

Heresies in the Catholic Church

An Overview

By Marilyn Hughes

The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation!

<http://outofbodytravel.org>



Inquisition

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For information, write to:

The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation!

<http://outofbodytravel.org>

MarilynnHughes@outofbodytravel.org

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Having worked primarily in radio broadcasting, Marilynn Hughes spent several years as a news reporter, producer and anchor before deciding to stay at home with her three children. She's experienced, researched, written, and taught about out-of-body travel since 1987.

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An Overview

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Who were the Adamites?

Heresies of the Catholic Church

Any religious doctrine not in concert with the Catholic Church teachings can be considered heresy.

The primary belief system which held the Adamites attention was an unusual and profoundly strong desire to live out and recreate what they perceived as the primordial and primitive ecstasy of the Garden of Eden.

Adamites among the First Nudists

The primary belief system which held the Adamites attention was an unusual and profoundly strong desire to live out and recreate what they perceived as the primordial and primitive ecstasy of the Garden of Eden.

It was in this manner that they became known for going around naked because they believed that if they were in a sinless state and their spirits were free, their nakedness would be a sign and a symbol to all.

Adamites utilized the apocryphal books of Adam in their rites, rituals and beliefs and they truly believed that they had transcended all sin as they understood it through orthodox cannels. As a result, in their minds, they were free to do as they pleased.

Their wrath was especially directed at all organized religions and to priests whom they were known to verbally and physically attack.

Other Similar Heresies

Many heretical sects were known by more than one name, and many of them shared similar but not identical beliefs. The Adamites were often referred to as the Hussites or the Brotherhood of the Free Spirit.

Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, By John Milton

It is an interesting and little known point that the great work by John Milton which has been considered a classic for well over four hundred years (1667) – *Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained* – is actually the last and greatest Adamite work. Next time you read the text, take a closer look.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers had much to say about heresy in their own time, “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are . . . selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (New Testament, Galatians 5:19 – 21) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* - Edited by David W. Bercot

Who were the Albaneses?

Catholic Heresies similar to the Cathars

If a person professes the belief of the Catholic Church but believes doctrines contrary to it, that is a heresy.

The High Middle Ages sported various groups of heretics who eventually became known as the absolute dualists. Although there were many similarities in their doctrines, the nuances of their beliefs made them different enough from their sibling dualists to be classified accordingly.

The Dualistic Views of the Albaneses

The Albigensians were the largest and best known of the dualists. They are remembered much more by the title of 'Cathars.'

One of the key texts of both the Cathars and the Albaneses is still available today. *The book of the Two Principles* is one of the few remaining written works of these fascinating sects.

Their basic belief says that God cannot be the source of both Good and Evil, and therefore, there must be two sources - a good source or a good God, and a bad source or a bad God. One of their primary New Testament scriptures that they utilized to support their views was Matthew 7: 17 - 18 which states "A

good tree always yields good fruit, and poor tree bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, or a poor tree good fruit.”

The Albaneses in Relation to the Similar Dualistic Sects

Although it would seem to make more sense that such groups would support one another, the Albaneses actually bitterly feuded with the dualists who rivaled their particular beliefs, especially the Concorezzanes, Garatenses, Mani and the Gnostics.

The Albaneses seemed to share the Gnostic view that there was an evil God represented in the New Testament and that Jesus Christ was the good God sent to release humanity from the material prison created by the Old Testament God.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

According to the Early Church Fathers, heresies would abound in their time and should be carefully discerned, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” (New Testament, 2 Timothy 4: 3, 4) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* Edited by David W. Bercot

Who were the Albigensians?

Heretics in the History of the Catholic Church

The Albigensians and the Arians were the cause of more General Councils of the Church being called than any of the others.

Also known as the Cathars, Albigensians dominated Catholic History. And history has shown that of all the heresies that came and went through the Catholic Church in its 2000 year history, only the Cathars and the Knights Templar have remained hugely popular in legends and myth-making.

The Cathars and the Knights Templar

Both groups have also been associated with the many inquiries and bold conquests concerning the Holy Grail.

Additionally, the Cathars and the Knights Templar share some of the most tragic histories in regards to the slaughter and annihilation of their orders and people.

Ironically, it was the Knights of the Crusades who were ordered into Southern France by Pope Innocent III in 1209 to annihilate and slaughter the remaining

Cathars. These genocides went on for a period of 16 years from 1220 A.D. to 125 A.D. and were known as the Albigensian Crusades.

And later, the Knights Templar became victims to the very Papacy they had served when they, too, were wiped out by the French King and a later Pope.

The Albigensian Belief System

The Albigensians called themselves 'The Perfects,' and adopted many unique doctrines in their time. Among them was a doctrine commonly referred to as dualism. They did not believe a good God could create a world filled with pain and suffering.

Therefore, they viewed the Old Testament God as an evil God, while the New Testament God was, in their view, an entirely different God - the true Good and merciful God - two dualities constantly at odds and at war over the souls of men.

Therefore, a natural aversion to the material life resulted manifesting in another belief and way of life which discouraged marriage and procreation. This belief in and of itself would have guaranteed their eventual extinction.

Albigensian Texts

Very few Albigensian texts remain today, but among those that do are *The Gospel of the Secret Supper* and *The Book of the Two Principles*.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers and the Apostles spoke a great deal about the false doctrines which would come about in the early days of the church, "There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed." (New Testament, 2 Peter 2:1) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* - Edited by David W. Bercot

Who were the Anabaptists?

Heresies in the Early Church

The word heresy comes from a Greek word *Hairesis* which means to choose for oneself.

Many of the Anabaptists were also known to be pacifists, holding very strong views about war and peace – and the nature of peace being a value to hold no matter the cost.

What Anabaptist Means

A simple meaning is attached to the term ‘Anabaptizer,’ which is simply restated as a re-baptizer. It is most commonly associated with Mennonites, Schwenckfelders and Hutterites but can be associated with any groups after the Protestant Reformation who did not practice infant baptism.

The earliest form of understanding regarding the Anabaptists, however, came from the early church. The term Anabaptists seemed to apply to any sect or religious faith which advocated the re-baptism of individuals who had originally – although often unbeknownst to them at the time – been baptized by clergy who had denied their faith under persecution or outright heretics.

This was not unlike the Donatists, another heretical sect.

May Anabaptists did focus on their spiritual lives, however, in the 16th century some groups of the Anabaptists led by Thomas Muntzer, became very politically active in the concerns of the time. The Peasant Wars were established in the 1520's in Germany by this movement and these aspects of the Anabaptists became more of a political rather than a spiritual entity.

But the Anabaptists did evolve over time during the Protestant Reformation into many denominations that actually still exist today.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

Many references are made to heresies in the writings of the Early Church Fathers. "Keep yourselves away from evil plants that Jesus Christ does not tend. For they are not the planting of the Father. For as many as are of God and Jesus Christ are also with the bishop If anyone walks according to a strange opinion, he does not agree with the Passion." (Ignatius) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* - Edited by David W. Bercot

What is Antinomianism?

Heretical Beliefs in the Early Church

The word heresy has been utilized to indicate sectarianism in the Acts of the Apostles.

Antinomianism was a heresy that came early on although many of its beliefs were major doctrinal differences also during the Protestant Reformation. Antinomianism is a word which comes from a Greek term meaning 'against law.' But Antinomianism came to known as any belief system which held that **faith alone** was necessary for salvation.

Antinomianism and the Rejection of Law

Various groups such as the Apostles (Groups which emerged which held no ties to the original Apostles), the Brethren of the Free Spirit, the Luciferans and the Gnostics were all considered antinomian. The reason this was so was an unusual belief that the teachings of the church could be rendered null and void if someone simply claimed that they had been mystically 'filled with the Holy Spirit.'

Critics of the movement often accused them of sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, sacrilege and sometimes really bizarre accusations which history cannot prove to be either true or untrue including cannibalism contracting with Satan.

Many Antinomians came to their beliefs through following another heretical view which is known as dualism. This belief involved the assumption that earthly bodies were actually created by Satan. Another belief in a force known as the Demiurge often led many antinomians to believe that morality was not only unimportant, but totally false.

In their view, only the spirit mattered. As a result, anything done in the body did not matter. This was a way that they were able to justify their sexual immoralities.

But as many dualists believed in early times, many antinomians had an almost phobic perception about having children and bringing more souls into the 'prison' of this world.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers encouraged the faithful to stay away from heresies. "Therefore, it is fitting that you should keep aloof from such persons [i.e. heretics] and not to speak of them either in private or in public." (Ignatius) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

What is Arianism?

Heretical Beliefs of Church History

The word heresy has been utilized to indicate sectarianism in the Epistles of St. Paul.

Constantine, in the year 326 A.D., began his crusade to Christianize the Roman Empire. It began in an edict which stated, "Constantine, Victor, Greatest Augustus, to bishops and laity: [The heretic] Arius, having initiated wicked and impious men, deserves to suffer the same loss of privileges as they."

The edict goes on to state Arius and those who followed him would now be under the edict that any writings found by Arius were to be burned "so that not only his corrupt teachings may vanish, but no memory of him at all may remain."

The Bishop Arius

Living from 250 A.D. to 336 .D. Bishop Arius began his religious ministry as a poet and ascetic. To his contemporaries he was a simple priest, not likely to be later cause of one of the most remembered heresies in church history.

What the Arians Believed

Beginning in the year 319 A.D. as a simple dispute with the Bishop of Alexandria over the 'nature' of Christ, the Arian doctrinal issue at hand was how Jesus Christ could be the begotten Son of the Father if He had been in existence since the beginning of time. This questioning got Arius excommunicated.

Arius's views are well extant now, and are only known to us through the writings of other church fathers who wrote against the heresy.

In a document written by St. Athanasius, "God the Father was 'uncreated' and was the first principle from which all else, including the Son and the Holy Ghost was derived."

However, Arius's views differed in this way. He believed and taught that the Father is eternal - because he was uncreated - but that the Son, having been created at some point, was not eternal.

Arius Teachings Condemned

It was the First General Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. that first officially condemned this view, although the battle raged on for centuries thereafter. It was officially quelled in 381 A.D. at the First General Council of Constantinople. But being 'officially' quelled is quite different from disappearing from the minds of men. The undercurrents of these beliefs

continued long after, and are even sometimes seen today in newer sects which have arisen out of Protestant Christianity in the modern world.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers discouraged the faithful from branching out into many sects, but recognized that there would indeed be a branching out before the Doctrines of the Church could be put into a unified canon and the beliefs of the Church could be made clear. "There must also be factions [or heresies] among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you." (New Testament, 1 Corinthians 11:19) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

Who were the Beghards?

Heretical Beliefs in the Catholic Church

Later Christian writings utilized the word heresy to any belief held by a Catholic Christian in opposition to the teachings of the Church.

The Beghards were the male counterpart of the Beguines who were all women. Those who embraced the Beghard life were religious people who hoped to imitate the life of the Apostles, but did not wish to enter into formal religious orders of the church.

The Mysterious Beghards

Most of the Beghards were in the areas now known as Germany and Belgium and one of their distinguishing features was that they chose to follow no ecclesiastical authority.

The Beghards counted blacksmiths, shepherds, artists, farm workers and others like them in their ranks. Most of their preaching was done outdoors and often contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Many of the Beghards openly criticized the organized priesthood and clergy.

What the Beghards Believed

At the time of the Beghard revolution, the bible was still only available in Latin. Most common people could not read its contents. They believed the bible should be translated into the language of the people.

They also believed that any Eucharistic Mass celebrated by a priest known to be sinful, should be invalid. But they also held that any believer, not just a consecrated priest of the church, hold a Holy Mass.

They gave no validity to any of the other six sacraments of the church.

Despite their heretical status, many of the Beghards were referred to very commonly as good men. Many of them became wandering preachers, while others gathered in communities and worked to support themselves and their works of charity.

Many of the Beghards utilized the rule of the third order of St. Francis of Assisi, but many of them had different rules depending on their location.

Several requirements were made of the Beghards, that they remain chaste, receive communion seven times a year, keep all secrets of the order and they were not allowed to leave the communal homes of the Beghards at night.

Beghards were around primarily in the 13th and 14th centuries, and after the Black Plague in the 1340's, were known for their charitable acts of burying the dead.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

Many of the Early Church Fathers held very strong views against the heretical believers. "How much more will this be the case with anyone who by wicked doctrine corrupts the faith of God, for which Jesus Christ was crucified! Such a one becomes defiled. He will go away into everlasting fire, and so will everyone that listens to him." (Ignatius) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

Who were the Beguines?

Beliefs not in Keeping with Catholic Doctrine

Heresy became a crime in the Roman Empire.

The word, Beguine, describes an unmarried woman who lives a religious life without entering an order and taking the vows of a nun. The Beguines were the female counterpart to the Beghards.

The Itinerant Female Beguines

Unlike other heresies, some Beguines were approved of by the church but many were not.

Like their male counterparts the Beghards, the Beguines sought to follow the example of the twelve apostles and live as itinerant preachers wandering amongst the poor. They called this doctrine or belief 'Vita Apostolica.'

Most Beguines did not have a clear relationship to either society or the church, although many were known to be weavers, spinners and craftmakers.

It was at Liege, Belgium in the 1170's that we hear of the first group of Beguines entering into history, and they continued throughout the 13th and 14th centuries. Unlike their male counterparts, the Beghards, they faded away slowly. It was Pope John XXII from 1316

to 1334 who really began to persecute them, but the Black Death is what significantly slowed them down.,

However, the Beguines persisted even until the Reformation. And several groups still remained in the twentieth century in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany.

Interestingly, it is believed by some that many of the Beguines were actually widows of crusaders. Their lifestyle erupted out of an inequality in the number of living men and women during the times of the crusades, and these women joined together in such groups to live out lives of prayer and charitable works.

Similar to the third order Franciscans, the primary difference in their way of life was that they did not have to surrender their personal property to the church and they had the freedom to leave the order if they so chose.

How the Beguines were Ordered

Many Beguines had spiritual directors, somebody who stood in the place of a male cleric. Often this function was fulfilled by Franciscan Brothers.

A famous Beguine was Blessed Christina von Stommeln who was born in the year 1242. She was a mystic in her teen years and joined a Beguine

community until her eighteenth birthday. Afterwards, she lived as a Beguine in her hometown.

Many Beguines were women of very different backgrounds, both rich and poor. Their lifestyle was chosen in a sense to protect many of them from marriage, childbirth and from controlling husbands who would engage them in legal battles over their estates and inheritances.

The primary complaint against the Beguines was not about their doctrines, but rather, their austere lifestyle which embraced a level of 'holy poverty' which was criticized by the church even though when the Franciscan Orders began flourishing worldwide.

Because of this piety, the church remained concerned that the Beguines would be treated as religious authorities outside the church.

Any heretical sect in the church before Vatican I and II was treated with great disdain as you can see by the quotes of some of the Early Church Fathers on the matters. It was only after Vatican I and II that tolerance really became integrated into the Holy Faith and those with different lifestyles, views or ways of practicing their faith were accepted and treated with compassion.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers held strong views against any people who failed to stay fully in line with the Catholic Doctrine which had been defined at the time. "They were hypocrites, and introducers of strange doctrines. They were also subverters of the servants of God, especially of those who had sinned. For they did not require them to repent, but persuaded them by foolish doctrines." (Hermas) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* – Edited by David W. Bercot

Who were the Bogomils?

Heresies of the Middle Ages

In the Roman Empire, heresy became punishable by civil law.

The Bogomils began to emerge in the Balkan regions around 930 A.D. Particularly annoying to the church, the Bogomils supported a dualist view which was similar to Albigensians, and as they sent many of their people throughout the Byzantine empire, Italy, France and Western Europe, they are often blamed for contributing to the rise of Albigensianism later in history.

The Founder of the Bogomils

The name didn't just fall out of the sky, the founder of the Bogomils was indeed a man by the name of Bogomil. It had the meaning, "Beloved of God" or "Worthy of God's Pity" depending on the translation.

Bogomil, influenced by the Paulicians, taught a dualist doctrine. In his view, God had two sons. These sons were Christ and Satan. In his view, Satan was the God of the Old Testament and was responsible for the death of God's other Son, Christ, on a Cross.

Bogomil believed that there was only one valid prayer, the Lord's Prayer. He also held some of the

controversial beliefs of the Albigensians such as the perception that true believers could not eat meat or drink wine. They lived a chaste life to the point of perceiving that marriage and procreation were to be avoided as lesser states of spiritual being.

They had no priesthood, so the Bogomil men and women confessed their sins to one another. The Bogomil religion was embraced primarily by the poor and the majority of the spreading of the religion seemed to come through the peasants.

The End of Bogomils

Two known Bogomil groups existed, the first was the Church of Dragovitsa named after a village. The members of this faction were profound dualists, and believed that Satan was a real equal in the hierarchy - equal to God. The Bulgars, an older version of the Bogomils, believed Satan to be God's fallen bother. This belief was referred to as absolutism.

It was in the fifteenth century that the Bogomils would find their end, having been wiped out by the Ottoman Turks. Many Bogomils also embraced Islam, but the capture of Constantinople in 1453 ended organized Bogomilism although the ideas persisted and some of them re-emerged in later heresies and in folktales.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers found the Bogomils and other heretical group like them to be a nuisance. It was hard to keep up with the many heresies cropping up every day. "[The heretics] taught them to both speak and do ungodly and blasphemous things. These persons are called by us after the name of the men from whom each doctrine and opinion had its origin." (Justin Martyr) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

Who Were the Cainites?

Early Church Heresies

Heresy became outlawed in countries with civil supported churches.

The Cainites would be one of the reasons why this may have come to pass. A bizarre group, the Cainites have been compared to a similar group of modern day rebels, the modern day Satanists.

The Worship of Cain, Esau and Judas

Epiphanius is the one to whom we go to learn the most about the strange and mysterious Cainites. They believed in what they called the 'Stronger Power,' which in reality ended up being a belief in the dark side. Epiphanius speaks about the Cainites in his writings which date around 370 A.D.

In their views, Cain, Esau and Judas represented the stronger powers - in some ways they were perceived as being selfishly wise. This 'getting what they wanted' was deemed as similar to containing the 'highest knowledge.'

It was Cain who slew his brother Abel, both sons of Adam and Eve in the biblical book of Genesis. Esau was the protagonist in the biblical story of two sons - Jacob and Esau - both trying to win the favor of their

aged father and his kingdom. And Judas, of course, betrayed Jesus Christ thereby leading Him to His death.

The Gospel of Judas

Interestingly, it was the Cainites who originally spoke about and considered among their most important scriptures the now famous *Gospel of Judas*. In the *Gospel of Judas*, Judas is portrayed as a secret confidante of Jesus Christ, the only one among the twelve apostles who can really understand Christ and His mission.

As a result, this gospel claims that Jesus asked His most favored friend to betray Him because only Judas could understand that He 'must be given up to his enemies' in order that the will of God be fulfilled.

In the *Gospel of Judas*, Judas becomes the courageous disciple who had to do the hard work, knowing it would be completely misunderstood, not only by his fellow disciples, but to history. Therefore, the Cainites viewed Judas as a hero, someone to be emulated.

But another interesting facet of these Cainites was their tendency to follow the darker characters in biblical history. It was very similar to Satanism in that they turned everything backwards, all that was holy to Christendom was turned inside out and its opposite was worshipped by the Cainites.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

One can only imagine the horror of the Early Church Fathers in being faced with such a contrary teaching to their beloved Christ. "The church was called a virgin, for she had not as yet been corrupted by worthless teaching. The bulis it was who, displeased because he was not made a bishop, first began to corrupt the church by stealth . . . From these men have come false Christs, false prophets, false apostles - men who have split up the one church into parts through their corrupting doctrines." (Hegesippus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

The Cathars

The Largest and Most Popular Catholic Heresy of the Middle Ages

A Catholic sect of the Roman Catholic Church which fought hypocrisies present in their time, the Cathars were slaughtered and eliminated during the crusades.

Who were the Cathars

The Cathars were a unique and large sect of unique Christians who sought to follow a more pure life than that which they felt was present within the Catholic Church of their time. They broke off from the Holy Roman Catholic Church in the middle ages. Their primary areas of reign were in Italy and the Languedoc.

Many followers of Catharism were members of the nobility from southern France, but the Cathars had a large following among the artists and poor people, as well.

What the Cathars Believed

The Cathars believed that the world was an evil place and in order to compensate for this dissatisfaction and defect, they sought to live their lives in fasting, prayer, work and non-violence.

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Cathar Claim to Apostolic Succession

The Cathars believed that their beliefs and tradition dated back to the time of the apostles and this belief was somewhat reinforced by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the *Damascus Document* wherein the implication is made that St. Paul was excommunicated from the Catholic Church near the end of his life.

Because the Roman Catholic Church teachings are based primarily on the teachings of St. Paul, this would, in effect, validate their claim; although the Holy Roman Catholic Church claims the same succession back to the Papacy of St. Peter which is also equally unprovable at this time.

Priests and Perfects

Their system included the equality and respect of women, which allowed for the female gender to participate in all the offices of their faith and become 'priests' or the 'perfect' which was the office of priest in the Cathar tradition.

Scriptures that Still Remain from the Cathar Religion

The only remaining scriptures from the Cathars include *The Gospel of the Secret Supper* and *The Book of the Two Principles*. *The Gospel of the Secret Supper* is not originally a Cathar text, but one that was inherited

from the Bogomils in the 12th century. According to *The Gnostic Bible*, Edited by William Barnstone and Marvin Meyer, *The Gospel of the Secret Supper* "is a gospel of the invisible father, his son the angel Christ, and John of the canonical gospels, who questions the lord (Jesus Christ) and the invisible father at a Last Supper (Passover Meal)." *The Book of the Two Principles* was a prime manuscript of moral doctrine to the Cathar faith which proposed a god incapable of evil and cites a unique doctrine of belief in that the God of the Old Testament, the biblical god, is not the God they worship, but rather, a demon impersonating as a god.

It was this and other radical concepts of the Cathars which made them unusually threatening to the Catholic Church of the time.

The Inquisition and the Albigensian Crusade

The Cathars and their profound popularity and growth were among the primary motivations for the Inquisition and it was the Albigensian Crusade in the year 1244 which took down the final vestiges of this newfound faith by literally killing them to the very last man and woman.

Who were the Collyridians?

Heresy in the Catholic Church

Most heresies occurred between the years 100 A.D. to 1600 A.D.

Epiphanius, who was a highly respected fourth century bishop, was the one who named the Collyridians. But there is no explanation as to the reason for the name or how it actually described this particular heretical sect of primarily women.

What did the Collyridians Believe

Collyridians were primarily women who honored Mary in special ways in their elaborate worship rituals.

The Mother of Jesus held special importance to Collyridians. Their practices originated in Thrace which is now in areas among the Greeks, Bulgaria and Turkey.

Apparently, the Collyridians would decorate chairs or square stools and spread linens upon them. One day out of every year, the women of the Collyridians would gather around this stool, place bread upon it

and offer honor to Mary, Mother of Jesus. Epiphanius was not impressed with this ritual.

In fact, Epiphanius utilized the Collyridian heresy as a launching pad to attack any mention made regarding the ordination of women to the priesthood. As with many in that era and even up to modern day, the idea of women becoming priests didn't sit well with the all-male clergy so used to having total control of the Holy See and the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

Epiphanius said in reference to the Collyridians, "Which of the prophets ever bade us worship a man, to say nothing of a woman? For she [Mary] is a chosen vessel, but a woman, and in no way different in nature, highly honored though she is in her will and her senses, as are the bodies of the saints?"

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

Many of the Early Church Fathers found the number of heresies which seemed to plague the church as to be almost ridiculous. "As Paul also says, 'Reject a man who is a heretic, after the first and second, knowing that he who is such is subverted, and sins, being condemned of himself.'" (Ireneaeus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

What is Docetism?

Banned Beliefs from the History of the Church

The word heresy was used in later Greek to denote different philosophical sects and parties.

It was the Docetists who inspired St. John to include in his gospel this warning, "This is how we may recognize the false spirit of God: every spirit which acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God and every spirit which does not thus acknowledge Jesus is not from God." (John 4:2-3)

The Problem of Docetism

The Docetists had a fundamental problem with believing in a Saviour who could suffer and die as a man. They considered this a paradox, and therefore, they came up with many teachings which indicated that Jesus Christ did not physically suffer or die during the crucifixion. Rather, it was a mass hallucination produced by His divine power. The first Docetist known was Simon Magus mentioned in the scriptures; the Book of Acts.

It was an unheard of belief at the time of Christ that a divine personage could suffer at the hands of humans. It was simply an unacceptable view, one which many Muslims share today.

The First Formal Christian Creed of Ignatius of Antioch

Gnostic Christians spread the gospel of Docetism to such a degree that it provoked a formal Orthodox Christian creed. Ignatius of Antioch who was martyred between 98 and 117 A.D. wrote that creed. In the Ignatian creed, he affirmed Jesus “truly, and not in appearance” suffered all the events recorded in the Gospels regarding the crucifixion and resurrection.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

Marcion was a figure who played out highly in the Docetist religion, and the Early Church Fathers did not hold a high opinion of him as they felt he had led many astray from the true gospel. “Marcion [a docetist] met Polycarp on one occasion, and he said, ‘Do you know me?’ Polycarp replied, ‘I do know you, the first-born of Satan!’ Such was the horror that the apostles and their disciples had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters of the truth . . . But Marcion, mutilating the Gospel according to Luke, is still proved to be a blasphemer of the only existing God, from those passages which he still retains. Those, again, who separate Jesus from Christ, alleging that Christ remained impassible, but that it was Jesus who suffered, prefer the Gospel by Mark. However, if they read it with a love of truth, they would have their errors rectified.” (Irenaeus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to*

*More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church
Fathers* – Edited by David W. Bercot

What is Donatism?

Banned Doctrines from the Catholic Church

The Sadducees and Pharisees of Judaism were the first sects to become considered heretical.

A doctrinal dispute between Roman North African churches began what would become the great Donatist heresy. The first of the heresies to demand that an imperial authority uphold one Christian view over another, the Donatists were highly opposed to the ordination of priests as they felt to consecrate any human being was blasphemous.

Donatists and the Priesthood

Many medieval reformers who were often heretics in their own right shared the Donatist view that the clergy should be held to a profoundly strict moral standard. In their belief system, a priest who was openly or in a hidden way sinful could not practice or perform valid sacraments - baptism, marriage, eucharist.

In the years 302 - 305, there were groups of priests who had been persecuted. Those who gave into the torture and handed over their bibles to imperial authority were known as traditors. Donatists believed that traditors could not be restored to the priesthood.

It was a group of dissident bishops, approximately seventy, who ended up forming the faction later to be referred to as Donatists.

In 312 A.D., Constantine rose to power and persecuted the Donatists. His successor continued this tradition. Donatus was finally exiled in 347 A.D. Despite all this, the Donatists eventually had a majority of North African Nations and slowly seemed to be moving into creating their own independent Church.

They actually moved to join with another revolutionary group called the Circumcellions.

It was St. Augustine, in the fifth century, who took the Donatists on very openly in his writings. But it was an imperial decree in 412 A.D. that finally ended the majority of the conflict.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

St. Augustine of Hippo was well-known for his run ins with the Donatists, but he was not the only one of the Early Church Fathers to speak out against them. "Alienated from the truth, they deservedly wallow in all error, tossed to and fro by it. They think differently in regard to the same things at the different times. And they never attain to a well-grounded knowledge . . . They always have the excuse of searching after truth (for they are blind), but they never succeed in finding it." (Irenaeus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian*

*Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics
Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by
David W. Bercot

Who were the Ebionites?

Heretical Sects in Catholic History

In the New Testament, the word heresy has been known to refer to an exacerbated form of division.

Ebionites emerged from a Palestinian and Syrian form of Christianity. It was practiced by Jewish people.

Ebionites utilized a Gospel Similar to the Gospel of Matthew

The Ebionites considered the Gospel of Matthew to be most similar to Judaism than any of the other gospels. But what became controversial was that the version that they held to had removed the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As a result, Ebionites did not consider Jesus Christ as Messiah and King, but rather as a prophet who encouraged the continuation of the practice of Jewish Laws.

Irenaeus against Ebionitism

In Irenaeus's bid to uphold the position of the Church against the Ebionite heresy, he said, "How can they be saved unless he was God who wrought their salvation on the earth? And how shall man pass to God unless God has passed into man? How shall man be freed from the generation of death, except he pass

into a new birth, wonderfully and unexpectedly given by God, for a token of salvation, a birth from a virgin, receiving a rebirth through faith?"

The term 'Ebionite' is actually is a derived from a Hebrew word which connotes the meaning of 'a poor person.' Nobody knows if the poverty of the Ebionites was chosen or a matter of circumstances.

St. Paul and the Early Christians made many references to sending aid to needy Jewish Christians who were presumed to be the Ebionites. But in later years, Ebionites became known very simply as those who denied the divinity of Jesus Christ, considering him to be a wonderful teacher of religions - but not a messiah, redeemer or savior of mankind.

Heresy and the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers felt that the Ebionites use of only one gospel was counterproductive. "The Ebionites, who use only Matthew's Gospel, are refuted out of this very same work, making false suppositions with regard to the Lord." (Irenaeus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

Who were the Flagellant Sects?

Heretical Sects from the Catholic Church

Heresies indicated divisions which had grown into distinct and organized belief systems which were not in concert with Catholic Teachings.

In many monastic rules, the practice of self-flagellation as penance for personal and communal sins was accepted. So it became a very fine line to discern between those orders which performed self-flagellation as part of their penitential rule, and those who would be condemned by the Catholic Church as taking it too far.

The La Penitentes

The majority of heretical Flagellant Sects were popular around the times of the middle ages. However, The 'La Penitentes' of Colorado were a modern version of one of these types of Flagellant Sects.

They emerged much later in the 19th century and were also condemned by the church although they settled most of the San Luis Valley, a huge southwestern territory of Colorado. And they are credited for

bringing the Catholic Church to these remote locations.

Flagellant Sects of the Middle Ages

Flagellation was the imposition of the use of ropes and other devices to either whip oneself or another as penance for sins or breaking with the rule of the order.

Sometimes, flagellation occurred in large groups among medieval laypersons. Such things were more likely to occur during difficult historical times, i.e. plagues.

One such group termed the *disciplinati* was organized by a hermit. These people would engage in public whippings. Many of these public displays included the singing of hymns and prayer, which drew large numbers of people

The practice of self-flagellation was actually made unlawful in 1261 A.D. They were banned in large part because of the public displays.

Self flagellation was originally intended in the monastic orders to be a private matter, done quietly and alone. Although history would prove to make even the private practice of this unusual penance quite controversial.

Many well loved saints were known to engage in self-flagellation such as St. Teresa of Avila and St. Catherine of Siena. The Church has had a difficult time explaining these medieval practices accepted in their time to the modern world.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers had a hard time discerning between those who engaged in lawful penance and those who crossed the line and became grouped into the Flagellant Sects. "It is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the church - those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles. These men, together with the succession of the bishops, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father." (Ireneaus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

Who were the Fraticelli?

Doctrines Rejected by the Catholic Church

St. Paul placed heresies on the same level with serious sins.

It was a group of radical Franciscans who became the Fraticelli brotherhood, which literally means 'little brothers.' Their attempts to divide the church failed despite the lingering history of their schism against the Franciscan Order.

The Disagreement Between the 'Carnal' and the 'Spiritual' Church

Coming primarily out of Sicily and Italy, the Fraticelli followed the writings of Joachim of Floris who had propounded a variety of unaccepted apocalyptic prophecies in his time. The Fraticelli believed that they were following apostolic succession, the 'spiritual' church. Whereas, in their view, the Roman Church was 'carnal' and followed a false and decadent path.

Pope John XXII was adamantly against the Fraticelli, condemning their heresy in the bull *Gloriosan Ecclesiam* in 1318 A.D. He accused them of trying to split the church into two factions, which indeed they had done.

One monk, Angelo del Clarena, appeared to be behind the formation of many of the communities in Italy.

Another group known as the Michaelists were members of the Fraticelli heresy and established many communities. They were led by Michael of Cesena. Thus, the different name of their group.

Michael wrote many condemnations of the church, taking on church authority quite directly. He paid dearly for this war of words by being excommunicated from the Holy Roman Catholic Church in 1328, primarily for his disagreements and continued infighting regarding the authority of the papacy.

Reformers continued the work of the Fraticelli as they faded from view within 100 years of this excommunication and condemnation in Pope John XXII's bull.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

Sometimes, heresies would erupt from legitimate monastic orders, and the Early Church Fathers took an even harder exception to that type of mockery of legitimate authority. "But we should hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession, and assemble themselves together in any place whatsoever - either as heretics of perverse minds, or as schismatics puffed up and self-pleasing.

Or they may be hypocrites, acting this way for the sake of money and vainglory." (Irenaeus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

Who were the Free Spirits?

Heretical Beliefs in the Early Church

St. Peter spoke of false prophets and teachers who would bring in heresies of perdition.

The Free Spirit followers actually derived themselves from an earlier heresy. In a sense, they became a heresy upon the shoulders of another heresy. Deriving their basic beliefs from the Beghards and the Beguines, the Free Spirit followers were considered to be the most radical of these.

What the Free Spirit Heresy Believed

Rejecting all church authority like the Beghards and Beguines they originated from, the Free Spirit followers followed a form of pantheism wherein they perceived God in everything all around them.

Also embracing a form of Neoplatonism, they believed in the oneness of the soul with God.

Interestingly, because the Free Spirit followers believed that they had become one with the will of God, they believed that no matter what they might choose to do, they were incapable of sin. It was this belief that brought the attention of the Church against them.

Many of the Free Spirit followers lived immoral lives in the name of their faith.

The Response of Pope Clement V and the Roman Catholic Church

Pope Clement V issued a bull summarizing the beliefs of the Free Spirit followers in order to legitimize their condemnation. Eight core beliefs defined the Free Spirit heresy:

- 1.) People could attain perfection and be beyond sinning in this life.
- 2.) Because such a person had no control over his own passions or sensible appetites, there was no need to fast and pray.
- 3.) The Free Spirit brothers and sisters were no longer required to adhere to obedience to the Roman Catholic Church.
- 4.) The freedom of spirit could attain to full sanctification in this life.
- 5.) That those with such freedom needed no divine light in order to love the Lord.
- 6.) That only those who remained imperfect needed to practice virtue.
- 7.) Sexual intercourse if desired, is not sinful.
- 8.) They believed that no respect need be shown to the Eucharistic Host, as they did not accept the doctrine of transubstantiation - the physical presence of Christ in communion.

At the same time as the bull was issued against the Free Spirit heresy, Pope Clement V spoke out against the Beghards and Beguines.

The Free Spirit were found most commonly in Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Czechoslovakia.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Free Spirit heresy exacted harsh words from the Early Church Fathers. After all, they were a heresy which derived itself from yet another heresy. "For all of those persons have fallen from the truth. The heretics bring strange fire to the altar of God - namely, strange doctrines . . . And those persons who rise up in opposition to the truth and exhort others against the church of God shall remain among those in the pit of Hades." (Irenaeus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

What was Gnosticism?

Heretical Ideas Rejected by the Church

St. Ignatius utilized the word heresy as term of serious reproach.

The Gnostic belief system contained a multifaceted and complex belief system which remains in circulation today probably more than any other heresy in the history of the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

Who were these Gnostics?

Gnostics were profoundly mystical people who were constantly seeking an interior experience of God. This personal experience of God which would free them from worldly attachments was of more importance to them than dogma.

Gnostics believed there was a secret oral tradition which contained a higher and more secret teaching than the Gospels.

Though many books remain in circulation today of the Gnostic writings, it was still considered absolutely essential that the individual have a personal experience of God. Reading the texts would not be enough.

Where the beliefs became more controversial occurred with their views of a good and evil God which ruled this world and the next. It was the Gnostic view that an evil God ruled the earth, and one had to transcend the God of this world in order to reach the good God beyond.

Although this can be initially seen as a bizarre belief, it is not that different from Christianity in the sense that Jesus Christ said the world belonged to Lucifer. Jesus' kingdom was not of this world, while Satan's kingdom was this world.

It was very important for Gnostics to open up to the spiritual realities in order to actually become true followers of Christ and to begin to really know themselves. As a result, the Gnostics separated followers into three categories:

- 1.) Spiritually Advanced Pneumatics
- 2.) The Less Aware Psychics
- 3.) Totally Materialistic Somatics

Another area where Gnostic texts differed from Christian Texts was in the inclusion of women. Gnostic writings were often written by women and Jesus was purported to have many women followers along with the male disciples.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

Although the Early Church Fathers were never able to fully squelch the Gnostic heresy, they had very strong views against them. "Those, moreover, who follow Valentinus, make copious use of the Gospel according to John to illustrate their conjunctions. However, they, too, will be proved to be totally in error." (Irenaeus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

The Great Gnostic Teacher, Valentinus

Valentinus was a powerful and important teacher of Gnosticism in his time. Valentinus was known to say that Jesus had said "I became very small, so that through my humility I might take you up to the great height when you had fallen." *Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics* - By Charles S. Clifton

Valentinus himself wrote a book which became known as *The Gospel of Truth*. In it, Valentinus was quoted as saying "'Ignorance . . . brought about by anguish and terror. And the anguish grew solid like a fog, so that no one was able to see. For this reason, error is powerful . . . Whoever has not known himself has known nothing, but he who has known himself has at the same time already achieved knowledge about the depths of all things.'" *Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics* - By Charles S. Clifton

This simple explanation sums up the basis of Gnostic teachings quite well.

Who were the Gugliemites?

Heretical Theories Rejected by the Church

Tertullian gave the name of heretic to those who of their own choose false doctrines.

The great prophet monk Joachim of Flores foresaw the Gugliemite heresy coming in visions around the year 1260 A.D.

Gugliema, the Italian Prophetess

In the city of Milan, Italy in 1270 A.D., the Gugliemite heresy began when Gugliema, the Italian Prophetess, began having ecstasies and visions. Her followers believed that she was an incarnation of the Holy Spirit. In their view, she would be ushering in the Third Age of the World.

The Gugliemites weren't the first to believe that a woman would bring in an incarnation of the Holy Spirit. The Joachites believed this, as well as, the Beguines and even the Shakers who believed 'Mother' Ann Lee (1736 - 1784 A.D.) was the incarnation of the Holy Spirit.

Another less known woman followed her in her claim. Jemima Wilkinson (1752-1819 A.D.) was often

considered by her own followers to be the return of Christ.

These women often started colonies of celibate utopian believers who tried to create communities based around their beliefs. They didn't last because of the celibacy, and they didn't procreate those who shared their beliefs. Thus, they died out.

Gugliema, the first and best known of these believed incarnations of the Holy Spirit is held out in tradition to be represented as the Female Pope, the High Priestess Card, in the Tarot Deck.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

Perhaps Prophetesses at the head of heresies in the Holy Roman Catholic Church stood less of a chance against the Early Church Fathers and Hierarchy than any other. "Therefore, it behooves us to keep aloof from all such persons, and to adhere to those who, as I have already observed, hold to the doctrine of the apostles. It is these who, together with the order of presbyters, display sound speech and blameless conduct for the strengthening and correction of others." (Irenaeus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

Who were the Hussites?

Rejected Views of the Heretics

Some heretics would choose of their own will a false doctrine.

Jan Hus, founder of the Hussites, was born around 1369 A.D. in Bohemia. Having studied for the priesthood, he taught theology at the University of Prague. During his years of study, he found himself entranced by the work of Jerome of Prague who introduced him to the works of John Wycliffe who eventually became one of the most important men in the history of the Protestant Reformation.

John Wycliffe's Influence on the Hussite Heresy

John Wycliffe was a profoundly holy man, now considered a saint by Protestants and often Catholics alike. But in his time, he was obsessed with translation the bible into the language of the people so that the faithful could truly understand what it was they professed to believe.

For this profound commitment, John Wycliffe was put in prison more than once. When he died, his body was uninterred and burned. Both John Wycliffe and Jan Hus would come to be called heretics.

Jan Hus and his Creation of the Hussites

Jan Hus rose to great power in the Catholic Church as rector of a University. He became a huge reformer of the clerical state which was a very common problem in that time. Usury and the selling of indulgence along with many other concerns became his passion.

Somewhere along the way, it was the life and writings of John Wycliffe that inspired his rebellion against a corrupt clergy. Writing *De Ecclesia*, he utilized the ideas of Wycliffe on predestination and he, too, rejected the claim of the papacy to be of divine origin.

The Hussites eventually became members of a reformed pre-Protestant church in 1418, although many other controversies and difficulties lay ahead of them.

But Jan Hus and John Wycliffe go down in Protestant history as saints, despite official condemnation of them by the Catholic Church when they were declared heretics.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers had a difficult time holding the line on their doctrinal definitions, especially when such Protestant greats as Jan Hus and John Wycliffe entered onto the world scene with the full and sincere intention of making the gospels readable in the

languages of the people. "The heretics, as many as they are, all depart [from each other], holding so many opinions as to one thing. They bear about their 'clear notions' in secret within themselves. Therefore, if they ever agree among themselves as to the things predicted in Scriptures, then we will also refute them. Mean while, in addition to holding wrong opinions, they also convict themselves, for they are not of one mind with regard to the same words." (Irenaeus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

What is Iconoclasm?

Views of Heretics Rejected by the Church

Some heretics institute false sections of their own. The word heresy has been utilized to indicate sectarianism in the Acts of the Apostles.

In the eighth and ninth centuries a deep schism emerged in the Eastern and Byzantine Churches over the use of holy pictures and images.

Pagans and Muslims and their affect on Iconography

Because the use of icons had been utilized in Pagan circles before Christianity, the issue of bringing the same custom into the Catholic Church became a big one.

Another issue came out of the fact that the Muslim empire had grown and were now issuing forth their opinions on the second commandment of Moses: "You shall not make a carved image for yourself nor he likeness of anything in the heavens above, or on the earth below or in the waters of the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord God, am a jealous God."

Icons were worshipped the most by the Greek Christians, but in 726 the ruler of the Byzantine

Empire Leo II issued one of many edicts against the practice. But he faced much opposition including Pope Gregory II

The View of the Iconoclasts

The Iconoclasts felt the veneration of icons was a sin against the second command and that to make any pictures or images of Christ were vain attempts to limit the true nature of Christ.

But in 843 A.D., after many years of warring with words over the issue back and forth, Empress Theodora restored icon worship.

The issue has remained steady in Catholic Churches since that time with some brief changes made since Vatican II - but was brought up again during the Protestant Reformation in that most Protestant Sects rejected the use of such religious artwork.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers could say all that they wished about this particular heresy, but it was a question which would rear its head over and over throughout the centuries in different eras of the worship of the faithful. "Now all these heretics are of much later date than are the bishops to whom the apostles committed the churches . . . It follows, then, as a matter of course, that these aforementioned heretics - since they are blind to the truth and deviate

from the way – will walk in diverse roads. Therefore, the footsteps of their doctrines are scattered here and there without agreement or connection. In contrast, the path of those belonging to the church circumscribes the whole world, as possessing the sure tradition of the apostles.” (Irenaeus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* – Edited by David W. Bercot

What is Jovinianism?

Heresies that Shocked the Church

Tertullian said that a heretic is condemned by the very fact of choosing their own doctrine when a Christian only received the Apostolic Teaching.

Jovinian was an ascetic monk in the fourth century, who although he lived the ascetic life himself, came to believe that there was little purpose in perpetual virginity or taking the vows of chastity.

Jovinian's Life and Conclusions

Jovinian lived a profoundly ascetic life which included infrequent washing, eating only the simplest and least amounts of food possible and of course, avoiding any interaction with women.

Over time, however, in Jovinian's study of the Scriptures, he came to believe that all baptized men and women were able to reach an equal level of holiness. And that in fact, according to the New Testament Gospel of Matthew 19:6 and the Old Testament book Genesis 1:28, all mankind had been called to marriage and procreation.

Along with these views which he held, he came to the conclusion that abstention from alcoholic substances

or living a life of extreme vegetarianism produced no benefit whatever.

Jovinian was condemned by Pope Siricius and excommunicated from the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

Many Christians followed him anyway which brought on criticism from St. Jerome and St. Augustine. St. Jerome had some pretty radical views himself, believing that all sexual intercourse was unclean.

Heresy and the Early Church Fathers

St. Jerome, in particular, was one of the Early Church Fathers who detested the beliefs of Jovinianism. He even wrote a book, *Against Jovinianism* which ironically is the only remaining documents the church has about this remote fourth century sect. "Those, therefore, who desert the preaching of the church, call into question the knowledge of the holy presbyters . . . Now, all the heretics are such persons. So are those who imagine that they have hit upon something further beyond the truth . . . So as blind men who are led by the blind, they will deservedly fall into the ditch of ignorance." *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

Who Were the Knights Templar?

Heresies that Rocked the Papacy

St. Thomas of Aquinas defines heresy in his *Summa Theologica*.

The tragic story of the Knights Templar began on the date of their instigation in 1118 A.D. and ended horrifically in 1314 A.D. when King Philip I of France had the remaining leaders of the Knights Templar burned at the stake under charges of heresy.

What Was the Original Purpose of the Knights Templar?

The Knights Templar have been laid down in legend after legend over history, but their initial purpose was simply to serve as a group of European knights who would protect and defend the Christian community in Palestine after the Muslims had taken over Jerusalem.

Two knights are known to have been responsible for the bringing together of the order, Hughes de Payn and Godefroi de St. Omer. After the first crusade, these two men organized a second wave of crusaders to go the Holy Land. Becoming a brand of fighting monks, it wasn't long before the church began

making offers of salvation to those who would join in the crusades.

It was Hughes de Payn who was able to obtain the support of St. Bernard of Clairvaux and it was St. Bernard who got the church firmly behind the Knights Templar.

What the Knights Templar Became

The Knights Templar actually became a very isolated order with a lot of myth and secrecy surrounding them. Tales of strange rituals remained popular then and today.

But the bottom line was that the Templars were offered indulgences to take upon themselves all the major crusades against the Muslim invaders in Jerusalem. The Knights Templar were eventually utilized to wipe out other heretical groups that became a problem for the Church, like the Cathars.

When they were unable to take back the holy land and when other crusades failed, they became weaker in the eyes of the people and the Church.

Over time, the Knights Templar formed what may very well have become the first banking system. Since they became very rich and many powerful people owed them money, this banking system became problematic for the Knights Templar, as powerful individuals took action against the group rather than pay their debts.

One instance of this involves the French king, who, rather than finding a way to pay his final debts to the Templars, declared them heretics and had their leaders burned at the stake. The Pope supported this action and was present at the execution.

At the time of Jacques de Molay's execution, he predicted that both the French King and the Pope would stand before God for their trials within one year. And indeed, both of men died within that same year.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The early Church fathers could never have predicted how true their statements regarding heresy would be in the 13th century when they wrote these words: "They therefore form opinions on what is beyond the limits of understanding. For this cause also the apostle says, ' Be not wise beyond it is fitting to be wise, but be wise prudently," according to (Irenaeus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers.*

Who Were the Lollards?

Heresies of the Catholic Church

Heresy, According to St. Thomas Aquinas, implies Christian belief.

Many of the heretical sects were not very far off from the teachings of the Catholic Church, but rather, differed in one or two respects from the dogmas of the faith.

The Lollards created quite the uproar in their time despite the fact that their views would not appear that radical in our day and age. Lollards disagreed with transubstantiation, the presence of Christ in the bread and wine in the sacrament of the Holy Mass. And they also felt that the people should be allowed to read the scriptures in English rather than Latin.

John Wycliffe and the Formation of the Lollards

If this is all beginning to sound a bit familiar, it's because it is. John Wycliffe who was an essential part of the heretical Hussite movement, was also behind the Lollards.

History shows, however, that the Hussite movement was much bigger and more successful than the Lollards. In the chronicles of heretical movements, the Lollards never really got the kind of support that

would be needed from influential members of society to give their movement credibility.

An ordained priest himself, John Wycliffe is credited with translating the majority of the bible into English. Because he didn't live to complete it, having spent so much of his time in prison during his life, colleagues of his from Oxford University ended up finishing the translation when he died.

The Lollards were formed by John Wycliffe in 1380 A.D. as a group of itinerant preachers who would speak in any place they were welcomed. As a result, they preached in markets, churchyards, private homes and even in the fields in the country.

One of the reasons John Wycliffe upset the church so much was because his translation of the entire bible into English was a direct confrontation to the Church belief that only trained clergy could preach from the actual scriptural texts.

Wycliffe, himself, was arrested many times in his life and spent time in prisons for his work. But other Lollards who took upon themselves the 'torch' so to speak of the new itinerant sect of preachers were actually declared to be not only heretics, but criminals, in the laws enacted by Henry IV,

Several Lollard leaders were not only imprisoned, but burned at the stake.

The Lollards faded out in 1431 A.D. after the last of the small group slowly disappeared into history.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers found the heresies which denied the Eucharistic Presence of Jesus in Holy Communion or the divinity of Jesus Christ to be amongst the most disturbing. The Lollards denied transubstantiation, and this warranted the wrath of the Fathers of the Church. 'He has forsaken the way of his own vineyard and wandered in the tracks of his own husbandry.' Such are the sects that deserted the primitive church. Now he who has fallen into heresy passes through an arid wilderness, abandoning the only true God. As a result, he is destitute of God." (Clement of Alexandria) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

Who Were the Luciferans?

Heresies that Rocked the Catholic Church

Some heretics had a way of turning Christianity in upon itself in their belief, Luciferans were among these.

It's difficult to understand how the Luciferan doctrine came into being, because it was such a bizarre twist on Christianity.

The Pantheism of the Luciferans

The Luciferans came about through an unusual set of beliefs, which were lined up along another unusual set of beliefs resulting in the deification of what the Catholic Church would define as the face of evil, Lucifer himself.

In early pantheism, many people held that God was present in all of creation. Because God was present in all of creation and God created Lucifer, in their view, he should be worshipped.

Catholics and Protestants both referred to Lucifer as 'the ruler of this world.' And it was a strange twist of that doctrine that led the Luciferans to believe that Lucifer would actually be restored to his rightful place in God's kingdom and therefore God and Lucifer were one - equal in their Godhead.

Accused of making pacts with Satan, these medieval heretics were often hard to distinguish from other heresies who were accused of committing similar acts.

One group in particular whose views were considered quite similar to the Luciferans was the Antinomians who existed in the 13th century primarily in Germany.

In the 1960's and 1970's, a group called the 'Process Church' operated in North America and England whose views were very similar to the Luciferans, as well. They were also considered to be among the first vestiges of Satanism which began to appear shortly thereafter.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers would have been shocked that heresy could go so far as the Luciferans eventually did go. But despite the fact that they could never have anticipated such a strange doctrine, they summarized it well long before the Luciferans came into being. "Heresies derive what strength as they have from the infirmities of individuals. For heresies have no strength whenever they encounter a truly powerful faith." (Tertullian) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

What Was Manichaeism?

Catholic Heresies Addressed in Councils of the Church

Because St. Thomas of Aquinas claims Christian belief is an essential part of heresy, those who have never been Christians are not heretics.

Today's scholars no longer view Manichaeism as a heresy because its doctrines were so far outside the bounds of Christianity, they believe it to have been an entirely different sect.

Mani and his Followers

Mani lived from the time of 216 to 277 A.D. and grew up within a Middle Eastern Sect. Eventually, however, Manichaeism would have followers all the way from North African to China.

Great persecution followed the Manicheans in every corner of the world where they spread.

Mani was considered by his followers to be many things. Described as a second Buddha, he was also thought to be the reincarnation of Lao-Tsu or another great prophet. Some viewed him as the reincarnation of Jesus or even the Persian teacher Zarathustra, founder of Zoroastrianism.

Mani had mystical visions about his future vocation in life. These visions led him to come out publicly and proclaim the doctrines loudly. Followers of Mani called him the 'Apostle of Light.'

Mani traveled to many locations and was allowed to preach all over the world. But eventually he was imprisoned and died 30 days later. His body was thrown to the dogs. Mani's followers commemorated his death every year with 30 days of fasting.

Manichaeism Cosmology

The Kephalaion is the only remaining work of Mani which explains his perception of the cosmos. They believed in a dualistic philosophy. Mani divided the history into three major divisions.

"In the beginning, the powers of good and evil, light and dark were separated."

"Over time, the chaotic world of matter began to penetrate the ordered world of light."

"A third of the Father's emanations, the Third Messenger, set out to capture the remaining light."
Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics, Charles S. Clifton

Another very bizarre belief held by the Manichaeism was that humans were actually conceived by the mating of demons that swallowed particles of light.

Manichaeans believed that if they had taken their final vows when they died, they would be taken immediately to the kingdom of light because all humans had that one spark within them.

For those who didn't take the vows would immediately reincarnate. So they also believed in their own version of the doctrine of reincarnation.

St. Augustine on Manichaeism

St. Augustine took on the Manichaean heresy in many of his writings. Among the many things he explained about them were that God and evil had substance, evil was believed by the Manicheans to have "a shapeless, hideous mass . . . that there were two antagonistic masses, both of which were infinite, yet the evil in a lesser and the good in a greater degree."

St. Augustine

Heresy According the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers were not certain that Manichaeism was actually a heresy rather than just a different religion. Its cosmology was very complex and well-defined. "This may be seen in all the heresies, when you examine the iniquities of their dogmas. For when they are overturned by our clearly showing that they are opposed to the Scriptures, those who defend the [heretical] teaching do one of two things: They either despite the consistency of their own dogmas, or else they despite the prophecy

itself . . . by disbelieving the Scriptures.” (Clement of Alexandria) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* – Edited by David W. Bercot

Who Were the Men of Intelligence?

Catholic Heresies

A heretic chooses another means to his eternal end by rejecting one or more of the articles of faith of the Catholic Church.

The Men of Intelligence were another offshoot of the Free Spirit heresy, but were not related to the Beguines or Beghards. Originating in Brussels around 1300 A.D., it was a woman named Bloemardinne who originated the Men of Intelligence Heresy.

The Men of Intelligence and their Beliefs

The Men of Intelligence were really not all that unique. Their beliefs were just another variation on several heresies which had come before them which made the attempt to justify the destruction of the moral codes of the Holy Roman Church.

Bloemardinne taught that believers could reach such an exalted state of grace that they could be beyond committing sin, and therefore, none of their actions could be regarded as sinful. It was known at the time that the Men of Intelligence engaged in and believed that sexual activity was a 'spiritual' state.

They believed this to such a degree that women who refused to participate in the illicit sexual behavior were often profoundly abused by their fellow Men of Intelligence.

Men of Intelligence and Seraphic Love

Bloemardinne called this sexual ecstasy 'seraphic love' which was truly a distortion of a term used in legitimate mystical theology regarding certain mystic states. And it would be the use of this term which would eventually condemn them.

They correlated seraphic love with promiscuous sexual love. The word 'seraph' refers to an angelic host, and seraphic love refers to the love between God and humankind in the true doctrines of the Catholic Church.

In 1411 A.D., the two surviving leaders of the Men of Intelligence - Giles Cantor and William Hilderniss - were condemned by the Bishop of Cambrai. In his condemnation, he implied that the term 'seraphic love' had been used to conceal a sexual relationship between the two men and the original founder, Bloemardinne.

Giles Cantor believed that he'd been instructed in mystical visions that the sacraments of penance, confession and absolution were invalid and useless. He also asserted that clergy had no business

interpreting scripture, only those filled with the Holy Spirit such as himself could do so without error.

Bishop Pierre d'Ailly in his condemnation of the Men of Intelligence mentioned that the heretical sect instructed its members to hide the level of promiscuity practiced within their confines, but they considered sexual activity to be equal to prayer.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

Clement of Alexandria among many Early Church Fathers had little respect for the shallow nature of the heresies that arose during his day. "Therefore, on account of the heresies, the toil of discovery must be undertaken. Yet, we must not at all abandon [the truth]. Suppose that fruit were set before us. Some of it was real and ripe, and some was made of wax." (Clement of Alexandria) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

What Was Monophysitism?

Heretical Beliefs of Church History

In Catholic teaching before the Reformation, formal heresy involved rebellion against God.

The Monophysites derived their primary teachings from Eutyches. Ironically, the primary difference between their beliefs and that of the Church was that they did not believe that Christ had two natures, divine and human. They believed He only had one.

They believed that Christ had one nature which expanded beyond human understanding and allowed Christ to live and act as human being, but when He performed miracles, because of this monadic nature was able to transcend the laws of mortal beings and reach into the divine to affect healing and other miraculous events.

Monophysite is actually a Greek word meaning 'one nature.'

Eastern and Western Christianity

Monophysitism occurred primarily in the branches of Christianity which had branched off the mission and teachings of St. James the apostle – the Eastern

Church. Some of the beliefs of Monophysitism still exist today in Coptic Christian Churches in Egypt, Ethiopia and the Middle East.

The Roman Catholic Church condemned Monophysitism at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. But this did not end the schism. In fact the schism between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic branches of the Church continued to grow after the Council.

But although Monophysitism had a pretty popular run in the fifth century and continued on for about one hundred years, it was not the Church which eventually eradicated the belief. But rather, it was the Muslim armies of the seventh century whose conquest finally ended the controversy in the church.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

Tertullian, one of the Early Church Fathers, often spoke openly about those who embraced heresies and their own personal responsibility for their choice to be involved in a schism. "The practical effects are false doctrines . . . This word is used in the sense of the choice that a man makes when he either teaches [false doctrines] or takes up with them. It is for this reason that he calls the heretic self-condemned, for the heretic has himself chosen that for which he is condemned." (Tertullian) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700*

Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers – Edited by
David W. Bercot

What Was Montanism?

Heretical Beliefs in the Catholic Church

Catholic teaching indicates that God expects believers to submit their understandings to the doctrine of the Church.

Montanism was called the New Prophecy movement by its followers and has been compared to modern day Mormons, Christian Scientist and the Jehovah's Witnesses. But its origin was in the mid second century.

The Second Coming of Christ

The Montanists were founded by a man named Montanus who believed and declared that he was the actual manifestation of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus Christ in Holy Scripture. He would often speak in ecstatic states as if 'channeling' the Holy Spirit.

Two of his assistants, Maximilla and Priscilla, perpetuated his teachings upon his passing.

But the sect believed that the Second Coming of Christ was at hand. As a result, Montanus instructed his followers not to get married. If they were already married, they were to separate so they could prepare for the great coming of the Lord. Montanists followed

strict lifestyle guidelines regarding food, clothing and habitation.

Interestingly, Montanus was one of the few heretics who had been bold enough to define his own Canon of the bible and actually *add* his own writings to the scripture of the New Testament.

Montanus' attempts to add to scripture of his own to the Holy Bible compelled the Church to act in defining the canon of the New Testament which happened around 200 A.D. But it wasn't until the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. that the establishment of the New Testament canon was finalized.

Montanus completely rejected the Old Testament, but at the same time pronounced that Moses' sister as a prophetess. He did such things in a move to introduce women into the priesthood. Montanists had women serve as bishops, presbyters and priests.

Expecting the Second Coming as imminent, when it did not occur, the Montanists began to quickly fade away.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers felt that many of the heretical sects in their day were missing the simplicity of the Gospel message taught by the Roman Catholic Church. "Your object in seeking was to find . . . Now, because so many other things have been taught by

various persons, are we on that account obliged to go on seeking? When will the seeking ever end? Where is the finality of belief? Where is the completion in finding?" (Tertullian) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

What Was Nestorianism?

The Catholic Bishop who Proclaimed a Heretical Teaching

A heretic in death could only receive absolution by the Pope.

Nestorianism was a powerful heresy beginning in the fifth century by Bishop Nestorius who was the Patriarch of Constantinople. Eventually, he was deposed from his position for proclaiming his heretical beliefs.

What the Nestorians Believed

Bishop Nestorius got involved in a common controversy between the church and heretical groups in the Early Church – the issue of the two natures of Jesus Christ, divine and human.

Nestorius believed that Christ received his human nature from His mother and His divine nature from God the Father. Nestorius taught that these natures were completely separate, but acted in unity as one. As a result, Nestorius taught that it was erroneous to refer to the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Mother of God.

Condemnation by the Council of Ephesus

In 431 A.D., Nestorius and his followers were condemned by the Roman Catholic Church at a General Council of the Church held at Ephesus. But Nestorius and his followers crossed over into the Persian Empire and their beliefs survived even until today.

The Persian Church took upon some of the Nestorian teachings and caused a schism around 486 A.D. They continued on in Persia, Asia, India and Africa.

Eventually, during the fifteenth century the Roman Catholic and Nestorian Churches were reconciled with one another and the Nestorian church continues its own liturgy today primarily in the Middle East and India.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

One of the common associations that the Early Church Fathers made to many of the heretical groups was that many of them believed they were receiving new revelations which expanded upon the teaching of Christ and the Apostles. "The heretics insist that [the apostles] did not reveal everything to all men. Rather, they say that the apostles proclaimed some things openly and to all the world, but that they disclosed other things only in secret and to a few." (Tertullian) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* – Edited by David W. Bercot

Who were the Pelagians?

Heretical Monks in Catholic History

Many heretics ended up dying for their cause at the hands of the crusaders.

Pelagius was born around the year 360 A.D. in either Ireland or Celtic Britain. Becoming a monk and a missionary, he came to Rome around 400 A.D.

St. Augustine and Pelagius

Pelagius didn't have a chance when St. Augustine took the Pelagian heresy upon himself as his personal mission. St. Augustine was a staunch defender of the authority of the church. But ironically, the dispute between doctrines held at the time would not hold today within the Catholic Church. Pelagius would've come out the victor if the same debate were held today in the Catholic Church.

Pre-Destination or Moral Choice

Pelagius was disgusted by the way that so many in the church had embraced a doctrine of pre-destination which allowed them to take no responsibility for their choices and actions in this life. He opened the debate which continues today between many Christian denominations as to whether it is the

free will of human beings or the actions of God's grace which determine the salvation of a soul.

In simpler terms, Pelagius believed that humanity needed to take responsibility for doing the work of salvation and stop blaming the will of God or pre-destination for their failings. St. Augustine held firmly to the belief in pre-destination which is not a doctrine which is held today in the Catholic Church, but rather a Protestant issue.

St. Augustine ultimately outlined that he believed that only some had been chosen by God for salvation and these would be saved. This enraged Pelagius who was eventually forced to leave Jerusalem because of his views.

The issue of Pelagius and St. Augustine is a controversy which rages today. Catholic doctrine teaches today that men choose their salvation – or not. Why the Pelagian controversy could not find middle ground with the Church and ended up becoming such an area of antagonism in the fifth century is unknown to scholars today.

It is thought by some that St. Augustine held such firm views upon the importance of the authority of the Church, that he attacked this particular view with unusual force which in hindsight makes little sense.

Pelagius died in exile around 420 A.D. But his ideas have lived ever since.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers found great difficulty with the heretical sects in part because they wouldn't accept the basics of Roman Catholic Teachings, scripture and tradition. "It comes to this, therefore, that these men accept neither Scripture or tradition. Such are the adversaries with whom we have to deal." (Irenaeus) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

Who Were the Waldensians?

Rejected Views of the Heretics

Heresies emerged in the early church in part because there was no uniformity in doctrine.

The Waldensian movement was started by a lay follower of the church, rather than by a priest or monk. His name was Peter Waldo and his goal was to return to a purer Christianity.

But he did not do this in the manner that other reformers had done before him. The Waldensians had no interest in creating a monastic order, but rather, flourished on the idea of bringing other laypeople to the Gospels.

This was important in Peter Waldo's time in the 1170's A.D., because the Gospels were only available in Latin or Greek.

Peter Waldo and his Journey into Waldensianism

Waldo, who was married and had made his living as a merchant, underwent a spiritual crisis wherein he began to feel that his life was no in keeping with the teachings of Christ in Holy Scripture. He had become

very rich and he worried that this wealth had come at the expense of his spiritual well-being.

Inspired by stories of St. Alexis and his wife who made vows on their wedding day to live a life of celibacy and give everything they had to the poor, Waldo eventually decided that he wanted to become a wandering preacher and give everything away.

Hiring two priests to translate parts of the New Testament into French so that he could study them, he became more and more convinced that his life was not in keeping with the Gospel.

His wife, however, was not happy with that decision and appealed to the archbishop of Lyons to stop her husband from following this desire. He did forbid Waldo to preach without the approval of the church. Waldo allowed his wife to retain all their possessions and then left his family to live what he called an 'apostolic life.'

Waldensians versus Albigensians

Waldensian preachers traveled two by two like the apostles and set out to lead what they perceived to be more moral lives. But Waldo was not only never given permission by the church to preach, but he and his fellow Waldensians were excommunicated for not following that order of the Catholic Church in the 1180's. Pope Lucius III made the pronouncement.

Waldensians were often mistakenly compared to the Albigensians, but this was quite inaccurate. The Albigensians changed Christian Doctrine to fit their chosen lifestyle, whereas, the Waldensians did not do this. Waldensians believed in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ in His humanity. Albigensians, on the other hand, believed that Christ had only experienced the crucifixion metaphorically. In their view, Jesus Christ was unable to experience suffering because of His divinity, and therefore, transcended the cross.

Heresy According to the Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers often charged heretics with using and twisting the scriptures to justify their false beliefs. "They have boldly falsified the Sacred Scriptures, rejected the canons of the ancient Faith, and ignored Christ. Instead of inquiring what the sacred Scriptures say, they laboriously seek to discover what form of syllogism might be contrived to establish their impiety." (Eusebius) *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* - Edited by David W. Bercot

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Heresies in the Catholic Church

An Overview

By Marilyn Hughes

The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation!

<http://outofbodytravel.org>

Heretical Sects have been around in the Catholic Church since the beginning. And this is to be expected especially as the Catholic Church was forming its formal dogmas to be in concise unity with the teachings of Christ. The study of Heresies in the Catholic Church can be a complicated and difficult task. I've tried to simplify that study in this book. This book gives you an overview and insight into a subject otherwise only understood through lengthy study.

Go to our Website at:

<http://outofbodytravel.org>

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