HERESY IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:1-5
Prayer: "In the Cross of Christ I Glory"

TWELFTH CENTURY REVOLTS AGAINST CHURCH AND STATE

The ugly Church-State struggle provoked strong criticism and reaction against both church and state, against both pope and emperor. This was especially true of the second stage of the controversy--the struggle between the papacy and the Hohenstaufen emperors. After the temporary peace of the Concordat of Worms (1122) the clash became an open and unashamed struggle for power and supremacy with both sides resorting to all sorts of tricks to gain the advantage and to bring down the opposition. Both church and state were largely guided by the philosophy that the end justifies the means. The abuses of power and office on the part of both church and state provoked strong reactions that often resulted in heretical and even anti-clerical movements. In the West from the fifth to the eleventh century heresy had not been a major factor in the history of the church. The monothelite and iconoclastic controversies of the Eastern Church were important concerns in the West mainly to the papal and imperial powers. The debates of the Carolingian Renaissance and of Scholasticism were largely problems for the scholars. But in the eleventh and twelfth centuries heresy and anti-church and anti-clerical movements took on a great importance. Both church and state had laid themselves open to sharp and painful criticism. There was the revolt of the simple and the spiritual against the riches, the luxury, the corruption and the abuse of power of both church and state. Traces of dualistic heresy from the Balkans began to take root and grow. Also a few highly trained, original but unorthodox minds challenged the established order. Social and economic factors often important aspects of the troubles with cults of poverty and communal life challenging feudal wealth and luxury. Anti-clerical and anti-sacramental critics made much of clerical greed and immorality.

In the eleventh century in scattered districts of France and Italy, there appeared revolt movements that sometimes were heretical, sometimes antinomian and sometimes even antimoral. Some of these were led by popular leaders, some of whom claimed special divine powers. The origins of some were obscure. Some could be traced to communities of refugees from the East. Some of the movements questioned the Incarnation, some challenged the traditional doctrine of the Eucharist, some denied the validity of baptism and ordination--especially baptism and ordination administered by unworthy clerics. Often there were calls to apostolic poverty and holiness. Some of these revolt movements were repressed severely by the church, by the state, or by popular violence.

Early in the twelfth century there was a wave of reform movements and leaders calling for apostolic poverty and holiness on the part of
the clergy. Some went so far in their demands for a puritanical religion that they were branded as heretics. Peter of Bruis preached poverty and an unsacramental puritanical religion that led to his being denounced by Peter the Venerable and Bernard of Clairvaux. Peter of Bruis was burned by an excited crowd about 1155. Arnold of Brescia was tireless in his hostility to the clergy and tried to set up a commune in constant collision with the authorities until his death about 1179.

The most important of the anti-church revolts of the twelfth century was that known as the Cathari or Albigenses.

THE CATHARI OR ALBIGENSES

ORIGIN AND SPREAD OF THE CATHARI: As early as the tenth century there appeared in France communities of heretics that came to be known as Cathari (pure ones) or Albigenses (From Albi, one of their main centers). They spread in the eleventh century in France, in the Rhineland and Flanders. In the twelfth century they became a major threat to both church and state. In their life and teachings churchmen saw many of the features of the Manicheans of the fourth and fifth century and of the Paulicians of the ninth century. They also had Gnostic and Donatist features. The heretical movements of the tenth and eleventh centuries helped prepare the way for them and as they grew they attracted the persecuted remnants of the earlier heretical movements. Often the early Cathari were called Manicheans, Bogomiles, and Bulgars. Paulicians had done missionary work in Bulgaria. The resultant sect of Bogomils spread up the Danube and followed the trade routes and formed communities in the West. The Cathari were missionary. Students, merchants, craftsmen, and missionaries spread their teachings. The scandalous condition of the clergy in southern France made this section a fertile mission field for them.

THE DUALISM OF THE CATHARI: The doctrines of the Cathari are known to us mainly from history written by their persecutors. They were condemned as the new dualists or new Manicheans. They were charged with believing that God had two sons, Satan and Christ. Satan rebelled and became the Evil God who created this world of matter which includes human bodies. Human reproduction is the work of Satan. The Evil God was identified with the God of the Old Testament. Christ came to make known the Good God and gave the New Testament. Christ was a docetic appearance—his body was not real. Life on earth is a battle between the evil and good, between matter and spirit. They predicted the ultimate victory of the Good God and Christ. The Church which was preoccupied with temporal affairs—wealth, power, luxurious living—was a "synagogue of Satan." The governments of this world with war and capital punishment, greed and tyranny, also belonged to Satan.

THE LIFE-STYLE OF THE CATHARI: For the Cathari—the Pure Ones—the good life consisted in purification from matter. This involved abstaining from marriage and reproduction. They were to avoid all food connected with the reproductive process—meat, milk, butter, eggs, and cheese. They were vegetarians. Through ignorance they allowed fish. They must have nothing to do with the organization, doctrine or ritual of the Catholic Church. They could own no property. They
refused military service, denouncing war and capital punishment. They condemned soldiers, crusaders, and judges as murderers.

These extremes were required only of what they called "The Perfect." The majority of the Cathari were called "the Believers." They did not have to practise the extreme asceticism. They were to support and honor the Perfect. The believers were allowed to marry, have children, own property, eat meat. They could even serve in the army and join the Catholic Church to avoid persecution. The Cathari denied both purgatory and hell. They did believe in the transmigration of souls--those who did not become perfect would come back as an animal and finally return as humans. Believers became "perfect" by receiving "the Consolamentum"--when they pledged themselves to the life of perfection the Perfect laid the Gospel of John on their heads. They were accused of sometimes practising suicide to make sure they did not break their vows.

THE CATHARI AS A RESTORATION MOVEMENT: The Cathari claimed to be the true church. They claimed the New Testament as their authority. They translated the Scriptures into the vernacular and memorized large portions. They zealously condemned the Catholic church as apostate. They spoke against the corrupt hierarchy, against the costly cathedrals, against the worldly clergy. The Cathari were noted for upright moral lives. They were very effective in winning the more serious and spiritual of the humbler people.

THE WAR AGAINST THE CATHARI: At first bishops, local priests, local authorities and laymen persecuted the Cathari. They continued to spread. When nobles joined the movement church and state called for stronger action. Pope Alexander III condemned the Cathari in the Third Lateran Council of 1179. He called for a crusade against the Viscount of Beziers as a supporter of the Cathari. In 1184 Pope Lucius III and Emperor Frederick Barbarossa agreed bishops should search out the heretics and the secular power should exile and confiscate and even execute the heretics. King Peter II of Aragon in 1197 decreed that heretics who would not obey the sentence of exile should be burned. Pope Innocent III at first tried missionary efforts among the Cathari. When his legate, Peter of Castelnau, was murdered in 1208, he blamed the Cathari and called on king and nobles to destroy the Cathari. For twenty years bloody inquisition raged. Count Raymond VI of Toulouse was one of the most powerful of the Cathari princes. Count Simon de Montfort was one of the most savage of the inquisitors. King Philip Augustus of France finally took the lead against the Cathari. The Synod of Toulouse in 1229 forbade the laity to possess the Scriptures and denounced all translations of Scripture. Pope Innocent III declared that Heresy was treason against God which was more heinous than treason against the king. Pope Gregory IX perfected the machinery of inquisition, using the Dominicans as informers. Pope Innocent IV in 1252 issued a bull that all accused were liable to torture. Confiscation of the convicted's property kept accusations and the fires of inquisition burning.

POPE ALEXANDER III, KING HENRY II AND BECKET

King Henry II of England appointed his friend, Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury. When Becket upheld the rights of the church
against the king, Henry's men murdered Becket in his cathedral. Pope Alexander III handled the matter skillfully for the advantage of the church. King Henry had to do penance at Becket's grave and the Pope made Becket a Saint. The king was forced to recognize canon law in England, the sole right of the Church to try and punish clergy, and the right of appeal to the pope.

THE WALDENSES

One of the most important of the twelfth century revolts against the church was the Waldensian movement. It did not begin as an heretical movement but as an attempt to return to the simple apostolic life of the gospels. It was forced out of the church.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WALDENSIAN MOVEMENT: Peter Waldo, a rich merchant of Lyons in 1176 experienced conversion upon listening to a wandering minstrel reciting the story of St. Alexis and quoting the Golden Text of the monks (Matthew 19:21), "If thou wouldest be perfect, go sell what thou hast, give to the poor, and come follow me." Peter Waldo took the text literally. He sold all he had, set up a modest trust for his wife and daughters, gave the rest to the poor and became poor, wandering, bare-footed preacher of the gospel of apostolic poverty. He took the Gospels literally and preached them as he understood them with great earnestness. He was joined by both men and women who also preached apostolic poverty and simple living. His followers became known as "Poor men of Lyons" and "The Poor in Spirit." They went bare-footed in course woolen robes, possessing nothing as individuals and holding all things in common. They went two and two with no settled homes. They took the Gospel literally and preached it in the vernacular tongue. They made and used vernacular translations of the New Testament which they considered Christ's law. They began to preach against the immoral and worldly character of the clergy which aroused opposition.

THE WALDENSANS FORCED OUT OF THE CHURCH: Peter Waldo went to Rome to the Third Lateran Council of 1179 and appealed to Pope Alexander III for confirmation of his order and the recognition of their right to preach. The pope at first approved their vow of poverty and gave them permission to preach provided they got the consent of the local ecclesiastical authority. When the Waldensian ignored the pope's stipulations and continued to preach without authorization from the clergy, the pope forbade them to preach.

To Peter Waldo it was the voice of man against the voice of God. He and his Waldensians continued to preach.

Pope Lucius III (1181-1185) at the Council of Verona in 1184 excommunicated Peter Waldo and his followers for disobedience. Banished from Lyons the Waldensians spread into Southern France, Spain, Lombardy, the Rhineland, Bohemia and into Hungary. They became more radical and more missionary. They declared that ordination was necessary for preaching. Any good man could preach the Gospel—in fact good men were the only true successors to the apostles. They memorized large portions of Scripture in the vernacular and boasted that they knew more Scripture than the priests. They won the hearts of many peasants and simple working people.
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WALDENSIANS: The New Testament was the sole rule of life and faith. It was Christ's law book and was to be followed to the letter. They emphasized reading the Bible in the vernacular and in memorizing Scripture. They went two and two, dressed in simple woolen robes, bare-footed or in sandals. They lived on the gifts of hearers. They fasted on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. They rejected all oaths and condemned all shedding of blood. They condemned memorized or written prayers except the Lord's Prayer and grace at the table. They insisted on confessions and listened to confession. They observed the Lord's Supper every Sunday. They condemned masses and prayer for the dead. They denied purgatory. They held that sacraments administered by unworthy clergy were worthless. Prayer in secret was more effective than prayer in a church--prayer even in a barn was more holy than prayer in a church. Both men and women preached. They denounced a worldly church and its hierarchy--the luxury, the lust for power, the expensive cathedrals, the immorality.

THE HUMILIATI: About the same time as the rise of the Waldensians, there arose in Milan and northern Italy groups of lowly working people who held separated meetings and emphasized lives of penance and simple living. They were called "Humiliati." Pope Alexander III forbade them to hold separate meetings and forbade them to preach. Pope Lucius III in 1184 also condemned them for disobeying. Persecuted by the church, many of the Humiliati joined the Waldensians. Pope Innocent III in 1207-1208 tried to win them back by forming his "Order of the Holy Trinity" or "Poor Catholics" led by Durand de Huesca.

DIVISION AMONG THE WALDENSIANS: The Waldensians split over organization. Peter Waldo was chosen first rector and bishops, priests, and deacons were appointed. Some opposed organization and resented the arbitrary government of Peter Waldo. Some of the Humiliati and Lombards did not feel as great loyalty to Peter Waldo as his original followers. In 1210 the Lombard branch split off. An attempt at reunion after Peter Waldo's death (1218) failed.

 WALDENSIANS AND THE INQUISITION: The Inquisition was turned loose on the Waldensians and many were martyrs. The Waldensians fled to the Alps of Italy and Switzerland where they survived. Some joined Huss, Luther, Zwingli and the Anabaptists, but others have maintained their existence and identity to the present.