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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. xi + 311 pp. Maps, genealogies, notes, bibliography, and index. \$29.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-84383-645-2.

Claire Taylor, *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Medieval Quercy*. Heresy and the Inquisition in the Middle Ages. York Medieval Press: Boydell and Brewer, 2011. xvi + 277 pp. Maps, genealogies, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$90.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-903153-38-3.

Review by Mark Gregory Pegg, Washington University.

Claire Taylor notes that *Heresy in Medieval France: Dualism in Aquitaine and the Agenais, 1000-1249* (first published in 2005, now reissued in paperback) is a response to Yves Dossat's observation from half a century ago that "the Cathar heresy, so prevalent within the French Languedoc from the second half of the twelfth century, never took root in the duchy of Aquitaine, except in the Agenais" (p. 1). This seeming puzzle about why Catharism never crossed the Garonne River elicits an impressive analysis of sources referring to heretics from the eleventh century (a scattering of sermons, histories, edicts) to the thirteenth (an abundance of polemics, papal letters, inquisition records). *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Medieval Quercy* extends the research of the earlier monograph, although focusing more on the Albigenian Crusade and the inquisitions into heretical depravity after 1241 (whose original records for the Quercy, while now lost, partially survive in seventeenth-century copies).

Both books are similarly structured: conscientious historiographic introductions on Catharism, and to a lesser extent Waldensianism, and then roughly two hundred pages alternating between chapters on heresy as the history of ideas to accomplished sections on the social, political, and institutional history of each region. Taylor implicitly recognises that a history of heresy must be more than thoughts and philosophies, that the communities in which heretics lived must have some relationship to the beliefs they supposedly believed, but as she never articulates any connection between ideas and society, the oscillating chapters fail to cohere. What holds each book together is the conviction that heresy in Latin Christendom was shaped by a pervasive (and verifiable) theological dualism embodied in an international (and manifest) Cathar Church.

Catharism is the most famous heresy of the Middle Ages. The traditional narrative regarding the Cathars has barely changed in more than a century. It tells us that these heretics first appeared sometime after 1000 in what is now southwestern France, clandestine figures only partially glimpsed in a few apocalyptic histories, chronicles, and sermons. By the middle of the twelfth century the Cathars, far from lurking in the shadows, were flourishing throughout Latin Christendom, preaching and proselytizing, establishing an elaborate hierarchy of ordinary believers, *perfecti*, deacons, and bishops. The greatest number lived between the Garonne and Rhône Rivers, particularly in the lands of the counts of Toulouse and the viscounts of Béziers, Carcassonne, Albi, and Razès. They were dualists, believing in a cosmic clash between matter and spirit, body and soul, where a manipulative carnal God (or Devil) choreographs the visible world and a passive transcendent God does nothing (except delicately exist). This theology was the direct result of furtive Bogomil missionaries from the Byzantine Empire arriving in the eleventh century and returning again in the twelfth. The Cathars threatened the

Church, so much so that Pope Innocent III proclaimed a crusade against the heretics and their protector Raimon VI, count of Toulouse, in 1208. This holy war raged twenty-one years, decimating the Cathars, turning them into fugitives. Finally, after 1233, inquisitors (mostly Dominican) hunted and persecuted the remaining pockets of Catharism until it essentially disappeared in the early decades of the fourteenth century.

Taylor's two books are thoughtful exegeses on this conventional picture of Catharism applied to the Aquitaine, Agenais, and Quercy (regions in northern Languedoc). Unfortunately, the traditional narrative is no longer persuasive, a learned relic that, for more than a decade now, has failed every serious test. This criticism, and the new narrative on heresy and Latin Christianity developing from it, initially followed simultaneous but separate trajectories in the work of French and English language scholars. Notable amongst the former are Monique Zerner (especially two excellent essay collections she edited), Guy Lobrichon, Uwe Brunn, and Jean-Louis Biget, each of whom submitted the alleged textual foundations of Catharism to the basic demands of modern scholarship and judged the old story a failure; whereas the later is mostly associated (according to Taylor) with the work of R. I. Moore and myself. Taylor summarizes this scholarship, especially in *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Medieval Quercy*, although classifying it as "post-modern revisionism" or as "skepticism" (pp. 4–5) deliberately underplays the seriousness of these historians, at once making them seem as no more than fashionable poseurs or simply contrarians who might come back to the fold.

Taylor argues in *Heresy in Medieval France* that Bogomil missionaries disguised as "priests, hermits, pilgrims and monks, or Bogomil converts" were secretly spreading dualist tenets in the Aquitaine and elsewhere in the decades after 1000 (p. 123). Fifty or so years later these Bogomils seemingly disappeared or went into hiding, only reemerging to spread the dualist faith once more after 1100. Her evidence is that the supposed dualist doctrines of the Bogomils as established by some Byzantine polemicists in the eleventh century partially "resembles" (the verb she uses repeatedly) what some Latin Christian polemicists accused heretics of partially believing during the same decades. Reasoning from the apparent similarity of ideas is a weak way of constructing an historical explanation. Indeed, Taylor recognises such methodological weakness, acknowledging that "not one single incident in the west corresponds in more than a handful of ways" to the presumed dualism of the Bogomils (p. 67). Yet she argues that this chimerical theology (and the fanciful men behind it) is the only possible way of explaining heresy as described by Latin Christian intellectuals in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Taylor never realizes that the pattern she sees between one end of the Mediterranean and another, between one group of supposed heretics and another, is a scholarly artifice, no more than invention and imposition by modern historians. In this case, comprehension and creation very much go together.

"Dualist churches were established on a large scale in the west in the second half of the twelfth century," writes Taylor in *Heresy in Medieval France* (p. 134). "The Cathar church was not a branch of the Bogomil church however, but a fully independent movement," although she suggests that correspondence with the Bogomils was renewed in the 1170s (p. 141). Crucially, in *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition* she argues (after Peter Biller) that Catharism "preceded clerical commentary on it" (p. 25). There is no evidence for such assertions or, rather, the few texts supposedly supporting such a vision must be consistently misread and their contents twisted in rhetorically egregious ways. Or the credulous acceptance of texts that may never have existed, such as the famous "Charter of Niquinta"—supposedly revealing the visit of Niquinta, a Bogomil pope, to a Cathar council outside Toulouse around 1167—which only exists as a jumbled appendix in a book from 1660. An obvious (and pivotal) example of such egregiousness (and gullibility) is that the term "Cathar" never occurred in any polemic, sermon, or inquisition against heresy in the Aquitaine, Agenais, or Quercy (or anywhere else in southern France). Indeed, it was always one of the less common names for a heretic, with "Arian," "Manichaeon," or simply "the heretic" being preferred by most Latin Christian intellectuals. In the records of the inquisition, "the heretics" were always the "good men" and "good women" in contrast to the "Waldensians."

Taylor does not address this question of terminology until p. 171 in *Heresy in Medieval France*, all the while referring to “Cathars” and “Catharism” both before and after this disclosure. She seems aware that this imprecision is immensely consequential; nevertheless, she does not explain her inexactitude. In *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition* she justifies using Cathar to rename the good men and good women because a group of obscure Cologne heretics were given this label by the Benedictine Eckbert of Schönau in 1163 (p. 28). Her rationale is that the Cologne heretics and the Quercy heretics were both clearly dualists and so related (through the influence and infiltration of Bogomils). In this she fails to take account of, still less answer, Brunn’s comprehensive demonstration that Eckbert’s description of those he called “Cathars” was based not on anything they said or did, but on the Benedictine’s own scholastic education and polemical purposes. While Taylor’s logic here is breathtaking, at least she states it, whereas she never accounts for her repeated use of *perfecti* for the good men and good women, another epithet never used by the inquisition. When scholars rename heretics as “Cathars” or good men as “perfects,” they invent a coherent heresy, only discovering what they themselves are designing. Taylor, at the very beginning of *Heresy in Medieval France*, thoughtfully questions the applicability of the terms “feudal” and “feudalism” for the Aquitaine, ultimately deciding that they suggest a consistency and coherence she considers spurious (p. 6). It is a shame such nuance about terminology and social structures is never applied to heresy or religion.

The traditional narrative of Catharism is largely driven by a backwards trajectory from the Albigensian Crusade and inquisitions into heretical depravity. It assumes that, despite two decades of holy war and more than half a century of tribunals, the men, women, and children killed by crusaders and questioned by inquisitors, were in no way profoundly transfigured by these shocking events, still less transformed into heretics by their persecutors; quite the contrary, those whom the crusaders slaughtered and the inquisitors quizzed were self-evidently part of a long-term dualist Cathar Church stretching back into the twelfth century (and quite possibly the eleventh). Implicit in the questions asked by the inquisitors was undeniably a form of dualism which, by the middle of thirteenth century, was the idealist template imposed upon individuals suspected of heresy. Some men and women actually confessed to hearing and even believing in notions like marriage was worthless or the visible world was not made by God. But an idea, no matter how similar it seems to another idea or to a set of ideas, demonstrates nothing in and of itself unless a scholar intimately ties it to the specific world in which it once had specific meaning. Taylor, for all her adroit research into the society and politics of the Aquitaine, Agenais, and Quercy never does this. Ideas float above society for her, simply in the air, carried this way and that by mythical wise men from the East, and occasionally, like drifting clouds, they resemble something once seen far away. In mundane reality, dualism did not exist in the villages and towns of southern France until the inquisitors introduced it as a way of framing the lives, past and future, of the thousands they interrogated.

In *Heresy in Medieval France*, Taylor—seemingly taken by surprise halfway through writing the book—genuinely does not understand the devastating criticism by recent scholars regarding the conventional picture of dualism and Catharism, and yet there is a searching (and appealing) honesty in her struggle to grasp what is unthinkable to her. In *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition*, she comprehends the critique, but instead of seriously addressing it, caricatures its implications, assuming those who dismiss Catharism are as methodologically naïve as those who defend it. An intellectual revanchism sets the tone. “For my part,” she writes of these new approaches, “I think this has gone too far” (p. 5). Her comprehension of what she thinks is more than enough criticism, though, gets one thing very wrong. Arguing that popes, monks, and mendicants constructed the reality of the heretics they so genuinely feared, imposing this creation upon those they preached against or interrogated—as Biget, to mention only one, has done compellingly—is not the same as saying that a sermon or inquisition testimony can tell us nothing outside of its own construction. On the contrary, such an argument actually agrees with Taylor that there was a distinct reality for the men, women, and children accused of heresy outside the text, and that this world can be evoked through careful and imaginative scholarship. She mistakenly assumes that casting aside Catharism is about dismissing evidence and historical truth, as opposed to the repudiation

of a historiographic tradition (if anything it is a call for reading more deeply and widely)--and yet to her (and to many others) this tradition has so come to represent what really happened that she cannot conceive of the past without it.

Or can she? "Heresy was partially constructed and understood through the categories of belief and activity imposed on it by inquisition records," Taylor observes towards the end of *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition* (p. 227). A very smart comment suggesting some uncertainty is creeping into her commitment to the old model. This glimmer of doubt (and there are a few others) is never more than a wink amidst her undimmed *a priori* assumptions about dualism and Catharism. If only she would focus on the social structures she describes so well, she would see a very different picture of heresy involving the good men and good women, a more truthful likeness of what happened in the Quercy before and after the Albigensian Crusade. The sheer cleverness Taylor brings to discussions about fiefs, rights, and lands--these pages are wonderfully clear on the very confusing proprietary world of the Quercy specifically and the Midi more generally--or the expert delineation of lordly families and their donations to the Cistercian monastery of Obazine, is never applied to the problem of heresy which, in the end, is what she considers her work to be about.

Taylor's two books exemplify what is so exciting and frustrating about scholarship on medieval heresy at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Outstanding research, challenging insights, vigorous debate, so much that should be moving the field forward. Yet by chaining herself to the moribund narrative of Catharism she stifles her historical imagination, limiting what she can (and could) do. She is not alone. It cannot be stressed enough that if heresy is fundamentally misunderstood, then the medieval world is fundamentally misunderstood. She is blind to some things, but she gets this, well aware of the significance of what she is doing. It is this awareness that gives Taylor's scholarship a lasting importance, not so much for the old paths to which she clings, rather for the new directions she will pursue in the future.

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