

The Cathars from Non-Catholic Sources

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A convenient starting point for the history of dualist heresy in medieval Europe is R. I. Moore's *The War on Heresy: Faith and Power in Medieval Europe* (London, 2012). Moore leaves the attentive reader in no doubt that dualist heresy flourished in the thirteenth century. It is worth collecting some of the dates he provides together, since one or two reviewers appear to have been inattentive.¹ (How did they do so? The key passages occur near the end of the book, by which time it would be easy for a reader to have decided what its central argument was and to miss Moore's conscientious record of evidence that complicates the overall picture, especially since the central thrust of the argument is foregrounded and the complexities are fitted in smoothly and quite unobtrusively, as in an *Economist* article.) Writing about an inquisition in 1245–6, Moore comments that:

Dualism is certainly suggested by occasional comments incidental to the inquisitors' immediate concerns – that God did not make the world, that the devil did, that a man who slept with his wife could not be saved (and so might just as well sleep with somebody else.)

(p. 304)

Or again:

Testimony presented [...] by a group of Franciscan friars [in 1247] [...] was more revealing. [...] The unique value of the friars' stories [...] is that they record a spontaneous account of Pier's beliefs, given of his own volition. The God who had given the law to Moses, he said, was a malevolent scoundrel [...] Marriage was prostitution, and nobody who slept with a woman, even his own wife, could be saved.

(pp. 304–5)

Turning from southern France to Italy, Moore gives a good deal of space to the inquisitorial treatise written c. 1250 by Rainier Sacconi, 'who had been

¹ Page references in brackets in the text are to R. I. Moore, *The War on Heresy: Faith and Power in Medieval Europe* (London, 2012).

a Cathar for seventeen years and occupied a leading position among them [...] before joining the Dominicans' (p. 315) – and so presumably knew what he was talking about. He quotes Sacconi's words: 'All Cathars believe that the devil made the world and everything in it [...] they regard as mortal sins reproductive sex, the consumption of its fruits, meat, eggs and cheese' (pp. 315–16). Rejection of all forms of sex, especially reproductive, is a theme emerging clearly from Moore's treatment of Catharism. That he and most other scholars are right to emphasize the rejection of marital sex is conclusively confirmed by a key Cathar source, the 'Book of Two Principles', in which it emerges as common ground between warring sects.

The 'Book of Two Principles' was one of Antoine Dondaine's remarkable discoveries. His provisional edition of it was replaced by that of Christine Thouzellier, *Livre des deux principes* (Paris, 1973). She dated it to c. 1250, with 1254 as a *terminus ante quem*.² This paper is concerned with the section entitled *Contra Garatenses*. This takes us into the middle of a debate between moderate and hard-line dualists, one in which positions have already become entrenched. The 'Garatenses' believe in a creation that was good in its origins but was corrupted at an early stage by an evil principle – so in this respect their position is not so far from that of their Catholic opponents. The author of the *Liber*, however, is further removed: he presents the view that the visible world was evil right from the beginning. Here our concern is with the presuppositions about marriage taken for granted by both sides of the debate. The Latin is rather clumsy but the level of debate is fairly sophisticated, enough to make a paraphrase of the argumentation a useful preliminary to any inferences we may go on to draw.

The *Liber's* author first addresses himself to the theory that a good God created the four elements but that the evil 'prince of this world' shaped the visible world as we know it. This evil lord was himself created by the good God, but clearly went bad and corrupted the rest of creation³ – a Lucifer figure in effect. It was he who formed the two sexes.⁴ Some skilful logical fencing follows. The *Liber* asks where the proponents of this view find scriptural proof for their version, and an imaginary *Garatensis* respondent quotes passages from Genesis including Genesis 2. 24, 'Because of this man will leave father and mother and cleave to his wife' – all this representing the work of the evil lord.⁵ Then the *Liber's* author drives his opponents onto the horns of a dilemma. Either they believe the words of Genesis or they do not (because it derives from the evil principle so cannot be trusted).⁶ If they do not, they have no evidence for their story at all. But if they do, Genesis proves more

² C. Thouzellier, *Livre des deux principes* (Paris, 1973), p. 31.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 364–5.

⁴ '[...] ipse malus dominus masculum et feminam formavit' (*ibid.*).

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 366–8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 368–9.

than they want: for similar texts from Genesis, the author argues, show that the visible world was created by this evil principle from the beginning.⁷ They want to have the good God creating the visible world and the bad principle corrupting it (and introducing sex), but they cannot have it both ways.

The *Liber's* author now turns to a variant on the theory he has just demolished. Some 'indiscreet' *Garatensis* might try to escape the net by arguing (with the help of New Testament texts) that the state of affairs described in the Genesis creation narrative was indeed all good. That is, not just the four elements, but the distinction of the sexes, birds and beasts, and all visible bodies were initially good (more or less the orthodox position, incidentally).⁸ This would get the *Garatenses* out of the trap into which the author forced them in the first part of the polemic. But only to walk into the punch: if they do indeed think that the Genesis creation story is about the work of the good God, on what grounds does their condemnation of marriage rest?⁹

We need to stop to reflect on this argument. When a writer argues for this or that view, it might be just his personal opinion. When a writer treats a view as an assumption shared with an opponent, and uses it as the premise of an argument, that implies a much more widespread and unquestioning acceptance, in this case the assumption that marriage is evil. This much is clear: so far from defending marriage, the author of the *Liber* is refuting the *Garatenses* by saying that their creation beliefs would lead to the absurd position that marriage is defensible. The goodness of marriage is an '*absurdum*' to which his remorseless logic drives anyone who opposes his own version of a creation which is in its entirety the work of an evil principle.

The author returns to this *reductio ad absurdum* more than once in the course of his polemic against the *Garatenses*. With crushing irony, he writes:

For you condemn of a daily basis something created (*creaturam*) by the true lord God, by condemning his matrimony – if it is true that a most kindly and merciful lord created and made the male and woman and the visible bodies of this world.¹⁰

He makes quite clear his own credo, that it was an evil God who created man and woman.¹¹ The point is that his account of creation by an evil God is compatible with his condemnation of marriage, whereas the condemnation of

⁷ Ibid., pp. 370–1.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 372–5.

⁹ 'Contra hoc obicio in hunc modum: Si autem dominus verus fecit in principio masculum et feminam, volucres et iumenta et alia visibilia corpora universa, quare carnale opus coniunctionis maris et femine cotidie condempnatis, illud esse opus diabolicum affirmantes? Cur non facitis filios et filias domino deo vestro?' (ibid., p. 374). He develops a similar line of argument with respect to eating meat.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 376, passage beginning 'Vos enim' and ending 'huius mundi.'

¹¹ '[...] volo sustinere et defendere fidem meam, quam habeo et coram Christi fidelibus

marriage by the *Garatenses* is undermined by their account of creation.¹² Both the author of the *Liber* and the *Garatenses* he attacks can be called dualists without hesitation. Common ground is the absolute rejection of marriage as intrinsically evil.¹³

The *Garatenses* do seem to have been in touch with the Bogomil world. The evidence of an anonymous tract from the 1220s or 1230s has been summarized by R. I. Moore:

Mark, their bishop over 'the whole of Lombardy, Tuscany and the Marches', accepted a fresh *consolamentum* from a visitor from Constantinople, named Nicetas, who told him that his original *consolamentum*, which he had received from Bulgarian heretics, was invalid. After Mark's death, however, his followers heard from another visitor from 'across the sea' that Nicetas's own *consolamentum* had not been valid because the man from whom he received it had been found with a woman. This caused some of them to withdraw their allegiance from Mark's successor and choose a new leader. The two parties agreed to draw lots between their respective bishops. After much wrangling, including the deposition of one bishop who said he would not accept the result and the resignation of another because he thought that if chosen he would not be accepted, candidates were selected from each side and the lot fell upon Garatus [*sic*] – who was promptly reported by two witnesses to have slept with a woman. 'Because of this there were many who maintained that he was unworthy of his rank, and therefore they no longer considered themselves bound by their promise of obedience to him.'¹⁴

Nonetheless it would seem that Garattus retained a body of supporters, and these can presumably be identified with the *Garatenses*. The account given by Moore shows a movement sufficiently well developed c. 1230 (on his dating) to be both institutionalized and riven by factions. (That date might be pushed back even earlier: Dondaine dated the text to around 1200,¹⁵ and each of their datings is heavily affected by their respective ideas of antecedent probability. But for the sake of argument, let us stay with Moore's dating.)¹⁶ It is also impossible to airbrush out the link asserted between them and a Bulgarian sect.

predico evidenter, per testimonia legis et prophetarum et novi testamenti, [...] quod unus malus deus est, qui "creavit [...] masculum et feminam" (ibid., p. 378).

¹² Similar reasoning again (ibid., p. 382).

¹³ Also, though it is not the subject of this paper, the eating of meat, eggs and cheese.

¹⁴ Moore, *The War on Heresy*, p. 320.

¹⁵ A. Dondaine, 'La hiérarchie cathare en Italie: I – Le *De heresi catharorum*', *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 19 (1949), 280–312 (pp. 290, 312). Dondaine's argument is powerful. We have evidence of a Peter Gallo who was a Cathar bishop in 1214–15, but in the treatise he does not yet appear to have reached that eminence.

¹⁶ 'Of course, an element of circularity in all these datings is pretty hard to avoid: you could say something similar about mine. The real difference is that Dondaine saw it all coming together in the 1170s and 80s, I in the 1220s' (R. I. Moore, personal communication).

In view of connection between the *Garatenses* and Bulgaria, their ideas about the origins of sex as described and attacked in the *Liber* can usefully be compared with the account of sex in the 'Secret Book of the Bogomils', from the tenth century, which was 'originally written in Old Bulgarian and translated into Latin as Bulgarian Bogomils who fanned out West after the conquest of the country by Byzantium found a fertile soil for spreading their unorthodox beliefs in Northern Italy and Southern France':¹⁷

Then he [Satan] thought and made man in the likeness of himself and ordered the angel of the Third Heaven to enter a clay body. And he took from him and made another body in the shape of a woman and ordered the angel of the Second Heaven to enter the body of the woman. The angels, seeing themselves in mortal shapes, and different ones at that, began to weep. He ordered them to copulate in their clay bodies and [they] did not understand this was sin.¹⁸

The ideas of the Bulgarian sect and those of the *Garatenses* as reported in the *Liber* are not very different. The *Liber* simply goes further, utterly refuting the view held by the Catholic Church, which was overwhelmingly positive about marriage as an institution and promulgated its view through preaching¹⁹ – more on this below. While it is possible that the Balkan connections of Italian dualists had no influence on their attitudes to marriage, the hypothesis seems extreme.

To summarize the foregoing: dualist communities disagreed on the question of whether the evil principle was the symmetrical counterpart of the good God, or an originally good being who had fallen, but on marriage they were in complete agreement. For both, marriage and procreation were evil. This common assumption was so strong that the author of the *Liber* could use it as a lever to prise apart the rest of the system of the *Garatenses*. The community of the *Garatenses* goes back at the very least to the second or third decade of the thirteenth century, and seems to be one of the sects resulting from irreconcilable divisions within the larger Italian dualist community, probably one with strong Balkan connections. If the tract is 'from the 1220s or '30s' (Moore, p. 320), we may infer an Italian dualist movement that must have been around for decades before the crisis described.

Was such dualism a purely Italian phenomenon? It seems unlikely. Moore says 'it is easy to forget how much movement there actually was' in the early medieval world, while:

¹⁷ K. Petkov, *The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, Seventh–Fifteenth Century: The Records of a Bygone Culture* (Leiden, 2008), p. 83.

¹⁸ Petkov, *The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria*, p. 85.

¹⁹ D. L. d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford, 2005), ch. 1(d). This positive message went with the view, expressed in Handbooks of Confessors, that pleasure should not be the motive for sex (though it could be a side effect).

From around the millennium such contacts grew exponentially in number, variety and regularity. [...] It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of evangelism in the dissemination of ideas, and of the itinerant preacher, the archetypal outsider, in prompting the questioning of habits of life and deference long accepted as simply how things are.²⁰

A chance documentary survival reveals great numbers of Waldensians in fourteenth-century Bohemia.²¹ They had come a long way from their origins. It would be strange if dualist heresies did not spread far and fast, as we know the Waldensian movement did. In short, and whatever the direction of influence, the default position should be to expect the presence of dualism in southern France c. 1200, rather than to seek to deny it. The argument from silence is a particularly risky basis for denial, since a scorched earth policy against heresy, and the absence of anything remotely like a dissident 'library' to preserve dualist texts, raised the odds against survival to almost insuperable heights. It is in fact astounding that we have as many dualist texts as we do from the period. This we owe presumably to the 'know your enemy' philosophy of inquisitors.

One of the most interesting heretical texts that we still have is an attack on the dualists from a Waldensian point of view: the *Liber antiheresis* of Durandus of Osca, composed before his conversion to Catholicism in 1207²² or 1208.²³ This has a long section defending marriage against the dualists, prefaced by the following sentence:

And since some assert that marriage is a dreadful sin and criminal, we will attack their audacity showing that it is licit for those who are not able to be continent, and permitted by God: and [we will show] this by means of authorities of the New Testament only, since they do not respect or care at all about the authorities of the Old Testament and of the doctors [of the Church].²⁴

This Waldensian view of the dualists should be taken seriously. Durandus was himself a member of a persecuted movement. His defence of marriage against, let me say it, the Cathars takes up more than six pages in Selge's edition. One has the impression he is dealing with argumentative opponents:

But perhaps someone will say: Is it not one and the same act that is carried

²⁰ Moore, *The War on Heresy*, p. 322.

²¹ Alexander Patschovsky, *Quellen zur Böhmisches Inquisition im 14. Jahrhundert* (Weimar, 1985).

²² M. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Reform Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Oxford, 1992), p. 92

²³ *Die ersten Waldenser, mit Edition des Liber antiheresis des Durandus von Osca*, vol. 2: *Der Liber antiheresis des Durandus von Osca*, ed. Kurt-Victor Selge (Berlin, 1967), p. x.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

out with your own wife, as with other women? To whom the following reply will be given: No, because your own wife is not forbidden to him²⁵ by the Lord, but other women are.²⁶

This Waldensian source, written before its author's conversion to the established Church in 1207/8, attempts to rebut the same condemnation of marriage as was current among Italian dualists. This combined testimony from non-Catholic sources makes it impossible to deny that dualist heresy was firmly established in the Europe of the central Middle ages.

Cathar attitudes to marriage have been the focus of this paper because they cannot be explained as 'obvious answers to frequently recurring questions', or picked up from 'the opening chapters of the Acts of the Apostles', or ultimately derived from the programme of the eleventh-century papal reformers.²⁷ The last generation of research has corrected misapprehensions of the latter. Christopher Brooke wrote of one of the most influential reform leaders, Peter Damian, that he 'hated all sexuality and barely allowed marriage to be a legal cover to sin'.²⁸ Homer nodded here, for this is a mistake, *tout court*. Peter Damian had quite an exalted view of marriage, including sex: he could write of 'the marriage bed of mutual charity';²⁹ he saw marriage as a symbol of Christ's union with the Church.³⁰ Starting with Hincmar of Reims in the ninth century, the idea developed among orthodox intellectuals that only a sexually consummated marriage adequately symbolized that union.³¹ In a different context Moore has written well about the promotion of marriage in the age of the papal reform. He links it with a change in inheritance rules: 'When the transmission of an undivided inheritance became the overriding consideration [...] the heir must be designated as clearly as possible, and the number and standing of his potential rivals minimised' (by the stigmatization of bastardy); consequently, 'Insistence on legitimacy inevitably elevated the importance of the marriage from which the heir would spring.'³²

Rejection of marital sex is not on a continuum with the agenda of the orthodox reform movements of the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. They were against a married priesthood, but that went with a promotion of

²⁵ The word is 'ei', to which MS P adds 'qui continere non potest', according to Selge's *apparatus criticus*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁷ Moore, *The War on Heresy*, p. 319: a weak page.

²⁸ In his generally excellent book on *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford, 1989), p. 61.

²⁹ D. L. d'Avray, 'Peter Damian, Consanguinity and Church Property', in *Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages*, ed. L. Smith and B. Ward (London, 1992), pp. 71–80 (pp. 73–4). The too-learned copy editor or typesetter of that paper tried to change the phrase to 'the marriage bed of mutual chastity'!

³⁰ d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, pp. 134–5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, ch. 4 *passim*.

³² R. I. Moore, *The First European Revolution, c. 970–1215* (Oxford, 2000), p. 91.

marriage for the laity. It is one of the services of Professor Moore to scholarship that he has brought this out with great clarity. As he sums it up, in his synthesis on the 'first European Revolution':

At the heart of our revolution was the unspoken agreement between the eldest son and his tonsured brother to confirm the lands and privileges of the monastery in return for recognition of the eldest as sole legitimate heir to the patrimony, and on condition that the monks would remain celibate.³³

Celibacy and marriage with children were complementary.

The idea that sex is bad, marriage worse, and reproductive sex the worst of all makes no sense within any of the rationalities of reform, but it is entirely logical within a dualist view of the material world as created by the devil. This paper uses ideas about marriage as a symptom of the appeal of dualism the Middle Ages. No Catholic sources were used to do this: the key witnesses were a Cathar text, the 'Book of Two Principles', and a Waldensian attack on Catharism from the early thirteenth century. As for secondary sources, the key witnesses were the works of Professor Moore. There is still an argument going on about chronology, but the question is not whether dualist Catharism existed, but rather by when, how early. Contributions to this volume, notably Jörg Feuchter's, move that debate significantly forward. In the meantime, no careful reader of Moore's work (or of key non-Catholic thirteenth-century sources) can doubt the existence of Cathar dualism as a force in the medieval world. His writings should be read with greater attention.

³³ Ibid., p. 97.