Cathars (from the Greek Katharoi for “pure ones”); or, Albigensians; or, The Good People / The Good Christians

Origins

* Gnostic / transmigratory elements believed to have drifted westward from Byzantium via trade-routes as early as 8th century
* Shared many associations with the Bogomils
* First prominent in the Occitan city of Albi (hence “Albigensians”)

Beliefs

* Theistic dualists. Two countervailing Gods:

1. Rex Mundi (God of the World), the God of the material, that which is depicted in the old testament, is a force of evil, situated as either Satan, the father of Satan, or that which tempted Satan
2. God of the new testament, the God of the spiritual realm, the God of Light

* Human spirits are the souls of angels, embodied/trapped by the Rex Mundi.
  + Souls are reincarnated until they can achieve salvation
  + Procreation = perpetuating the cycle of reincarnation/entrapment
* Souls can be liberated via the rite of the Consolamentum – sin cleansing
  + Once received, a Cathar was said to have joined the rank of the Perfecti
    - “Perfect” was also used pejoratively by the Catholic Church to describe the Cathars (“perfect heretic”)
  + Because of the ascetic demands of the Perfecti, it was common practice to receive the Consolamentum at the end of one’s life
    - Many Cathars therefore lead relatively “worldly” early lives
  + The principal hierarchy within Cathar communities: those who had received the Consolamentum and those who had not
  + Women were free to join the Perfecti (angels being genderless, souls could not be said to be male or female)
* Proto-reformation reverence for primacy of text / gnostic reverence for individual experience of grace

Grounds for Allegations of Heresy

* Rejection of procreation was thought to encourage sodomy
* Cathars were anti-sacerdotal (i.e. they rejected the notion of the clergy as necessary mediators for God)
* Rejected the resurrection of Christ (which places primacy on the literal flesh)
  + Accordingly rejected the Eucharist
  + Likewise rejected Trinitarian understanding of God
* Rejected most Church rites, including Baptism (Consolamentum being the main event)

Albigensian Crusade (1209-1229)

* Carried out by the French Crown on behalf of Pope Innocent III
* Inciting event: Murder of Papal official upon his return from convening with the Cathars
  + Murder thought to have been plotted by Count of Toulouse, Raymond VI who presided over Cathar land
* Crusade quickly escalated as Innocent III promised Cathar land to whichever noblemen would capture it
* For context: Church documents allege that 20,000 Cathars were killed in the siege of the town of Beziers
  + Though this number of casualties is plausible, it’s thought that the majority of killed were not in fact practicing Cathars
* Catharism lived on in isolation/secrecy for ~ a century.

Cathar Hymn – [Lo Boier (The Oxherd)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCDGd9arng8) – can’t vouch for the historical accuracy of this arrangement but it’s the least cheesy/affected recording I could find