing.

There is in fact no clear polarity between the school with which he identifies, with its singular ‘new narrative,’ and anything other than a straw-man traditionalist. Anglophone literature over the last couple of decades is in general more ‘traditional’ than much of that in French, but it is nonetheless nuanced and very source-critical indeed. Francophone work does not closely accord with his own. Jean-Louis Biget’s is amongst the best. But Biget considers the western movement *indeed* to be dualist and considers it an indigenous ‘Church’ (*Église*).[4] In a more recent work, one that deserves our full attention, Pilar Jiménez-Sanches speaks of ‘catharisms.’[5] I do not see myself as uncritical of the ‘traditional’ historiography. Even though I have not found evidence that significantly dents Bernard Hamilton’s understanding of the nature and origins of western heresy--his article on the Saint-Félix document being a work of genius achievable only by someone with an unparalleled knowledge of the western and eastern sources[6]--I see myself as someone who has taken the new school very seriously and who works in a field full of people who have done the same. We do need iconoclasts. But looking at the question the other way around, the conviction of some scholars of religion that there was no dualism in the eleventh or twelfth centuries has resulted in some truly convoluted logic. Some of the Zerner school strikes

me like this, and I am thinking also of Guy Lobrichon's tortured response to the discovery of a version of the "Letter of Héribert" of c.1000.[7]

My work on the sources and historiography concerning the related "crisis of the year 1000" equips me to know how to address rigid positions concerning conflicting models of interpretation. These can put the development of the scholarship on hold, giving rise to both straw men and heroes ready to burn them down whilst perfectly good scholarship cannot nose its way into the discussion. France in c. 1000 was, in my view, neither coherent nor chaotic but a bit of both, if somewhat more chaotic than in other medieval periods. I say this because what was taking place apparently varied regionally and over time; it depends where and when you look, and what you look at. This sounds like common sense and yet it is not an understanding employed in much of the literature, which still tends to view the major sources--monastic cartularies--as compiled either in self-defence in the context of lay encroachment against the monks and the peasantry, or as a conspiracy by the abbeys to paint exactly that picture whilst in fact expanding and consolidating their own interests. This is not to say that every variable is present or that anything can be proven. Rather, whatever reality we can glean from the texts is more subtle and less knowable than some admit. It strikes me that polarised positions are not useful in relation to medieval dualism either. It isn't the case that the *heretici* either were or were not real. They were almost certainly both and we need more regional studies. Off-hand, I know that Pegg's heretical Languedoc is different from mine in that his good women did not preach, whereas plenty of my *hereticae* did; his good men and women got married, whereas my *credentes* left marriages to become heretics; and his Cathars are always called good men and good women by inquisitors, whereas mine are always called heretics.

Finally, I am charged with considering ideas to "float above society," "simply in the air," "carried this way and that," landing willy-nilly. Elsewhere Pegg uses the simile of a "hot air balloon." I am most happy to have the chance to respond to this directly, because it has bothered me and my students for years. No one is making a case that ideas have an existence of their own, as though thoughts were external to the person thinking them and then landed in their head. Aside from this analogy being dismissive of heretical ideas themselves ("hot air"), quite the opposite is the case in terms of their transmission. Certain ideas, as opposed to others, were articulated by one party at the right time and in the right context for them to be effective (and safe), were found convincing or otherwise by the other, and passed on or not, equally deliberately, by them in turn. We have a great deal of evidence for this. Western sources refer explicitly to heretical ideas having been brought from elsewhere, including from the east, by specific people. Eastern sources are even more explicit that this happened. We know that Bogomils sent missionaries abroad to carry their ideas as a particular strategy (or are all the sources for Bogomilism also to be discounted?). Historians, including myself, have set out evidence of how this worked in practice. Pegg needs to provide evidence if he wishes to refute this.

To conclude, what we call or don't call Catharism existed from the twelfth century as a movement of radicals who refused to accept that the hell their neighbours were living through could be the work of the loving God of the New Testament. In the misery that worsened in the early thirteenth century, their shocking message about Creation--it is not the work of God, he is not here and he cannot help us--gained purchase even where it had not done so before.

I will not comment on whether or not I am “credulous,” “egregious,” “gullible,” “blind” and so on. I like to think that I “disagree with,” rather than “don’t understand” other scholarship. Nonetheless I thank Mark Pegg for his genuinely complimentary observations.

NOTES

[1] See: Mark Gregory Pegg, “Albigenses in the Antipodes: An Australian and the Cathars,” *Journal of Religious History* 35/4(2011): 577-600.

[2] Hilbert Chiu, “Alan of Lille’s academic concept of the Manichee,” *Journal of Religious History* 35/4(2011): 492-506.

[3] Lucy Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics in the Thirteenth Century: The Textual Representations* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2011).

[4] For example, see “Le ‘catharisme,’ une histoire en devenir,” in Jean-Louis Biget, *Hérésie et inquisition dans le Midi de la France* (Paris: Picard, 2007), pp. 7-35, especially p. 21.

[5] Pilar Jiménez-Sanches, *Les catharismes: modèles dissidents du christianisme médiéval (XIIe-XIIIe siècles)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008).

[6] Bernard Hamilton, *Monastic Reform, Catharism and the Crusades (900-1300)* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979), pp. 23-53.

[7] “The chiaroscuro of heresy: early eleventh-century Aquitaine as seen from Auxerre”, trans. P. Buc, in T. Head and R. Landes, eds., *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000* (Ithaca, N.Y./London: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 80-103. Cf. M. Frassetto, “The sermons of Adémar of Chabannes and the letter of Héribert. New sources concerning the origins of medieval heresy”, *Revue Bénédictine* 109(1999): 324-340 and C. Taylor, “The letter of Héribert of Périgord as a source for dualist heresy in the society of early-eleventh-century Aquitaine”, *Journal of Medieval History* 27(2000): 313-349.

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ISSN 1553-9172