

De-Incarnating the Spirit:
A Diachronic and Typological Analysis of Marcosian and Cathar Rites of Separation

Brandon Taschuk

2322606

Dissertation submitted to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David for the degree of Master of
Arts in Ancient Religions

30 September 2026

Abstract

This dissertation addresses the contentious scholarly question of the Gnostic origins of the Cathars through a rigorous diachronic and typological comparative analysis. Specifically, it evaluates the medieval peri-mortem Cathar *consolamentum* ritual alongside the second-century CE peri-mortem Valentinian Marcosian *apolytrosis* or ‘redemption’ ritual. This inquiry is accomplished through a thorough examination of some of the primary sources for each ritual, including Irenaeus and Hippolytus for the *apolytrosis*, and Sacconi, the *Vision of Isaiah*, the *Interrogatio Iohannis*, and the Cathar *Rituals* for the *consolamentum*. Using the frameworks of comparison in the study of religion developed by Jonathan Z. Smith and Burton L. Mack and refined by Oliver Freiberger, this dissertation engages in an illuminative comparison that extends beyond juxtaposition to rectify existing academic classifications. This culminates in the proposal of a new typological genre of ritual: the Christian de-incarnational rite of separation. This typological genre, characterised by aspects of inclusion, separation, marginality, and aggregation, is fundamentally concerned with escaping the flawed material world and its creator via ritual means in order to return to the benevolent spiritual Father and his spiritual realm. This ritual genre is inherently shaped by dualist Christian belief systems and is often performed in close proximity to an initiate’s death in order to facilitate the spiritual return to the realm of their Father. While this typological affinity does not establish a genetic link between the two groups, it nonetheless demonstrates that their affinity is significant and can be explained both in relation to their surrounding orthodox contemporaries as well as possible shared ‘Gnostic’ ideas.



Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

Declaration Form

1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Name: Brandon Taschuk

Date: 30 September 2026

2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Ancient Religions

Name: Brandon Taschuk

Date: 30 September 2026

3. This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Name: Brandon Taschuk

Date: 30 September 2026

4. I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying, inter- library loan, and for deposit in the University's digital repository

Name: Brandon Taschuk

Date: 30 September 2026

Supervisor's Declaration.

I am satisfied that this work is the result of the student's own efforts.

Signed: HR Webster.....

Date: ...30 September 2026

Acknowledgements

There are many people in my life who I owe a great debt to who have allowed me to reach this milestone and finish my Master's dissertation. I'd like to thank my supervisor, Harriet Webster, and all of the amazing instructors at UWTSD who have fostered my intellectual curiosity and helped me to grow so much as a student and scholar. I'd like to thank my Biblical scholar 'hero' Daniel O. McLellan, whose example of public scholarship inspired me to pursue my true interests and passions, and expand my intellectual horizons. Most of all, I'd like to thank my family. I thank my mother, Lisa, my grandmother, Carol, and my late grandfather, Richard, for allowing my curiosity to flourish in my youth and giving me the confidence and drive to succeed academically. I thank my childhood dog, Spike, for helping me to overcome adversity up to my young adulthood. I thank my children, Amira and Elias, for forcing me out of bed on the days I don't want to be awake and keeping me motivated in their own special ways. Finally, perhaps more than all, I thank my amazing wife, Jessica, who inspired me to pursue this degree and who has encouraged me and supported me every step of the way. Thank you all.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	9
Chapter 3: Methodology	26
Chapter 4: Discussion, Analysis, and Interpretation	30
Chapter 5: Conclusions	61
Bibliography	64

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Cathar movement has been variably described, with speculation on what its connection to Gnosticism might be.¹ Ignoring more debatable aspects of Catharism, it is above all dualistic and focused on the contrast between the evil physical world, and the good spiritual world. While this dualism shifted between moderate and absolute,² it nonetheless echoed earlier dualistic movements both within Christianity and outside it. The similarities between their beliefs and other, more ancient, dualistic or so-called Gnostic belief systems has been extensively explored and speculated on; their contemporaries at times dubbed them Manichaeans, with prominent inquisitors such as Bernard Gui calling them such.³ W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans note that the ‘tendency to speak of “Manichaeans”’ when referencing various heresies of the high middle ages is ‘best explained by the notoriety of those ancient sects’ and by the rumours of ‘secret assemblies, demon-worship, magic, and lewd behavior’ which abounded at the time.⁴ Scholars have likewise noted the similarity of Cathars to these various ancient sects, albeit with more nuance than their medieval counterparts. With that said, there is no consensus on how, or if, ancient Gnosticism influenced Catharism, including which sects may have had their dualistic ideas passed down through generations and centuries. Opinions of early scholars on the matter vary; Dmitri Obolensky purported that Manichaean ideas were transmitted in the Near East during antiquity and into the middle ages before reaching the West via

¹ Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014) pp. 1-14.

² Ibid, p. 2.

³ Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'inquisiteur*, translated by W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 379.

⁴ W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 21.

Paulicianism and Bogomilism, while others such as Hans Söderberg argued that another Gnostic tradition must have transmitted its ideas in a similar fashion; meanwhile, other scholars deny a continuity between Gnostic dualism of antiquity and Catharism altogether, arguing that its dogmas were wholly an innovation of the time and circumstance in which it arose.⁵ While a clear and definitive genealogical link between ancient Gnostics and medieval Cathars has yet to be established, it nonetheless seems plausible, if not probable, that such a link was a factor in Catharism's creation. Wakefield and Evans note the debate between scholars who posit an ancient origin of Catharism and those that characterise Catharism as a response to social and religious conditions of the high middle ages, claiming 'no one on either side of the argument insists on one explanation to the complete exclusion of the other'.⁶ That is to say, even scholars who are more sceptical of the idea of Catharism being influenced by ancient Gnostic ideas are uncomfortable with fully precluding its possibility. If one accepts the conclusion that ancient Gnostic beliefs, via reception and transmission across centuries, had at least some part in Catharism's development, then a pertinent question arises; namely, which ideas from which groups influenced which beliefs and practices amongst Cathar adherents?

As alluded to previously, many scholars favoured a Manichaean origin of the Cathars, perhaps because Manichaeism's existence is widely attested as persisting several centuries later than many other Gnostic groups. With that said, Manichaeism alone is an inadequate explanation for all the beliefs and practices that the Cathars may have inherited from so-called 'Gnostic' groups. While there may be more evidence to say that Manichaeism and Bogomilism overlapped temporally, and that scholars widely agree that Bogomilism evidently influenced Catharism,⁷

⁵ Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, pp. 17-19.

⁶ Ibid, p. 9.

⁷ Barber, *The Cathars*, p. 2.

Manichaeism is not the best explanation for the origin of Catharism's ritual practice. On the contrary, this dissertation will demonstrate that Marcosian Valentinian ritual practice characterised by the *apolytroxis*, or redemption, and Cathar ritual practice characterised by the *consolamentum*, represent the same typological category of ritual underpinned by the same theological and cosmological problems which the aforesaid rituals aimed to address. Through the development of this ritual genre using a judicious comparison of these rituals and their underlying theology, especially informed by historical and textual criticism of primary sources, this dissertation aims to add to the plausibility that at least some aspects of Cathar ritual practice are rooted in ancient so-called 'Gnostic' beliefs and practices.

The Consolamentum

To properly explore these two rituals, something must be said about the two groups who employed them, namely the Cathars and the Marcosians, as well as the evidence that informs our understanding of them. Scholars are in widespread agreement that the primary ritual and salvific practice of the Cathars was the *consolamentum*.⁸ Evidence of the *consolamentum* practice comes primarily through polemical opponents, one such being Rainier Sacconi and his *Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus*. Sacconi claims to have been a practicing Cathar for seventeen years before reverting to Catholicism, so if he is to be believed, his knowledge represents firsthand accounts of not only beliefs, but rituals such as the *consolamentum* as well. With that said, it is not only through opponents that our knowledge of the *consolamentum* stems. Several Cathar texts have been preserved, one of which known as *The Catharist Rituals* describes the *consolamentum* in detail and provides some rationales for its practice. These sources permit

⁸ Barber, *The Cathars*, p. 2.

scholars to form a rather detailed reconstruction of the ritual itself as well as many of the theological underpinnings. Furthermore, while there seems to have been a rather wide and diverging array of beliefs between different Cathar groups, these sources nonetheless allow for a general survey of what some Cathars believed and practiced.

The *consolamentum*, while not inherently a ‘deathbed’ ritual, was often practised as such. While there were members of the Cathars who undertook this ritual outside of the peri-mortem period, primarily being the leaders in the religion or *perfecti*, Malcolm Barber explains that the laity of the Cathar Church, known as *credentes*, ‘took the *consolamentum* when near death, for the ascetic rigours of the life of the *perfecti* were too great for most people to be able to sustain’.⁹ Therefore, while the ritual is not exclusively practised as a deathbed ritual, this dissertation will primarily focus on the *consolamentum* in this context, given that most people who would have undertaken the *consolamentum* would have done so just prior to death.

The essence of the ritual was baptism in the Holy Spirit; the Cathars would read the ‘Holy Prayer’, in this case a version of the Lord’s Prayer, and would impose hands on the one being baptised or ‘consoled’.¹⁰ The one being consoled would be instructed ‘to keep the commandments of Christ’, would have a copy of either the New Testament or the Gospel of John placed on their head, and would have the Cathar men lay their right hands on the initiate. While there was some variation in practice, especially if the *consolamentum* was being performed on a sick or dying individual, the underlying logic and theology remained the same. According to Wakefield and Evans, when the ritual was performed, it was believed to win the initiate forgiveness for both their pre-incarnate sins, as well as for their earthly sins; as a result, the soul of the one undergoing *consolamentum* ‘would regain its guiding spirit and would find the way of

⁹ Barber, *The Cathars*, p. 1.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 77-78.

return to its heavenly home'.¹¹ Far from normative Christian theology, Cathars seem to believe not only in the soul's pre-existence, but also its reincarnation until its return to heaven. At least according to Sacconi, the Devil implants angelic souls 'in human bodies and in those of lower animals, and also transfers them from one body to another, until such time as shall be brought back to heaven'.¹² This understanding will form the basis of the comparative study between the *consolamentum* and the *apolytrosis*.

The *Apolytrosis*

Out of one of the most famous Gnostic sects, the Valentinians, came a disciple of Valentinus himself known as Mark, who gave his name to his own disciples, known as Marcosians. Like other 'Gnostics', Marcosians were dualistic, viewing created matter, such as physical bodies, as evil but viewing the immaterial, such as spirits, as good. More so than the Cathars, the information regarding specific Marcosian practices comes almost exclusively from polemics deriding the practitioners, in this case from Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus, in his treatise *Adversus Haereses*, or *Against Heresies (AH)*, heavily criticises the founder of Marcosianism, using the epithet 'the Magician' and framing him as a tempter and defiler of women.¹³ To whatever degree Irenaeus's derisions of Mark are accurate is unknown, but Irenaeus seems to offer a relatively unbiased recounting of alleged Marcosian practices, even if his bias against Mark himself is undeniable. In any case, the Marcosians' primary ritual, the *apolytrosis*, like the *consolamentum*, is not inherently a peri-mortem ritual, but was nonetheless frequently practised

¹¹ Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, p. 465.

¹² Rainier Sacconi, *Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno*, 17, translated by W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 338.

¹³ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, (13.1 to 13.5) translated by Robert M. Grant in *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) pp. 58-59.

as such by at least some of the Marcosians, to the degree that Irenaeus thought it noteworthy enough to include in his treatise.

In terms of deathbed *apolytrosis* administration, Irenaeus describes the ritual as a baptism and notes that adherents pour ‘oil and water on their heads’ or a special balsam ointment in addition to water and say various invocations; there are also Marcosians he describes as eschewing the ‘physical’ elements of the *apolytrosis* who argue that they are redeemed through Gnosis, or knowledge.¹⁴ Irenaeus provides several different reports of invocations, with the central theme of calling on the ‘Father of all’ and on ‘Jesus of Nazareth’, among others such as Sophia or Wisdom, to ‘redeem [their souls] from this age and everything from it’.¹⁵ Irenaeus posits that the purpose of this ritual, especially its performance in such close proximity to death, is so that the initiates ‘may become incomprehensible and invisible to the Archons and Powers and their inner man may ascend above the invisible regions, abandoning the body to the created universe and leaving the soul with the Demiurge’.¹⁶ Similar to the Cathars, the Marcosians believed that without the appropriate ritual their souls would be unable to reach the highest heaven where the Father resides. While it is undeniable that the two rituals, the *consolamentum* and the *apolytrosis*, share obvious similarities, this dissertation aims to demonstrate that the similarities are profound and are rooted in the same underlying theology of dualism and cosmology of malevolent created matter and creator versus benevolent spiritual beings and spiritual progenitor.

¹⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.21.3 to 1.21.5, in Grant pp. 65-66.

¹⁵ Ibid, 1.21.3, in Grant, pp. 65-66.

¹⁶ Ibid, 1.21.5, in Grant, p. 65.

Reconciliation of Similarities

As previously mentioned, opponents of Catharism in the Middle Ages frequently derided them as modern Manichaeans. At least some scholars have entertained this notion, but in terms of ritual practice, these religions are quite disparate. Notably, while Manichaeans did seem to practice deathbed rituals, their underlying theology and practice does not seem to closely mirror deathbed *consolamentum* administration and the theology and practice of the same. For example, one fourth-century Manichaean papyrus (1 Ke. 227.18-26) describes an auditing on one's deathbed in which light particles or soul fragments, 'through good deeds, travel [...] to the heavenly bodies' to 'await their death before final judgment'.¹⁷ The language of auditing, the theological focus on light particles, and the idea of awaiting death before a final judgement is far from the Cathar ritual rooted in Christian theology with a focus on the Lord's Prayer, holy scripture, and restoring proximity to the Father via knowledge obtained from Jesus Christ.

While it is largely apparent that the *consolamentum* and *apolytrosis* are more similar in both practice and theology compared to either ritual and that of the Manichaeans, only an in-depth analysis of the evidence will facilitate a plausible case for both rituals belonging to a shared category that transcends time and geography. This dissertation will perform such an analysis by first providing context and analysis for the primary sources for either group, especially as they relate to ritual practice. In performing this work of hermeneutics, a redescription of either ritual will be made possible, supported by secondary scholarship. Finally, a full comparative analysis will be performed using the in-depth descriptions and analyses of the rituals, as well as their underlying context established through historical inquiry. Ultimately, this task will provide a framework that can either raise or lower the plausibility of Marcosian ritual

¹⁷ H. F. Teigen, 'Manichaean Rituals: Elect and Lay Practices' in *The Manichaean Church in Kellis*. (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 215-250 (p. 232) <DOI: 10.1163/9789004459779_009>.

practice or beliefs surviving in some regard and being adopted by the Bogomils and Cathars, forming the basis for their own central rituals.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Marcosians

In order to properly examine the context and beliefs surrounding the *apolytrosis* ritual, a survey of Marcosian identity as a distinct religious group, as well as an assessment of the reliability of the sources on Marcosianism is imperative. Most of our knowledge of the Marcosians comes from the polemical *Against Heresies* by Irenaeus, a second-century CE bishop from what is now Lyon, France. The problem of reconstructing ritual practice based on information from a fierce opponent is the question of reliability and veracity. Despite Irenaeus's polemical intent, John Behr argues that Irenaeus fully admits that he bases his work on only a few written sources as well as verbal reports and that there is 'no reason not to take him at his word'.¹⁸ Niclas Förster calls Irenaeus's report on the Marcosians 'very valuable [...] since it allows us to look at the form and sequence of the rites in the Gnostic service'.¹⁹ By contrast, Einar Thomassen draws doubts on Irenaeus's reliability when it comes to exposition about Valentinian baptismal theology, calling his information 'limited' and arguing that 'it cannot represent the view of more than a specific branch of Valentinianism'.²⁰ While it is almost certain that some aspects of Irenaeus's accounts were embellished or simply incorrect, if we consider the Marcosians a branch of Valentinianism then Thomassen's critique does little to undermine this dissertation's approach, given that it is indeed a distinct Marcosian ritual being investigated.

¹⁸ John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 103-104.

¹⁹ Niclas Förster, 'Marcosian Rituals for Prophecy and Apolytrosis'. In *Practicing Gnosis*, ed. by April DeConick, Gregory Shaw, and John D. Turner (Leiden: Brill, 2013) pp. 433-448 (p. 435).

²⁰ Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 361-362.

Regardless, François Sagnard,²¹ at least according to Nicola Denzey Lewis, successfully demonstrated that Irenaeus ‘tended not to distort his Valentinian sources’ and Lewis engages in a close reading of Irenaeus with several primary Valentinian sources without finding significant distortion in his writings.²² The scholarly consensus seems to be that in terms of describing the Marcosians’ beliefs and practices, Irenaeus is a relatively reliable source.

When it comes to describing Marcosianism as a distinct identity, Eduard Iricinschi primarily focused on gender as it relates to the Marcosians. While not primarily concerned with the *apolytrosis* ritual, his invaluable insight into the social and religious structure of the Marcosians provides ample context in which to examine their ritual practice. Like other scholars, he draws primarily on Irenaeus to inform his analysis. While focused more so on gender and its rhetorical effects on Irenaeus’s audience, he also crafts a useful characterisation of the Marcosians as inherently and primarily ‘itinerant Christian teachers’ throughout Asia Minor that, as a result of their ‘ideological and ritual sophistication’ were likely highly regarded by ‘those who invited them in their households’.²³ Iricinschi’s characterisation places Marcosians in congruence with the kind of apostolic evangelisation in the biblical Acts of the Apostles. To what degree they saw themselves as a continuation of this apostolic work and tradition is unclear, although it is clear that they saw their works’ origins in the words of Jesus himself. Still, scholars such as Niclas Förster,²⁴ Stephen Young,²⁵ and Iricinschi himself advance the notion of Marcosianism as a syncretic religion rather than a strictly Christian religion, to varying degrees.

²¹ François Sagnard, *La gnose Valentinienne et le témoignage de saint Irenée* (Paris: Vrin, 1947).

²² Nicola Denzey Lewis, ‘Apolytrosis as Ritual and Sacrament: Determining a Ritual Context for Death in Second-Century Marcosian Valentinianism’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 17.4 (2009), pp. 527-528.

²³ Eduard Iricinschi, ‘How Gullible Were the Women of Late antique Rhone and Asia Minor? Redescribing the Valentinian Marcosians in Irenaeus of Lyon’s *Against the Heresies* (I,13-15)’, *ASDIWAL. Revue genevoise d’anthropologie et d’histoire des religions*, 15 (2020), pp. 115-132 (p. 130) <DOI: 10.3406/asdi.2020.1183>.

²⁴ Förster, ‘Marcosian Rituals for Prophecy and Apolytrosis’, pp. 446-448.

²⁵ Stephen L Young, ‘The Marcosian Redemption: Mythmaking, the Afterlife, and Early Christian Religiosity’, *Journal of Early Christian History*, 6.2 (2016), pp. 77-110 <DOI: 10.1080/2222582X.2016.1184883>.

With that said, to what degree all Christian sects are syncretic is unclear, given that none exist in a cultural and historical vacuum. One could easily say that most, if not all, of the earliest Christianities were a product of Hellenistic tradition to varying degrees.

Apolytrosis as Ritual

Nicola Denzey Lewis, one of the foremost scholars of the *apolytrosis* ritual, performs an in-depth analysis of the *apolytrosis* and makes a detailed and diachronic comparison between the *apolytrosis* and the Catholic *viaticum* and *extreme unction* rituals which were practiced centuries later.²⁶ Her analysis finds that *apolytrosis* functioned as both soteriological and eschatological concept as well as ritual depending on which group was employing it,²⁷ and her argument is bolstered by insights from the texts found at Nag Hammadi. Her analysis and exposition on the ritual and its relationship to later orthodox rituals does much to inform this dissertation's arguments and structure in favour of the *apolytrosis*'s typological identification with the *consolamentum*.

Lewis draws a particular distinction between the Marcosian ritual and any formalised 'mainstream' Christian ritual such as the *viaticum*, a practice in which a dying individual would be administered the Eucharist. While the *viaticum* no doubt functioned as a deathbed ritual, Lewis argues that this constitutes a ritual of inclusion into the Christian community; that is to say that it represented the final action 'in a four-step ritual process after confession of faith, aspersion with holy water, and chrismation in the form of a cross on the individual's forehead'²⁸ which would admit the initiate into the living body of Christ. Here, the ritual itself is not necessarily

²⁶ Lewis, 'Apolytrosis as Ritual and Sacrament', p. 540.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 560-561.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 540.

imparting any supernatural or magic protection, but rather is finalising the ritual process by which one fully becomes a Christian following one's time as a catechumen. The purpose of the *viaticum* in this context becomes inclusion into the broader Christian communion. By contrast, Lewis argues that the *apolytrosis* functions specifically as a ritual of 'separation, marginality, and aggregation'.²⁹ As opposed to a ritual incorporating one into the body of Christ, that is the church, the deathbed *apolytrosis* 'effects change in the individuals involved, by which they pass "from one cosmic or social world to another"'.³⁰ Contrary to the orthodox *viaticum*, the purpose of the Marcosian deathbed *apolytrosis* seems to have been to transition one's 'spirit-soul aggregate' from one's material body, essentially acting as a 'birth rite in reverse in which a human being's eternal components are sent back to their respective sources'.³¹ By this ritual, one's soul and spirit could be separated and one could finally ascend to the Pleroma or highest heaven. While both the *viaticum* and *apolytrosis* could be said to impart salvation, the salvation of the Marcosian initiate involved an inherent separation from the community of the living and from the material world entirely.

Niclas Förster characterises the *apolytrosis* as a logical conclusion to the Marcosian marriage ritual mentioned by Irenaeus. While the basis of Förster's analysis of the marriage ritual is beyond this dissertation's scope, his analysis and characterisation of the *apolytrosis* ritual is nonetheless helpful. According to Förster, the *apolytrosis* formula consisted of an 'invocation that was supposed to ensure the salvation of the Gnostic when, in the moment immediately following his death, he was judged by the Demiurge'.³² Förster explains that the formula essentially served as a 'password for escaping this judgement after death' and ultimately

²⁹ Lewis, 'Apolytrosis as Ritual and Sacrament', p. 537.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 537.

³¹ Ibid, p. 537.

³² Förster, 'Marcosian Rituals for Prophecy and Apolytrosis', p. 440.

escaping the sphere of the Demiurge³³ but also notes that a certain magical protection takes place upon invocation of the formula, with Sophia using ‘the Homeric hat of Hades for making the wearer invisible’.³⁴ In citing Hippolytus, Förster also mentions that ‘Gnostic’ rituals were heavily controlled by the bishop, who revealed the *apolytrosis* formula only as the Marcosian initiate was dying, with the bishop ‘[putting] his hands on [the initiate’s] head and [whispering] the formula of Apolytrosis into their ears’.³⁵ Förster’s analysis and exegesis of primary sources does several things for a detailed description of the *apolytrosis*. Namely, he establishes that one of the central aspects of the ritual involved an invocation or password and that the ritual imparted magic protection in the afterlife; he also establishes that, at least by the time of Hippolytus of Rome some decades after Irenaeus, the Marcosian rituals were heavily regulated by Gnostic bishops.

Stephen Young, for his part, examines the relationship between the *apolytrosis* of the Marcosians and the Orphics’ Bacchic Gold Tablets. There are clear similarities present, as Young examines the two underlying mythologies through the lens of comparative literature and religion. Some tablets contain instructions for the dying or deceased individual on how to navigate the afterlife,³⁶ which is certainly reminiscent of the Marcosian instructions and sayings that both Irenaeus and Hippolytus write about. Further bolstering Young’s argument is the fact that the two traditions are relatively close temporally, with the Bacchic Gold Tablets dating ‘from the fourth century B.C.E. through the first century C.E.’ and with some geographic overlap between locations in which tablets have been found and the Marcosians’ alleged sphere of

³³ Förster, ‘Marcosian Rituals for Prophecy and Apolytrosis’, p. 440.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 442.

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 442-443

³⁶ Young, ‘The Marcosian Redemption’, pp. 85-86.

influence.³⁷ Young convincingly displays the similarities between the two movements' mythos, explaining that both traditions feature post-mortem antagonists aiming to hinder the deceased's goals,³⁸ and the necessity of a declaration in order to hinder said agents³⁹ which in both traditions is generally a declaration of the soul's divine origins.⁴⁰ While Young never claims to demonstrate a definitive genealogical link between the Orphics and the Marcosians, he nonetheless convincingly argues that both groups were influenced by similar ideas be it a result of a shared cultural milieu or direct inheritance. Young's work is perhaps the most convincing argument made in favour of a syncretic origin of the *apolytrosis*, although it is not definitive that this ritual is not merely a result of Christian tradition and exegetical work. Indeed, Lewis maintains that in spite of similarities with Greek mystery religions, the *apolytrosis* is overwhelmingly and primarily a result of 'Valentinian exegeses of Christian scriptures'.⁴¹ Her conclusion is bolstered by two key pieces of evidence: that Irenaeus makes note of the Marcosians citing gospel passages, and that there seem to be certain common themes present in the *apolytrosis* mythos which draw heavily on the Pauline epistles.⁴²

³⁷ Young, 'The Marcosian Redemption', p. 85.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 94.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 95.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 96.

⁴¹ Lewis, 'Apolytrosis as Ritual and Sacrament', p. 557.

⁴² Ibid, pp. 557-558.

Existing Methodology for Comparing the *Apolytrosis*

Several scholars have made concerted efforts to explore the Marcosians and the *apolytrosis* via a comparative method. While Lewis offers the most comprehensive overview of the ritual itself, her comparative methodology is perhaps the least developed. By contrast, Stephen Young seems somewhat more cognizant of the potential issues that can present themselves in a comparative study, noting that his goal in comparing the Bacchic Gold Tablets and the *apolytrosis* is explicitly to ‘go beyond simply cataloguing “parallels” or potential “influences”’ and instead explore how the two similar data sets can help ‘identify a genre or type of ancient Mediterranean religious activity’.⁴³ Young’s explicit distancing from the so-called cataloguing method of comparison has echoes in earlier scholarship, such as the questioning of comparison as a methodology altogether by Michael Stausberg⁴⁴ who echoes Jonathan Z. Smith’s own concerns with the methodology and its early practice.⁴⁵ Still, despite Young’s concerns, he nonetheless diligently employs the comparative method, with his comparative methodology somewhat more refined and analytical than that of Lewis. With that said, one of the most useful theories or methodologies that Lewis draws on to examine the *apolytrosis*, the *viaticum* and extreme unction, even if not in a comprehensive comparative study, is her application of Arnold Van Gennep’s concepts of rites of inclusion and rites of exclusion in *Rites of Passage*⁴⁶ to these respective rituals. This theory is central to her work, and does much to provide a theoretical lens under which the *apolytrosis* and *consolamentum* can be examined.

⁴³ Young, ‘The Marcosian Redemption’, p. 80.

⁴⁴ Michael Stausberg, ‘Comparison’ in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* ed. by Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 21-39.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith, ‘Prologue: In Comparison a Magic Dwells’, in *A Magic Still Dwells*, ed. by Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 23-44 (p. 27) <DOI: 10.2307/j.ctv11hpsn2.6>.

⁴⁶ Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffé (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1960).

Of the scholars interested in the comparative study of the Marcosians, Iricinschi's methodology is the most well-defined. He notes that his methods are rooted in Burton L. Mack's elaboration on Jonathan Z. Smith's 'instructions for the four-step methodological recalibration of comparison in the history of religions'.⁴⁷ While the focus of Iricinschi's own study does not necessarily pertain to the *apolytrosis*, his study and description of comparative methodology nonetheless function as a benchmark by which both Lewis and Young can be compared against. Both Young and Lewis make comparisons, which according to Iricinschi's method should have 'a declared focus on differences between the two items, rather than apparent similarities'.⁴⁸ Indeed, Lewis concludes the Catholic and Marcosian rites are *too* different to be related; meanwhile, while Young explores similarities between the Bacchic Gold Tablets and the *apolytrosis*, he notes that his goal is not to catalogue similarities but rather to redefine genre, that is to demonstrate that Marcosian ritual practice was 'embodied within a wide Greco-Roman genre of religiosity' which 'enables us to focus on the social conditions within which the Marcosian redemption was recognisable or compelling'.⁴⁹ Clearly neither of these scholars embody the cataloguing of parallels which worried Young. A comparison done correctly, argues Iricinschi, allows a redescription of the comparanda,⁵⁰ in this case the *apolytrosis* and similar or related rituals. Both Young and Lewis embody this redescription in their recontextualisation of the *apolytrosis* in light of data gathered from the comparison, and Young especially engages well with the Mack/Smith model's final step of rectifying categories, arguing for a unique category of mythmaking that would have been familiar to both Marcosian and Ophite alike. Iricinschi's more explicit description of methodology, especially in tandem with more recent scholarship on the

⁴⁷ Iricinschi, 'How Gullible Were the Women of Late Antique Rhone and Asia Minor?', p. 117.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 117.

⁴⁹ Young, 'The Marcosian Redemption', p. 102.

⁵⁰ Iricinschi, 'How Gullible Were the Women of Late Antique Rhone and Asia Minor?', p. 117.

matter, will be integral to the comparative study of the *apolytrosis* with the *consolamentum*, and the use of the *apolytrosis* as comparanda by both Lewis and Young provides a robust framework by which a more rigorous study with comparative focus can be performed.

On the Origins of Cathar Dualism

Given that this dissertation aims to address the similarity of Cathar and Marcosian dualism, something must be said about the extensive scholarship already afforded to the link between medieval Cathars and other, more ancient, dualistic groups. As can be gleaned from commentaries by scholars such as Malcolm Barber, or W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans, writers in the Middle Ages were keen to describe so-called heresies as ‘Manichaeism’ in origin.⁵¹ Wakefield and Evans explain that the dualistic Manichaean movement became ‘the archetype of dualist heresy in Christian eyes’ likely aided by its extensive coverage and refutation in St. Augustine’s works, who himself had been a Manichaean in his youth.⁵² In spite of the likelihood of the Manichaean label being applied to medieval heresies such as Catharism as a result of the former’s notoriety,⁵³ many scholars take seriously the idea that the ultimate source of Catharism’s dualism lies in Manichaean origins. Wakefield and Evans explain that scholars such as Steven Runciman and Dimitry Obolensky find at least somewhat credible the idea that Manichaeism had at least some influence, albeit indirectly, on the Cathars.⁵⁴ Barber further relates that historians such as ‘Dmitri Obolensky, Steven Runciman, and Hans Söderberg and,

⁵¹ Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 29-30.

⁵² Wakefield, W. L., Evans, A. P., *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 11-12.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 21.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 16-17.

more recently and tentatively, Yuri Stoyanov [...] have been prepared to accept the essential continuity of dualism, tracing it from Gnosticism and Manichaeism to the Paulicians and thence to the Bogomils and the Cathars'.⁵⁵ While these scholars take seriously the plausible influence of Gnostic thought on the Cathars, it remains to be seen whether Manichaeism was a primary influence. As noted in the introduction, for the purposes of the *consolamentum*, the Manichaeans did practice deathbed rituals, although their resemblance to the *consolamentum* is minimal, with entirely disparate theological, mythical, and practical constructs.

More recent scholarship on the matter yields a wide array of beliefs, from the notion that Catharism had no Bogomil, Gnostic, or Manichaean origin and was not a coherent religion at all,⁵⁶ to the assertion that the heresy was a construct to teach theology,⁵⁷ to the more traditional assertion that Catharism was directly influenced by Bogomilism and its sacred texts.⁵⁸ The notion of Eastern influence via the Bogomils would lend credence to the notion of more ancient origins for some of Catharism's dualistic tendencies. With that said, there appears to be a contentious divide between deconstructivist scholars and scholars who approach the question of Catharism's origins more traditionally. Some deconstructivists such as R. I. Moore take a more moderate approach, rightly questioning the reliability of inquisitorial sources. For example, Moore notes that around 1191, 'laywomen in Flanders had been unjustly suspected and condemned as Cathars solely because they resisted clerical attempts on their chastity'.⁵⁹ In this anecdote, Moore presents a problem in trusting polemics against the Cathars outright; that the

⁵⁵ Barber, *The Cathars*, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Mark Gregory Pegg, 'The Paradigm of Catharism; or, the Historians' Illusion' in *Cathars in Question* (York: York Medieval Press, 2016) ed. by Antonio Sennis pp. 21-52 (pp. 21-23).

⁵⁷ Piotr Czarnecki, 'Eastern Elements in Cathar Doctrines – an Argument for the Traditional Interpretation of Catharism', *Studia Ceranea*, 14.14 (2024), pp. 21-47 (p. 24).

⁵⁸ Piotr Czarnecki, 'The Cathar Myth of the Fall. A Late Invention of Independent Heretical Exegesis?', *Studia Religiologica*, 51.1 (2018), pp. 47–65 (pp. 48-54) <DOI: 10.4467/20844077SR.18.004.9493>.

⁵⁹ R. I. Moore, *The War on Heresy*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 5.

authors of such polemics may have had ulterior motives should surely be considered. Furthermore, Moore presents valid rhetorical questions, asking what caused the sudden expansion of persecuting heretics in the twelfth century; was it a confrontation ‘between religious fundamentalists, fanatics or idealists [...] or did it in some way arise from or embody broader political, social or cultural issues?’⁶⁰ The true answer likely encompasses all these facets of the question, for nothing truly exists in a vacuum devoid of connection to other aspects of society. It is likely that people were falsely accused of heresy, and even of Catharism, as a convenient tool to be exploited by those with nefarious intentions. Still, the approach more radical scholars such as Mark Gregory Pegg have taken seemingly ignores swathes of evidence altogether. Pegg’s assertion that Catharism was a scholarly invention rather than a religious movement⁶¹ seems to lack rigor in light of his own evidence. In fact, Czarnecki’s analysis of the same inquisitorial records reveals an opposing conclusion. While Pegg claims that the records demonstrate there was no dualism and that this was imposed by the inquisitors themselves, Czarnecki argues that the wide range of beliefs recorded by the inquisitors, including beliefs that do not align with known Cathar doctrines, demonstrates precisely that inquisitors did not impose a fabricated dualistic framework on their opponents.⁶² Despite there being a relative lack of recorded dualistic beliefs, Czarnecki notes that this is in keeping with the fact that most of those interviewed by inquisitors were simple followers, or *credentes*, who did not have the fullness of the Cathar teachings; the *perfecti* who had undergone the *consolamentum* had made clear that ‘the simple faithful were not members of their church’ and were forbidden from the Lord’s

⁶⁰ R. I. Moore, *The War on Heresy*, p. 9.

⁶¹ Pegg, ‘The Paradigm of Catharism’, p. 21.

⁶² Piotr Czarnecki, ‘A New Paradigm: “The Middle Ages without Catharism” and the Testimony of Inquisitorial Sources’, *Perspektywy Kultury*, 31.4 (2020), pp. 89-108 <DOI: 10.35765/pk.2020.3104.08>.

Prayer and from detailed knowledge on their doctrines.⁶³ With that said, there are inquisitor accounts of *perfecti* that demonstrate the Cathar dualism that Pegg opposes. Therefore, as can be seen, to claim that Cathars did not embrace dualism, or to say that Catharism is a fabrication, would be to espouse a similar view as the few scholars who discount the works of Irenaeus on early heresies. Czarnecki even demonstrates that in certain inquisitorial sources such as the interrogations conducted by Bernard Gui, ‘the Cathar testimonies overlap with the accounts’ of Catholic polemicists who, much like Irenaeus with the Marcosians, ‘acquired their knowledge of the heretical doctrine during disputes’ with their respective heretics.⁶⁴

Crucially, one of Pegg’s disagreements with ‘so many modern scholars’ is their insistence on the use of “‘Catharism as a descriptor, even when they know that very few heretics were called “Cathars” in the Middle Ages’, going on to call the term ‘a misnomer from the nineteenth century’.⁶⁵ Jean-Louis Biget echoes Pegg, arguing that the term ‘Cathar’ and ‘Catharism’ has been generically applied to the bulk of church dissidents from the tenth to fourteenth centuries, especially in the Languedoc region.⁶⁶ Pegg’s supporting argument is that ‘no one accused of heresy or identifying as a heretic in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries [... in] the supposed heartland of Catharism, was ever called by the name or adopted it for themselves’.⁶⁷ Pegg’s argument appears to be against an assertion which no scholars are making. The historical evidence plainly demonstrates that ‘Cathar’ was not a term used by those who were so-called. Rather, as can be seen from primary sources written by those we call Cathar such as *The Ritual*, adherents of this particular dualistic theology referred to themselves as ‘good

⁶³ Czarnecki, ‘A New Paradigm’, p. 103.

⁶⁴ Czarnecki, ‘A New Paradigm’, p. 97.

⁶⁵ Pegg, ‘The Paradigm of Catharism’, p. 28.

⁶⁶ Jean-Louis Biget, ‘Réflexions sur «l’hérésie» dans le Midi de la France au Moyen Âge’, *Heresis : revue d’hérésiologie médiévale*, 36-37 (2002), pp. 29-74 (p. 42).

⁶⁷ Pegg, ‘The Paradigm of Catharism’, pp. 28-29.

Christians'.⁶⁸ This is corroborated by Barber, who notes that 'the Paulicians, the Bogomils, and the Cathars all saw themselves as "good Christians"'.⁶⁹ While the autonym of 'good Christian' certainly proves less likely the notion that the Cathars were related to Manichaeans, something that Jean Duvernoy noted back in 1976,⁷⁰ it does not prove *useless* the title of 'Cathar'. While this was a title applied by their detractors, it is nonetheless evident that there existed a religious movement with dualistic theology in medieval France and Italy, with obvious influences from the Bogomils. What one chooses to call this group is irrelevant, as long as there is agreement on what the term defines. Scholars such as Czarnecki would seem to agree, arguing that the radically deconstructivist views championed by Pegg and others is not based on exegesis of our primary sources, but rather a questioning of the sources altogether.⁷¹ Czarnecki's scholarship on Catharism's Eastern origins represents some of the most convincing arguments in recent scholarship to take seriously the Bogomil and Paulician influence on Catharism. While Biget argues that the tenth century Balkans and twelfth century Languedoc are simply different times and places and should be treated as such,⁷² Scholars such as Diarmaid MacCulloch⁷³ and Czarnecki refute this notion, demonstrating that there were 'intense contacts' between adherents of Paulicianism, Bogomilism, and Catharism, highlighting that these dualistic ideas did not develop in a socio-cultural vacuum.⁷⁴ This is, of course, in addition to the evidence from primary documents that firmly demonstrate shared mythical and structural features of the three groups,

⁶⁸ *Catharist Rituals (Part A)* translated by W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 474.

⁶⁹ Barber, p. 12.

⁷⁰ Jean Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme: La Religion des Cathares* (privat, 1976), p. 27.

⁷¹ Czarnecki, 'The Cathar Myth of the Fall', pp. 47-49.

⁷² Biget, 'Réflexions', p. 32.

⁷³ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, (New York: Viking, 2010), pp. 387-388.

⁷⁴ Czarnecki, 'Eastern Elements in Cathar Doctrines', p. 25.

especially as it relates to their reception of sacred texts.^{75,76} Deconstructivists such as Pegg seem to be unaware of extant primary sources penned by the Cathars demonstrating their dualism. Instead, they focus on inquisitor documents and rightly question their reliability, yet uncritically apply their doubt to the Cathar movement as a whole. The very high probability of Catharism's Eastern influence via Paulicianism and Bogomilism establishes the plausibility that the *consolamentum* and its peri-mortem administration has mythological, theological, and practical origins that predate the Cathar movement and possibly extend into antiquity.

***Consolamentum* as Ritual**

Duvernoy notes that the imposition of hands as seen in the *consolamentum* can be seen amongst the 'Manichaeans of Orléans' in 1022, demonstrating that the core practices of the *consolamentum* ritual, even in western Europe, predate any unified Cathar church.⁷⁷ Malcolm Lambert explicitly links Cathar ritual practice to their Bogomil predecessors, noting that entry to the Cathar status of *perfecti* was 'conferred by the ceremony known as the *consolamentum*, which derived from the rite whereby the Bogomils admitted their adepts'.⁷⁸ Ylva Hagman provides in depth evidence for this practice, dividing the Bogomil rite into two distinct rituals, Initiation I and Initiation II. The first initiation involves baptism of the Holy Spirit while the second initiation is the 'perfection' by which hands are placed on a Bogomil initiate.⁷⁹ Hagman's

⁷⁵ Piotr Czarnecki, "'Time-Focused Dualism'"—An Argument for the Eastern Origins of Catharism', *The Catholic historical review*, 107.4 (2021), pp. 482-502.

⁷⁶ Czarnecki, 'The Cathar Myth of the Fall'.

⁷⁷ Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme*, p. 151.

⁷⁸ Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p. 116.

⁷⁹ Ylva Hagman, 'Le rite d'initiation chrétienne chez les Cathares et les Bogomiles', *Hérésis* 20 (1993), pp. 13-31 (p. 27).

position echoes Lambert, explaining that the aforementioned rites are the means by which ordination is conferred on both the Bogomil and Cathar initiate, and explaining that both rituals include the frequent recitation of the ‘Our Father’ prayer which was reserved for initiated members.⁸⁰ Hagman concludes that the two Initiations of the Bogomils were ultimately consolidated in the *consolamentum* ritual of the Cathars.⁸¹ Bernard Hamilton agrees, arguing that ‘all Cathars used a form of the same Ritual, which would seem to have come from the Balkans’ and further posits that there are no serious differences between the rituals of the Bogomils and the Cathars.⁸² Yuri Stoyanov concurs with the Bogomil origin of the Cathar ritual, providing convincing theories on the transmission of Bogomil ideas to the west, namely via travelling monks, crusaders, trade routes, and the acquisition of Byzantine colonies in Italy.⁸³ All of these are plausible, and the path of transmission likely took several, if not all, of these paths.

Further evidencing the Bogomil influence of Catharism and its central ritual, Roelof van Den Broek notes that ‘Cathars have always been conscious of their eastern roots’ with their claims of religious brethren in Greece and other lands.⁸⁴ Hamilton echoes this point, noting that ‘no reputable scholar now doubts that Catharism was an offshoot of medieval eastern dualism, though it was clearly not a simple transplant but developed its own distinctive form’.⁸⁵ Of the Bogomil ritual which evidently inspired the *consolamentum*, Milan Loos notes that an initiate went through a period of strict asceticism prior to an ‘exorcism and the symbolical washing away

⁸⁰ Hagman, ‘Le rite d’initiation’, pp. 13-27.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 29.

⁸² Bernard Hamilton, *Crusaders, Cathars and the Holy Places*, e-book (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), p. XIII_46-XIII_48.

⁸³ Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 185-189.

⁸⁴ Roelof van Den Broek, ‘The Cathars: Medieval Gnostics?’ in *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 157-177.

⁸⁵ Hamilton, *Crusaders, Cathars and the Holy Places*, p. XIII_38.

of all trace of church baptism'.⁸⁶ This was followed by the Gospels being laid on the initiate's head and, Loos assumes, the laying-on of hands.⁸⁷ Again, these details clearly mirror those of the *consolamentum* known from primary sources. Loos notes of the Bogomil ritual that 'there are remarkable parallels to it in ancient Christian baptismal ritual' as well as in monastic vows⁸⁸ which certainly suggests that the origins of the *consolamentum* predate the Cathars by several centuries. Van Den Broek explicitly links the Bogomil text which Cathars had called the *Interrogatio Iohannis* and the ancient second century *Apocryphon* of John, noting that the similarities of the Demiurgic myth are so blatant that 'we have to conclude that at this point the *Interrogatio* transmits a genuine gnostic tradition which was already in circulation in the second century'.⁸⁹ While van Den Broek traces Gnostic ideas directly to the Cathars, he notes that a significant difference lies in how knowledge is treated. In ancient Gnosticism, secret knowledge imparted salvation whereas in Catharism, the *consolamentum* was the only method by which salvation can be achieved. Van Den Broek does note that 'sacraments were known in several gnostic sects, for instance the *apolytroisis* in Valentinianism which was administered shortly before death, but the gnostics never declared the reception of such a sacrament to be indispensable for salvation'.⁹⁰ While van Den Broek explicitly names the *apolytroisis*, he does little else to draw a link between it and the *consolamentum*, only noting that both are rituals performed by groups that he reasonably calls 'Gnostic' in that they are dualistic with myths of an evil Demiurge.

As can be surmised, the ritual elements of the *consolamentum* predate the Cathars

⁸⁶ Milan Loos, *Dualist Heresy in the Middle Ages*, (Prague: Springer, 1974), p. 70.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 70.

⁸⁸ Ibid, pp. 70-71.

⁸⁹ van Den Broek, 'The Cathars: Medieval Gnostics?', p. 165.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 169.

themselves. A more explicit link with ancient Gnostic groups has yet to be established, with van Den Broek's passing reference to the *apolytrois* representing the only serious attempt to link the two. With that said, the establishment of the *consolamentum*'s Bogomil origins does much to establish the plausibility of more ancient origins of the ritual, given the Bogomils' own proposed influences by other groups. The lack of scholarly inquiry into whether a link exists between ritual elements of ancient Gnosticism and of Catharism presents precisely the gap that this dissertation aims to fill. While the *consolamentum* is indeed a salvific ritual, its theology, function, and purpose extend far beyond this. For example, Loos elaborates somewhat on the theological underpinnings of the *consolamentum*, noting that this ritual was the occasion at which one's spirit 'descended to our regions and searched for *its* own soul'.⁹¹ This is to say, that the Holy Spirit to the Cathars was not 'the third Person of the Trinity' but rather was each respective Cathar's heavenly counterpart which was 'consummated' with the soul 'at the moment of the laying on of hands'.⁹² The salvific mechanism of this ritual allowed the soul, once separated from the deceased body, to await 'the hour when it will return to the kingdom of the Father of the Just'.⁹³ It is precisely this dissertation's goal to demonstrate that the *apolytrois* for the Marcosians had the same ritual function and theological underpinnings as the *consolamentum* for the Cathars.

⁹¹ Loos, *Dualist Heresy in the Middle Ages*, p. 286.

⁹² Ibid, p. 140.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 141.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Because this dissertation's primary goal is a comparative study of the Marcosian *apolytrois* and Cathar *consolamentum*, a comprehensive method of comparison must be established. Even those scholars wary of comparison such as Young find utility in its proper implementation. Of primary concern is avoiding the mere 'cataloguing' of comparanda, which is what necessitates a proper description of a truly rigorous comparative method.

The Mack/Smith model has been discussed in terms of Iricinschi's analysis, however its usage in comparative religion has been most extensively described and advocated for by Oliver Freiberger⁹⁴ who will inform much of the present comparison's design. First, a justification is in order as to why comparison is a salient method to advocate for a possible genetic link between the *apolytrois* and *consolamentum*. The reality is that there exists only a limited subset of historical data from which we can strive to answer historical questions such as 'were the Cathars influenced by ancient Gnostics?' Because no such direct evidence exists, such a question must inherently be approached using various frameworks and methodologies. In the case of the present study, the *apolytrois* certainly bears striking similarities to the *consolamentum*, but to qualify the depth of these similarities, a comprehensive comparison must be performed. While such a comparison cannot definitively answer the question of whether the *consolamentum* was a direct continuation of the *apolytrois*, it can nonetheless support, or refute, the plausibility that various Marcosian ideas about *apolytrois* and theology more broadly may have survived in the Bogomils and Cathars.

Freiberger's expanded Mack/Smith comparative process involves five distinct steps,

⁹⁴ Oliver Freiberger, 'Elements of a Comparative Methodology in the Study of Religion', *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)*, 9.2 (2018), pp. 38-51 <DOI: 10.3390/rel9020038>.

which need not necessarily be followed in order. These are: ‘selection; description; juxtaposition; redescription; rectification and theory formation’.⁹⁵ In regards to selection, Freiburger notes that the comparands chosen for a particular study are often found ‘in a complex relationship’ which ‘presupposes a prior act of comparison in which a productive comparability of the two was established’.⁹⁶ This is an astute observation, as the Cathars themselves and various so-called Gnostic groups have been compared many times before with the intent of establishing a link, with the present study focused on ritual being only the most recent example of this centuries-long comparison of the Cathars to their supposed ancient forebears. The selection is also the part of this process which has already taken place, with the comparands being the *apolytrosis* and *consolamentum*. The following step, description, involves locating ‘a given example within the rich texture of its social, historical, and cultural environments that invest it with its local significance’.⁹⁷ This process must produce ‘a comprehensive and rich description that takes the [comparands’] historical-empirical context into consideration’.⁹⁸ For the present study, this will encompass a detailed examination of either ritual, in a similar way that Lewis demonstrated with her already-rich examination of the *apolytrosis*. This will be done through primary sources detailing either ritual’s practice, such as Irenaeus for the *apolytrosis* or Sacconi for the *consolamentum*, as well as through more theological exegesis related to either rituals’ underlying mythology. This will include, to some extent, exegeting *The Vision of Isaiah* and the *Interrogatio Iohannis*, both being integral texts to the Cathars and providing invaluable frameworks for the Cathars’ understanding of *consolamentum*.

⁹⁵ Freiburger, ‘Elements of a Comparative Methodology in the Study of Religion’, p. 45.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 45.

⁹⁷ Jonathan Z. Smith, ‘The “End” of Comparison: Redescription and Rectification’ in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. by Kimberly C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 237–41 (p. 239).

⁹⁸ Freiburger, ‘Elements of a Comparative Methodology in the Study of Religion’, p. 46.

Following the judicious description of both rituals, which includes not only the practice but the underlying theology to each, a juxtaposition between the two can be undertaken. As Freiburger notes, ‘similarities and differences are equally important’ at this stage.⁹⁹ Indeed, the goal of this comparative analysis is, above all else, to ensure accurate portrayal of all comparands. Whether this measured approach lends more or less credence to the plausibility of Marcosian influence amongst the Cathars remains to be seen, but a fair comparison can be achieved by representing each ritual in empiric terms using evidence from primary sources; this necessarily encompasses evidence that may disrupt the present theory of *apolytrois* influence on the *consolamentum* which is, of course, always a possibility in empirical study which aims to minimise bias.

Following juxtaposition in Freiburger’s model is redescription which, in Freiburger’s terms, ‘is the act of describing a historical-empirical item once again in light of the insights gained from the juxtaposition with a different item’.¹⁰⁰ In this case, the careful comparison of *apolytrois* and *consolamentum* may very well illuminate new features of either or both. Mack notes that the insights gained from comparison ‘will change the way in which the examples under investigation are understood and thus require redescription’.¹⁰¹ This process of what Arvind Sharma calls reciprocal illumination¹⁰² facilitates not only the possibility of new insights in terms of similarity, but differences as well, essentially resulting in a description of either ritual which is perhaps more comprehensive or more defined.¹⁰³ In terms of this study, the application

⁹⁹ Freiburger, ‘Elements of a Comparative Methodology in the Study of Religion’, p. 47.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 47.

¹⁰¹ Burton L. Mack, ‘On Redescribing Christian Origins’, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 8 (1996), pp. 247-269 (p. 258).

¹⁰² Arvind Sharma, *Religious Studies and Comparative Methodology: The Case for Reciprocal Illumination*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

¹⁰³ Freiburger, ‘Elements of a Comparative Methodology in the Study of Religion’, p. 47.

of Lewis's work on the *apolytrois* as a rite of separation will likely uncover new insights about the *consolamentum*'s own possible function as such. Conversely, it may demonstrate that the *consolamentum* cannot rightly be called a rite of separation. Either way, the newfound insights will allow a more precise and more accurate description to be made of the *consolamentum* in light of van Gennep's theories.

The final step in Freiburger's model is rectification and theory formation. While redescription aims to redefine a particular historical-empirical item, rectification and theory formation refine metalinguistic categories and theories, or propose new ones altogether.¹⁰⁴ For the purposes of this study, for example, an illuminative comparison may change the way that rites of separation are conceptualised, may refine the category altogether, or may propose a new concept of ritual that better describes the *apolytrois* and *consolamentum* to the exclusion of other named rites.

¹⁰⁴ Freiburger, 'Elements of a Comparative Methodology in the Study of Religion', pp. 47-48.

Chapter 4: Discussion, Analysis, and Interpretation

Description of *Apolytrosis* as Ritual Using Primary Sources

In order to formulate proper descriptions of the comparands, the primary sources for the *apolytrosis* and *consolamentum* must be consulted. In the case of the *apolytrosis*, its ritual practice has been explored in the primary accounts of both Irenaeus and Hippolytus, who were both contemporaries of Marcosians and ostensibly knew their practitioners. Their writings are therefore invaluable for an extensive and accurate description of the *apolytrosis*.

Irenaeus's first explicit mention of *apolytrosis* comes in paragraph 6 of chapter 13 of Book I of *Against Heresies*. In it, Irenaeus notes that followers of Mark the Magician call themselves “‘perfect’” while ‘seducing and corrupting many women’, ostensibly able to act on such fleshly and salacious urges because of “‘redemption’” which makes them ‘incomprehensible and invisible to the Judge’.¹⁰⁵ Continuing, Irenaeus notes that ‘if anyone should arrest them, they stand before him, protected by “redemption”’ and Irenaeus goes on to recite an alleged formula by which ‘the Mother’, hearing the reciter’s words, covers them with ‘the Homeric cap of Hades’ which renders the ‘redeemed’ invisible to the Demiurge who created the material realm.¹⁰⁶ There was some debate in early scholarship as to whether the redemption spoken of here, literally ἀπολύτρωσις (*apolytrosis* in Greek), was the same ritual mentioned later in Irenaeus,¹⁰⁷ but modern scholars such as Young¹⁰⁸ and Förster¹⁰⁹ are in agreement that the ritual alluded to in *AH* 1.13.6 is the same as the one found later in 1.21. Based on this excerpt,

¹⁰⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.13.6 in Grant, p. 58.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 58.

¹⁰⁷ Alexander Roberts and W. H. Rambaut, *The Writings of Irenaeus*, Vol. I. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), p. 55’s footnotes briefly discuss John Ernest Grabe’s theory that this redemption was employed as an imprecatory formula among the Marcosians.

¹⁰⁸ Young, ‘The Marcosian Redemption’, p. 82.

¹⁰⁹ Förster, ‘Marcosian Rituals for Prophecy and Apolytrosis’, p. 441.

several things are apparent about the *apolytrosis* and its practitioners. First, while Irenaeus's polemical attacks should not be taken to be wholly correct, he claims that Marcosian practitioners of *apolytrosis* engage in salacious behaviour, including seducing women. While it is possible this is polemical slander, the possibility that these 'perfect' and 'redeemed' Marcosians practiced seduction and corruption should not be completely ignored. Irenaeus notes the redeemed Marcosians view their knowledge as exceeding that of 'Paul or Peter or some other apostles' and that 'they can do everything freely without any fear'.¹¹⁰ The implication of the passage seems to be that the 'redeemed', those that have partaken of the *apolytrosis*, are free to commit at least some of what Irenaeus would view as sexual sin. Whether or not Irenaeus's framing of the Marcosians' behaviour is true remains unclear, but there is an implied perception that the redeemed Marcosians sin freely because the *apolytrosis* grants them the ability to. Additionally evident is that the redeemed possess the knowledge of certain utterances that seemingly give them protection in the afterlife, rendering them aid from 'the Mother', likely Sophia, in the form of invisibility to the Demiurge who would otherwise be capable of judging them. To this point the ritual is not exclusively linked with death, dying, or the afterlife, but it is clear just from this passage that those who have undergone the ritual possess knowledge which grants them the ability to obtain protection in the afterlife and to ascend past the realm of the Demiurge.

The next mention of redemption or *apolytrosis* in Irenaeus comes in chapter 21. Here, Irenaeus demonstrates the breadth of *apolytrosis* practice, with several different iterations presented. The first description frames *apolytrosis* as a baptism in which initiates are led to water.¹¹¹ Immediately prior in the same paragraph Irenaeus writes of the bridal chamber ritual,

¹¹⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.13.6 in Grant, p. 58.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 1.21.3 in Grant, p. 65.

which may have been linked to *apolytrois*, or may have been part of the same ritual.¹¹² Irenaeus describes several other instances of incantation and responses by initiators and initiates respectively, all in the context of the baptism in water. In at least one of these practices, the initiates are anointed with balsam at the close of the ritual.¹¹³ Irenaeus then outlines several more camps of thought in Marcosianism. Some Marcosians ‘mix oil and water together [...] and pour it on the head of those being initiated, and this they claim as “redemption”’ while others ‘anoint with balsam’ and others still reject all rites as deriving from created things, instead favouring *apolytrois* simply by ‘the Gnosis of the inexpressible Greatness’ which ‘is the redemption of the inner man’.¹¹⁴

Like Irenaeus, Hippolytus of Rome characterises *apolytrois* as a baptism, although provides more details on the process of obtaining *apolytrois*. Hippolytus notes that after Marcosians receive a first baptism, the leaders of the sect ‘promise another, which they call Redemption’.¹¹⁵ While Hippolytus spends far less time than Irenaeus detailing the workings of the ritual, he nonetheless offers some insight, noting the following of the ritual and its administrators:

For they utter something in an inexpressible (tone of) voice, after having laid hands on him who is receiving the redemption. And they allege that they could not easily declare (to another) what is thus spoken unless one were

¹¹² Lewis, ‘Apolytrois’, pp. 548-557. Nicola Denzey Lewis’s analysis of the Gospel of Phillip provides more evidence on this, which is beyond the scope of this discussion.

¹¹³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.21.3 in Grant, p. 65.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 1.21.4 in Grant, p. 65.

¹¹⁵ Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutation of All Heresies*, Book VI, Chapter XXXVI, translated in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. ‘Vol. 5 The Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus; Cyprian; Caius; Novatian; Appendix’ (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1885), pp. 92-93.

highly tested, or one were at the hour of death, (when) the bishop comes and whispers into the (expiring one's) ear.¹¹⁶

Hippolytus's characterisation of uttering something in an inexpressible tone of voice is reminiscent of Irenaeus's note that some Marcosians utter phrases in Hebrew, which would have been incomprehensible to most initiates, who were presumably Hellenised. Supporting this interpretation is the notion that, apparently, the meaning of utterances is only revealed by the bishop at the hour of one's death. Perhaps the starkest difference that Hippolytus presents in his characterisation of *apolytroisis* is the notion that there is a laying-on of hands during the ritual, presumably by the initiators of the ritual on the initiates. Irenaeus does not allude to this practice, however that is not necessarily indicative of its absence amongst the rituals described by Irenaeus.

The presentation gleaned thus far by both Irenaeus and Hippolytus is that of a diverse set of practices that reflect a broad range of Marcosian belief, at least as it pertains to what constitutes the correct practise of *apolytroisis*. With that said, there are clearly underlying themes present in all these ritual iterations thus far. Except for the Marcosians who view Gnosis itself as *apolytroisis*, who arguably do not undergo any clearly defined ritual, all iterations have one or more administrators of ritual and one or more initiates. Likewise, all iterations of the ritual have specific formulae which must be uttered. Perhaps most obviously, the theme of redemption, the English translation of the Greek *apolytroisis*, is present throughout. What this means to various practitioners of *apolytroisis* will become clearer with Irenaeus's subsequent paragraph.

¹¹⁶ Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutation of All Heresies*, translated in Roberts and Donaldson, p. 93.

Description of Deathbed *Apolytrosis* Using Irenaeus

Having established some basic principles of *apolytrosis* practice across several contexts, its use as a deathbed ritual can be described in more detail. Irenaeus explains the following of Marcosians who practice deathbed *apolytrosis*:

There are others who redeem the dead at their last moment, pouring oil and water on their heads, or the aforesaid ointment with water and the aforesaid invocations, so that they may become incomprehensible and invisible to the Archons and Powers and their inner man may ascend above the invisible regions, abandoning the body to the created universe and leaving the soul with the Demiurge.¹¹⁷

Irenaeus goes on to explain that initiates are taught an invocation to evade the ‘Powers’, by insisting that they are from the Father and are returning to the Father.¹¹⁸ Upon evading the Powers, the deceased initiate will encounter ‘those about the Demiurge’ and utter another invocation, declaring that they belong to the Mother (Sophia) who is supposed to be the mother of the Demiurge’s own mother (Achamoth).¹¹⁹ Upon this invocation, Irenaeus notes the Demiurge’s angels will be troubled and the initiate ‘will go toward his own places, rejecting his bond, that is his soul’.¹²⁰

Despite comprising only a single paragraph in Irenaeus’s treatise, his description of deathbed *apolytrosis* nonetheless contains a wealth of information to facilitate a proper

¹¹⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.21.5 in Grant, pp. 65-66.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 66.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 66.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 66.

description of the same. Of deathbed *apolytrosis*, there seems to be variation as to the precise practice. For example, the concoction poured on the dying initiate's head seems to vary between oil and water, or an ointment with water. Irenaeus also mentions 'the aforesaid invocations'¹²¹ which seems to suggest that the dying Marcosian and their respective ritual facilitator may have chosen any one of the invocations Irenaeus lists previously. That this ritual specifically makes invisible the 'inner man' so that it can ascend past the Archons and Powers certainly hearkens back to Irenaeus's notes in 1.13.6. Of specific interest is the notion that the initiate leaves 'the body to the created universe' and 'the soul with the Demiurge'.¹²² Lewis provides a useful framework for conceptualising the Marcosian view of body, soul, and spirit. Lewis explains that, for a Marcosian, they would be free from the material world upon death, leaving what she terms a spirit-soul aggregate.¹²³ This spirit-soul aggregate would ascend the cosmic realms to encounter the Demiurge and Achamoth at which point the soul is left 'in Achamoth's realm, the place of its origins, while the spirit continued upward toward its source where it would finally enter the Pleroma at the Eschaton'.¹²⁴

As Lewis points out, the *apolytrosis* 'incorporates clear elements of separation, marginality, and aggregation' which 'marks a symbolic transition' of the material body 'from person to corpse'.¹²⁵ The deathbed ritual 'functioned to aid in the individual's separation and transition from earthly existence'.¹²⁶ Lewis's dichotomy between inclusionary Catholic rites and separatory Marcosian rites is well-founded; however, when harmonising Irenaeus's accounts of *apolytrosis*, it is clear that it functioned as more than a rite of separation. Irenaeus notes in 1.13.6

¹²¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.21.5 in Grant, pp. 65-66.

¹²² Ibid, p. 66.

¹²³ Lewis, 'Apolytrosis', pp. 535-536.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 536.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 537.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 540.

that those who have been redeemed call themselves perfect. Furthermore, Irenaeus writes of some initiates being led to water in 1.21.3, which would certainly be implausible if said individuals were actively dying. Therefore the *apolytrosis* must not be characterised *only* as a rite of separation, but as both an inclusionary and mystery rite in which adherents are revealed more information as they progress through purification and inclusion into the Marcosian community.¹²⁷ All this is not to downplay the stark differences between orthodox and Marcosian Christian rites, but rather to characterise the ritual as more nuanced and complex than merely a death rite.

Having examined Irenaeus and Hippolytus, the deathbed *apolytrosis* can be characterised as follows. The ritual incorporates elements of inclusion, mystery, separation, aggregation and marginality. The ritual mechanism varies, but common to all iterations is the acceptance of one's heavenly origins from the ineffable Father and Sophia rather than the misguided Achamoth or Demiurge. An acknowledgement of the complex Marcosian cosmology, the origin of the spirit from the Father, the soul from Achamoth, and the body from the Demiurge, is all intrinsic to *apolytrosis*, even amongst those who hold that only Gnosis is required to undergo *apolytrosis*. Inherent in those who undergo *apolytrosis* is the rejection of the material, as well as the standard Christian cosmology, and the belief in Jesus as a messenger not from the creator of the earthly realm, but from the distant Father of the Pleroma. Furthermore, the purpose of the ritual, at least upon one's death, is to separate the spirit-soul aggregate from the material body, and further separate the spirit from the soul, evading agents of the Demiurge and Achamoth in order to return to one's heavenly point of origin.

Also inherent to the *apolytrosis* is its function as apotropaic protector for the 'redeemed'

¹²⁷ van Gennepe, 'Rites', p. 89.

Marcosian, both from Demiurgic agents in the afterlife, as well as any ‘judgement’ they may incur for sins of flesh, if Irenaeus’s polemic characterisation of them as ‘seducers’¹²⁸ is to be believed. While Irenaeus’s attacks should be scrutinised, a clear sense of underlying absolution can be gathered, although the specific mechanism of this absolution and whether it permits sins of the flesh following *apolytrosis* is unclear. The ritual was administered by an initiated class of Marcosian, who are called bishops by Hippolytus. Finally, the ritual, when administered on one’s deathbed, seems to incorporate a reciprocal incantation by both the bishop and the initiate, aspects of anointing or baptism, and by Hippolytus’s time, the imposition of hands on the initiate by the bishop.

Description of *Consolamentum* as Ritual Using Primary Sources

Reconstructing the *consolamentum* differs from the *apolytrosis* in that its description can be informed not only by polemicists, which undoubtedly are invaluable, but also by two copies of instructions on the administration of the *consolamentum*, one in Latin and one in Provençal. Wakefield and Evans note that the Latin text was likely ‘composed in the second quarter of the thirteenth century in Italy’ using a document composed in Provençal, judging by the Latin’s style.¹²⁹ The extant Provençal text, meanwhile, was found in a manuscript of the Bible composed perhaps as late as 1280 in France, although Wakefield and Evans note that the structure of this ritual may more closely mirror early practices than does the earlier Latin text.¹³⁰ Unlike with Irenaeus and Hippolytus, who had rhetorical goals, these texts, noted as *Ritual A* for the Latin

¹²⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.13.6 in Grant, p. 58.

¹²⁹ Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, pp. 465-466.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 466.

and *Ritual B* for the Provençal, present the rituals in the way that they were supposed to be performed without negative bias. The ritual practice, as well as its underlying theology, can be further explored using not only these two ritual texts, but also more theological texts the Cathars are known to have used and inherited from the Bogomils; these texts, *The Vision of Isaiah* which was composed in the first or second century CE, and the *Interrogatio Iohannis*, briefly mentioned earlier, provide insight into the dualistic framework and worldview with which the Cathars understood the *consolamentum*. Therefore, an understanding of these texts will enable a deeper understanding of the form and function of the *consolamentum* and its underlying logic.

Consolamentum in Practice

Both Latin and Provençal rituals detail events leading up to administering the *consolamentum*. In the Latin (*Ritual A*), the ministrant instructs those present on the Lord's Prayer, which was an integral part of Cathar ritual life, and explains its significance. In the explanation of the prayer, several things become apparent. The text explicitly describes the phrase 'Our Father' as an invocation, specifically the 'Father of those only who are to achieve salvation'.¹³¹ The text differentiates this Father from 'the father of the devil' who is the father of 'those who are utterly deprived of the mercy of salvation'.¹³² Already apparent is the dualist theology informing Cathar ritual. The juxtaposition of the good Father as the Father of the Cathars with the devil as the father of those who are not Cathars, frames the remainder of the prayer and its explanation. Another expanse of Cathar cosmology is made when *Ritual A*

¹³¹ *Catharist Rituals (Part A)* translated by W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 468-483 (pp. 468-469).

¹³² *Ibid*, p. 469.

expounds the ‘thy will’ portion of the prayer, ‘let Thy will be done in this people who cling to an earthly nature as it is done in the higher kingdom or in Christ’.¹³³ By contrasting the ‘earthly nature’ with the ‘higher kingdom’, the ritual once more affirms the dualist divide between what is created and what exists beyond the physical realm. The text explains that the ‘body’ and ‘blood’ of Christ are his spiritual commandments. Finally, at the close of the prayer, the ‘forever’ is noted to signify that the Father’s providence is over ‘divinely created beings’¹³⁴ in contrast to the material creations of the devil. This suggests that the Cathars believed themselves to be inherently divine beings, though subordinate to the Father. Following the explanation of the prayer, the prior asks the initiates whether they wish to proceed and has them recite the prayer after him, ‘word for word’ as well as performing the pardon.¹³⁵ *Ritual A* proceeds to detail the administration of the *consolamentum*. First, the believer is accompanied by an elder who makes ‘three obeisances before the prior’ and prays for the initiate, followed by the remainder of the present Cathars praying seven times, ‘asking that the prior be heard’.¹³⁶ The prior asks for mercy from the Father and the elder responds in affirmation, then the congregation makes three obeisances and asks for mercy, which is affirmed by the prior.¹³⁷ The prior arranges a table and the initiate takes the Book (the Gospels or New Testament) from the prior with three obeisances.¹³⁸ The prior then asks the initiate if it is their ‘will to receive the spiritual baptism of Jesus Christ and pardon for [their] sins, through the supplications of good Christians, together with the imposition of hands, and to keep this throughout [their] whole lifetime in chastity and in

¹³³ *Catharist Rituals (Part A)*, p. 469.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 472.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 473.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 473-474.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 474.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 474.

humility'.¹³⁹ The believer affirms, and the prior preaches a sermon, noting that the ritual in question is 'the spiritual baptism of Jesus Christ and the baptism of the Holy spirit' who will 'cleanse' the initiate.¹⁴⁰ Elaborating, the prior notes that Christ came 'to cleanse the filth of God's souls that have been soiled by contact with evil spirits'.¹⁴¹ The sermon details the Biblical basis for the imposition of hands and baptism of the Holy Spirit,¹⁴² framing the *consolamentum* as supplemental to orthodox baptism which is insufficient for salvation.¹⁴³ Finally, the *consolamentum* is administered where the believer 'places his hands on the table which stands before the prior' and the prior holds 'the Book upon the believer's head'.¹⁴⁴ Then, present *perfecti* place their right hand on the initiate and several invocations are made, including 'the Lord's Prayer five times', 'Let us adore the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' three times, followed by another Lord's Prayer and three more 'Let us adore' phrases.¹⁴⁵ The Gospel of John is read and the initiate three more times says 'Let us adore'.¹⁴⁶ Finally, the initiate kisses the Book and makes three obeisances.¹⁴⁷ *Ritual B* includes specific instructions on administering the *consolamentum* to one who is sick, including the actively dying. The process follows a similar logic to the *consolamentum* administration already discussed, with some accommodations made if the sick or dying initiate is unable to stand or endure a lengthy sermon.¹⁴⁸

¹³⁹ *Catharist Rituals (Part A)*, p. 474.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 475.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 475.

¹⁴² Ibid, pp. 475-478.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 480.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 481.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 481.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 481.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 482.

¹⁴⁸ *Catharist Rituals (Part B)* translated by W.L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 483-494 (pp. 492-493).

The Secret Supper (*Interrogatio Iohannis*)

Much of *Interrogatio Iohannis* is dedicated to a retelling of Genesis's creation account, with the Devil as creator. While largely focused on the creation of the world, the book helps to explain what Cathars view as their present state of affairs; that is, it explains how their angelic pre-incarnate souls became entrapped in corrupted fleshly bodies. In the account, Satan deceives one third of the angels, and is cast out of the heavens with those angels.¹⁴⁹ Satan then 'took his seat above the firmament' and 'raised two thirds of the waters high into the air', mirroring the separation of the waters in Genesis 1. Satan caused dry land to appear and from one of the angel's crowns made 'the light of the moon' and 'the light of day' and from 'precious stones he made fire, and from fire he made all the host of heaven and the stars'.¹⁵⁰ Satan then 'commanded the earth to bring forth all living things', including 'making man to serve him'.¹⁵¹ He accomplished the creation of man by forming a clay body and commanding 'an angel of the second heaven to enter the body of clay'.¹⁵² He then took part of this body and 'bade an angel of the first heaven to enter into it', which was the first woman.¹⁵³ Satan planted the paradise, that is Eden, and forbade humans eating the tree of knowledge of good and evil, yet tempted them to do so.¹⁵⁴ The author explicitly states that the Father made 'the virtues of heaven' by the Holy Spirit, but that He did not 'shape bodies of clay'.¹⁵⁵ *Interrogatio* claims biblical figures such as Enoch, Elijah, John the Baptist and Moses were actually agents of Satan who were deceived into

¹⁴⁹ *The Secret Supper* translated by W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 459.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 460.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 460.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 460.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 460.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 460.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 461.

imposing his sacrificial rites, the latter of whom being given three pieces of wood with which Jesus would eventually be crucified.¹⁵⁶ *Interrogatio* notes that salvation is not possible through the baptism of John, but only through Jesus's baptism, that is baptism with the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁷ In the narrative, John asks Jesus what his flesh and blood are that believers must partake in, to which Jesus replies the glorification of God through the 'Our Father who art in heaven' chant.¹⁵⁸ Thus, *Interrogatio Iohannis* firmly establishes the origin of the problem the *consolamentum* aims to address. That is, it establishes Cathar cosmology as a dualistic worldview in which Satan himself takes angelic beings from the heavens and imprisons them in evil and corrupted bodies of flesh which can only be freed and reunited with the Father's realm by means of the Cathar rites, supposed to have been passed from Jesus to the apostles, to the Cathars themselves.

The Vision of Isaiah

The Vision of Isaiah is a non-canonical book written within the first two centuries of Christianity, demonstrating that some Cathar beliefs have plausible origins in ancient Gnosticism. While this book has no explicit links to the *consolamentum*, its exegesis nonetheless gives insight into Cathar cosmology, which differed significantly to orthodox Christian belief. It will become evident that several of the themes of the book are reminiscent of, though not identical to, Marcosian theology. Nonetheless, the book demonstrates that Cathars did not simply evolve from mainstream Catholic thought, but rather inherited various traditions which may have included aspects of their ritual practice.

¹⁵⁶ *The Secret Supper* in Wakefield and Evans, pp. 461-462.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 462

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 462.

The book begins with Isaiah, ostensibly the same figure from biblical canon, visiting the king and having the Holy Spirit come upon him.¹⁵⁹ The text explains that when those present heard the Holy Spirit, ‘they fell to their knees and sang to the Highest God, who rests among the holy ones’.¹⁶⁰ The vision Isaiah sees is noted to be ‘of what is hidden from all flesh’.¹⁶¹ Isaiah encounters an angel with ‘a particularly great glory’ who guides him on his heavenly ascent, first above the firmament where ‘Satan’s war’ takes place, and then to the first heaven and onwards.¹⁶² Each progressive heaven is more glorious than the last, just as the angels of each higher heaven are similarly more glorious. Despite its focus on Isaiah, the book is distinctly Christian, referencing ‘the Most High and Eternal and His beloved Son’.¹⁶³ Isaiah’s angelic guide informs him that no fleshly person is able to see what he is being shown and tells Isaiah ‘when you shall have returned here through the will of the Father, then you will receive your garment, and then you will be equal to the angels who are in the seventh heaven’.¹⁶⁴ Whether or not neo-platonic dualism was the author’s intent, it is evident how many of the verses can be read to support Cathar theology. Isaiah begs not to be returned to his flesh, but his angelic guide informs him that his time to come to this realm is not yet fulfilled.¹⁶⁵ The dichotomy between flesh and spirit is further emphasised in chapter 4, verse 1, when an angel asks, ‘why do you who desire to live in the flesh come here?’.¹⁶⁶ In verse 5, Isaiah’s guide notes that he ‘may not hear’ the name of the Son of God ‘until [he has] departed from the flesh’.¹⁶⁷ Chapter 5, verse 6

¹⁵⁹ *The Vision of Isaiah* translated by W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 449-456 (p. 449).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 449.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 450.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, p. 450.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 451.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 452.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 452-453.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 453.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 453.

promotes the idea of the Father as a distant unknowable presence, similar to in Marcosian theology, noting ‘He is the One Living Eternal, living in the highest eternity and resting among the holy ones; we cannot endure to name or see Him who is praised by the Holy Spirit’.¹⁶⁸ At this point in the narrative, the Father instructs the Son to descend into the world where he will ‘judge the prince of that world and his angels’ because they have denied the Father and said ‘we are and without us there is no one’.¹⁶⁹ This verse establishes a contrast between the distant Father and the ‘prince’ of the world who seemingly claims supremacy.¹⁷⁰ Ultimately, the precise theology surrounding the ‘prince’ is unclear, but within Marcosian or Cathar theology, this verse could be read as a Demiurge or Satan who attempts to conceal the existence of the Father while situating himself as the true God. To what degree this reflects the author’s intent is unclear, but Wakefield and Evans note that the document ‘had reached Western Europe in Latin translation’ amongst the Cathars by the beginning of the thirteenth century, so it is reasonable that this would have been their interpretation.¹⁷¹

The *Summa* of Rainier Sacconi

In spite of Sacconi’s *Summa* being polemically opposed to Catharism and its practices, as a former Cathar he nonetheless offers invaluable insights into the theology and logic of *consolamentum* in light of Cathar cosmology. Beliefs varied widely depending on one’s position as *credente* or *perfecti* and depending upon whether one belonged to an absolute or moderate dualist church; therefore, Sacconi’s main contributions to developing a comprehensive

¹⁶⁸ *The Vision of Isaiah*, pp. 454-455.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 455.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 455.

¹⁷¹ Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, p. 447.

description of the *consolamentum* are his explanations of the beliefs of particular sects and individual Cathars such as John Lugio, which can expand the understanding of Cathar thought.

It should be noted that Sacconi's descriptions of Cathar belief are in line with the Cathar-authored documents examined thus far, meaning he should be seen as a relatively reliable source. Sacconi notes that all Cathars believe 'the devil made this world and everything in it', that 'all the sacraments of the [Catholic] Church [...] are of no avail for salvation'. He claims Cathars lack belief in a bodily resurrection, and that they believe their 'spiritual baptism' the only method by which mortal sin is forgiven. Of the *consolamentum*, he describes Cathars laying their right hands on an individual and reciting the Lord's Prayer, although notes that some Cathars do not believe in the imposition of hands, being a fleshly creation of the devil.¹⁷²

Sacconi's most interesting contribution to understanding Cathar cosmology and theology as it relates to the *consolamentum* is his description of the beliefs of the Cathars of Belesmanza. Sacconi explains that the beliefs at Belesmanza represent the old beliefs which all Cathars and Albanenses adhered to between the period of 1200 CE to 1230 CE.¹⁷³ Sacconi explains a belief in two gods, with the evil god as the creator of the material world.¹⁷⁴ This sect believes that the evil god 'ascended into heaven' and 'carried off a third part of the creatures created by [the good] God' which 'he implants daily in human bodies and in those of lower animals, and also transfers them from one body to another until such time as all shall be brought back to heaven'.¹⁷⁵ This sect expresses the belief that Jesus did not truly 'eat, drink, or suffer' as well as the notion that 'Abraham, Isaac [...] and all the fathers of old' as well as 'John the Baptist, were enemies of God and ministers of the devil' and that 'the devil was the author of all of the Old

¹⁷² Rainier Sacconi, *Summa*, translated in Wakefield and Evans, pp. 330-331.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p. 337.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 338.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 338.

Testament’ other than ‘Job, the Psalms, the books of Solomon, of Jesus the son of Sirach, of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel, Daniel, and of the twelve prophets’.¹⁷⁶ It should be reiterated that Sacconi claims ‘all the Albanenses’ held to these beliefs until 1230 CE¹⁷⁷ and that ‘the Cathars of the Toulousan church, and those of Albi and Carcassonne, maintain the errors of Belesmanza and the old Albanenses, as do almost all the churches of Cathars beyond the seas’.¹⁷⁸ Taken literally, it would seem that the aforementioned beliefs represent not only the more prominent Cathar beliefs but also the older beliefs, which would make their understanding integral to a judicious description of the *consolamentum*.

Consolidated Description of Deathbed *Consolamentum* and its Theology and Cosmology

Having examined the primary sources, a consolidated description of the *consolamentum* using its theology and cosmology can be made. Most evidently, the *consolamentum* functioned as a salvific ritual and the only means by which one could achieve salvation. What exactly salvation means for the Cathars can be exegeted using their texts. According to the cosmology and soteriology established in the *Vision of Isaiah*, salvation is to ascend to the seventh heaven where the Holy Spirit, Son of God, and the Most High and Eternal dwell. Explicit in this book is the notion that flesh cannot dwell in the seventh heaven and no one who is in flesh, save for Isaiah, can or has seen the seventh heaven. Therefore, according to the *Vision of Isaiah*, salvation entails the separation of the soul from the flesh, permitting one to dwell in the seventh heaven where ‘fleshly robes’ are exchanged for ‘heavenly robes’.¹⁷⁹ What the *Interrogatio Iohannis* and

¹⁷⁶ Sacconi, *Summa* in Wakefield and Evans, p. 338.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 338.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 345.

¹⁷⁹ *The Vision of Isaiah* in Wakefield and Evans, p. 453.

Sacconi's *Summa* reveal about Cathar cosmology further expounds the salvation the *consolamentum* imparts. Both works attest belief that the Devil, by force or coercion, caused a third of heavenly beings to fall from heaven. In the *Interrogatio*, Satan commands angels to enter the bodies of clay he fashions, giving rise to the first humans. Sacconi expounds this belief, noting that many Cathars believe that these heavenly beings, or angels, are implanted in human and animal bodies, being transferred 'from one body to another' until they achieve salvation.¹⁸⁰ These sources reveal that the underlying Cathar theology is that each human is a heavenly being who has been imprisoned in a body by Satan. Death does not free the soul or heavenly being, since Sacconi mentions the transplantation of heavenly beings between animal and human bodies. The *consolamentum* was viewed as the only way to achieve salvation. That is to say, one would not go to heaven upon one's death *unless* one had been consoled. What this meant to some Cathars, practically, is that without the *consolamentum* one would be trapped in a cycle of reincarnation until one successfully received the *consolamentum* and maintained one's sinless state until death.

In summary, the *consolamentum* is both a ritual of inclusion and initiation, whereby the initiate is admitted into the elite ranks of *perfecti* which grants them special authority to recite the Lord's Prayer and participate in the consoling of future *perfecti*. Additionally, it is a ritual of separation as well. By receiving *consolamentum* one separates from the world and from uninitiated *credentes* to join the elect *perfecti*. The ritual separation is clearer when the *consolamentum* is administered to a sick or dying individual, the express purpose being to release the angelic being inside the initiate so that it may ascend to heaven and be free from the cycle of reincarnation facilitated by Satan. The means by which one receives the Holy Spirit and

¹⁸⁰ Sacconi, *Summa* in Wakefield and Evans, p. 338.

is consoled varies, but always entails the use of incantations by the ritual leader and the initiate and congregation in the form of the Lord's Prayer, as well as other calls and responses such as 'Let us adore the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'.¹⁸¹ In most cases, the Holy Spirit is administered through the *consolamentum* not only by these incantations, but by means of the imposition of hands and the placement of the Book on the initiate's head. The healthy initiate gains access to the Holy Spirit and must live ascetically with strict prohibitions on diet and behaviour, but for the moribund initiate, remaining bed-ridden, the *consolamentum* truly functions as a purifying salvific rite to separate the soul from the material world so that it may ascend to its place of origin in the heavens with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In essence, the *consolamentum* was a ritual performed on both the healthy and the sick, which included repetitive incantations by both the ritual facilitator and the initiate, and often included imposing hands and sacred text to impart the Holy Spirit on an initiate, functioning as their only means of salvation by which their inner angelic being can become untethered to the material world. This salvation places them firmly outside of the realm of influence of the Devil and his material world and allows the angelic being to return to their place of origin.

Juxtaposition of the *Consolamentum* and *Apolytrosis* Rituals

With both rituals described, they can be juxtaposed and meaningfully evaluated. In terms of actual practice, both rituals share many similarities, as well as some evident differences. In terms of the ritual participants, both rituals were administered and led by a ritual expert who was at the highest echelon of either organisation. In the case of the Marcosians, *apolytrosis* was

¹⁸¹ *Catharist Rituals (Part A)* in Wakefield and Evans, p. 481.

administered by a bishop, and with the Cathars, the *consolamentum* was administered by an elder or prior, who must have been a *perfecti* by definition. In either case, the ritual officiant was someone who would have been initiated and recognised in their respective communities of believers. Meanwhile, the initiates of both rituals were people who seemingly eschewed the orthodox Christian thought in their surrounding environment and community in favour of a dualistic worldview framing the material realm as inherently evil and created by a malevolent or misguided divine being who was not identical to the true god, that is the Father. Further to this point, adherents of both sects viewed themselves as divine spiritual beings, who were forcibly trapped within flawed bodies by the creator of the material world, contrary to the will of their Father, who created spiritual beings and resided in a plane far beyond the reaches of humanity, or the creator of the material world. Initiates in both ritual systems believed that the only method by which they could become free of their material bodies and return to the spiritual realm of their Father was to undergo the specific ritual of both initiation and separation offered by either group. Furthermore, both rituals, while not inherently moribund rituals, were frequently practiced on one's deathbed, to the point that several primary sources for both rituals make note of this fact. Additionally, despite both groups being dubbed 'heretical' by their contemporaries, both groups can nonetheless be said to practice inherently Christian rituals in the sense that both groups acknowledged the divinity of Jesus Christ and both groups believed that he was the messenger of the true Father who brought the knowledge of how to achieve salvation to either sect. Additionally, while the canon of what would become the Bible was in no way settled during the time of Mark the Magician and his followers in subsequent decades, the Marcosians as demonstrated by Lewis, as well as the Cathars, nonetheless seem to draw on texts that were considered heretical by their contemporaries in the broader Christian communion.

Ultimately, the underlying theologies and cosmologies behind the *apolytrosis* and *consolamentum* seem to have relatively few macroscopic differences. With that said, there are nonetheless many nuanced differences. For example, the *apolytrosis* seemed to involve a declaration of one's divine origins. While the Cathars held similar beliefs in their own divine origins, their ritual did not involve such a post-mortem declaration in order to evade judgement. Rather, their ritual process itself granted the Holy Spirit which facilitated their own evasion of post-mortem interaction with the Devil, or creator god. Furthermore, the Marcosian system consisted of several numbered gods and goddesses who were emanations of the Father, as well as a complex system of gematria, whereas the mainstream Cathar system did not feature nearly as many divine beings, and did not employ the same type of numerology that Mark did, save for John Lugio whose distinct cosmology is reminiscent of emanation theology, but who did not represent mainstream Cathar beliefs. The Marcosian system of incorporating gematria and Hebrew is far more reminiscent of Hellenistic mystery religions of their time than Cathar theology and thought. Nonetheless, both rituals contain elements of mystery, and both rituals similarly address the same central problem. This problem, summarised, is how to escape the material bodily prisons created by the lesser creator deity so that one's inner divine being can ascend to the Father, who is the originator of the inner divinity and is diametrically opposed to the creator god and his material creations.

In terms of the ritual practice itself, more differences are noted, but a careful reading of the source texts nonetheless reveals many commonalities to both rituals. For example, both rituals employ incantations as essential transformative components of their practice that reifies the ritual effects. While the incantations varied in *apolytrosis*, its purpose was ultimately to effect change in the form of rendering the initiate 'incomprehensible and invisible' to the malevolent

forces and Demiurge wishing to stop the initiate's spirit from ascending to the Pleroma.¹⁸² With the *consolamentum*, it appears that the Cathar invocation was relatively uniform, primarily comprising the Lord's Prayer. For the Cathars, incantations were an integral component to the process of transferring the Holy Spirit to an initiate, which similarly would aid in their ascent to heaven. In either case, the spoken incantations are treated with extreme reverence, to the point that Hippolytus reports that Marcosian bishops withheld the *apolytrosis* formula until an initiate was dying, where he would whisper it into the initiate's ear. Similarly, the Cathars restricted those amongst them who could recite the Lord's Prayer to those who had been consoled, disallowing the *credentes* to utter it. In terms of the physical aspects of the ritual, the two groups diverged somewhat more. The Marcosians, for the most part, seem to favour practices reminiscent of water baptism or chrismation as a physical component of their ritual, although Irenaeus notes there are Marcosians who reject the physicality of the ritual entirely. Conversely, the Cathar *consolamentum* seems, like their invocation, to be somewhat more standardised, with the general practice consisting of the imposition of hands, as well as placing the New Testament or Gospels on an initiate's head. With that said, Sacconi notes there are Cathars who reject the imposition of hands by virtue of the hands being part of the material world.¹⁸³ This reasoning is the same given by Irenaeus for some Marcosians' rejection of the physicality of the *apolytrosis*.¹⁸⁴ This similarity reveals that there was underlying tension within both ritual systems, as both reject the material world, both adhere to a dualistic cosmology and theology, and therefore both groups had factions who rejected the notion of physical ritual to achieve spiritual goals. Still remaining is perhaps the most striking physical similarity; at least during the

¹⁸² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.21.5 in Grant, pp. 65-66.

¹⁸³ Rainier Sacconi, *Summa* in Wakefield and Evans, pp. 330-331.

¹⁸⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.21.4 in Grant, p. 65.

time of Hippolytus in the early third century CE, the imposition of hands is noted to be a prominent aspect of the *apolytrois*,¹⁸⁵ similar to how it is one of the central components of the *consolamentum*. To what degree the imposition of hands was integral to the *apolytrois* is unclear, as well as how exactly said imposition would have looked in ritual practice. Still, it was notable enough that Hippolytus thought to include it in his brief summary of the *apolytrois*, so it should not be taken for granted as an insignificant detail.

¹⁸⁵ Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* in Roberts and Donaldson, p. 93.

Redescription, Rectification, and Theory Formation

Having juxtaposed the *consolamentum* and *apolytrois*, something of a redescription of elements of both can be accomplished, which will lend itself to a new conceptual category of ritual based on the analysis of the two. For these purposes, the redescription will focus on highlighting new or overlooked elements that previous descriptions lacked. To begin, both rituals should be seen in light of their break from surrounding Christian orthodoxy. It should also be noted that, being inherently Christian rituals, there are obvious similarities one can draw between an orthodox baptism in water or chrismation and the *apolytrois*'s and *consolamentum*'s own use of baptism as both a symbolic and, in the case of *apolytrois*, sometimes literal ritual element. Still, both sects rejected the sacraments of their orthodox contemporaries, and it has become evident that the rituals more closely resemble each other than they do their orthodox counterparts. Therefore, the first item in the redescription of these rituals is the argument that they are not primarily re-workings of orthodox sacraments, but are rather independent practices developed through complex exegesis, mythmaking and cosmological construction. Nicola Denzey Lewis has already posited this as a reality of the *apolytrois*, but little attention has been given to the possibility that the *consolamentum* is not heavily influenced by orthodox baptism. Now, it is undoubtable that the aforementioned baptism had some influence on both *apolytrois* and *consolamentum*, given that nothing exists in a cultural vacuum, but its influence, as Lewis concludes for the *apolytrois*, is likely overstated for the *consolamentum* as well. Therefore, both rituals should be examined not as developments from orthodox sacraments, but rather as independent ritual constructions that incorporate elements common to some orthodox sacraments, but that are primarily constructed around fundamentally different mythologies,

cosmologies and theologies.

This notion lends to the next element in this redescription: that is that the moribund *consolamentum* administration, understood through the lens of Cathar theology, is fundamentally like the *apolytrois* and unlike orthodox baptism in that it is a ritual of separation, marginality and aggregation. Lewis's description of the effects of the *apolytrois* which 'effects change in the individuals involved, by which they pass "from one cosmic or social world to another"' ¹⁸⁶ are easily applied to the *consolamentum*, which when practiced on a dying Cathar has the same effect and function. Even when practised on a healthy Cathar, the *consolamentum*'s ultimate effect is the separation from the material world it grants the initiate upon said initiate's death, assuming no mortal sin is incurred until such time. While there are certainly elements of inclusion, its ultimate function is fundamentally different to orthodox baptism, being arguably different categories of ritual altogether. The third element of this redescription must be to acknowledge that, among both rituals, there is fundamental internal friction given that both rituals are predominantly realised via physical means, despite rejecting the material world. This friction was so great among both groups that there were some among them that altered the ritual to not involve material elements. This demonstrates that, unlike orthodox baptism, the *apolytrois* and *consolamentum* offered a relatively high degree of adaptability compared to their orthodox contemporaries. While water is essential to orthodox baptism, it would seem that at least some adherents of Marcosianism and Catharism acknowledged that the spiritual transformation which takes place amongst them upon their ritual initiation did not necessitate physical elements beyond spoken word or knowledge in order to reify its effects. In this sense, both rituals highly value incantations, although the *consolamentum*'s formula seems to be more

¹⁸⁶ Lewis, 'Apolytrosis as Ritual and Sacrament', p. 537.

standardised than those of the Marcosians. Similarly, both rituals are highly regulated, with a sophistication of ritual practitioner hierarchy that rivals that of their orthodox contemporaries. For the Marcosians, who did not reveal their formula at times until a member's impending death and for the Cathars, who forbid uttering the Lord's Prayer until a member was consoled and similarly hid most elements of their dualism from the *credentes*, both rituals mirror those of mystery religions in ways that orthodox rituals simply do not. The restriction of knowledge, especially, seems to be a commonality and this restriction creates a notable hierarchical divide between the elect initiates and the rest of their surrounding communities. In this way, there is an element of prestige and exclusivity afforded by each ritual that is not as closely mirrored in orthodox Christianity.

What the juxtaposition and redescription have thus far demonstrated is that the *apolytrosis* and *consolamentum* can be understood to be a unique category of ritual, more fundamentally similar to each other than to any contemporary mainstream Christian practices. While differences between the rituals exist, it is nonetheless useful to rectify, or create anew, the metalinguistic category by which these two rituals can be described. Therefore, an adequate description of this category of ritual is in order. The ritual category, here termed 'Christian de-incarnational rites of separation', can be described as a multi-purpose typological ritual of both inclusion and initiation, as well as separation, marginality, and aggregation. The Christian de-incarnational rite of separation is fundamentally concerned with death and the afterlife, and is often, though not always, administered temporally near an initiate's death. The belief systems underscoring Christian de-incarnational rites of separation are inherently dualistic, with a specific cosmology that centres and prioritises a benevolent but distant spiritual Father deity who is in opposition to the god of the material world, who traps spiritual divine beings, the inner

being of respective initiates, into material bodies and who positions himself as the true god to his material creations. Christian de-incarnational rites of separation are also underscored by the belief that a divine being and agent of the spiritual Father, in the form of Jesus Christ, manifested himself in the material world in order to teach humans about the reality of their dualistic cosmology and in order to facilitate their return to the spiritual Father by means of the de-incarnational rite. The Christian de-incarnational rite of separation is believed to facilitate the separation of the spiritual inner being of the initiate from the material world upon death and will free the initiate from any further influence of the lesser god of the material world, thus facilitating their return to their spiritual Father who resides in the highest spiritual realm and, in essence, ‘de-incarnating’ them by returning their inner being to its place of origin. Christian de-incarnational rites of separation are heavily regulated by an elect initiated class that is solely authorised to perform the ritual on new initiates. The ritual means by which the spiritual transformation occurs which allows eventual separation from the material realm varies, but is largely based on early Christian practices attested in the New Testament including anointing with oil, baptising with water, and the imposition of hands. With that said, some adherents of Christian de-incarnational rites of separation reject physical means of imposing spiritual transformation, and instead adhere to knowledge or incantations as the means by which an individual is spiritually altered. Ultimately, while the means of effecting spiritual change varies, the underlying and ultimate goal, and the believed effect of the ritual, is freedom from the flesh and the material world, and the reuniting of one’s true inner self with the Father. The Christian de-incarnational rite of separation manifests in religio-cultural milieus where the orthodox Christian rites, such as baptism, eucharist, confession, or chrismation are viewed as wholly inadequate to address the true central issue for dualist Christians: that is, how a perfect deity

could create an imperfect and material world. Therefore, there is ultimately nothing in orthodoxy that can satisfactorily aid the dualist Christian in accomplishing their main goal, which is full and final freedom from the material.

The establishment of a typological genre of ritual to explain the *apolytrosis* and *consolamentum* does much to demonstrate that these rituals share more in common than is immediately evident. With that said, this does not necessarily prove a genealogical relationship between the two. There remain at least two possibilities to explain the stark similarities and underlying themes common to these two rituals, and indeed to the Bogomil ritual from which the *consolamentum* derives; these are either that both rituals necessarily arose as a result of dualist anti-material exegesis of Christian text and theology, or that a genuine unbroken bridge of transmission and reception exists that stretches back to the second and third centuries CE which was transmitted to the Cathars via the Bogomils. Alternatively, it is plausible that there are aspects of both theories that are true.

The first theory, that both rituals are a result of Christian anti-materialist exegesis, is certainly plausible. The basis for at least some of the physical aspects of the *apolytrosis* and *consolamentum* can be found within the New Testament. For example, Acts 8:17 demonstrates the imparting of the Holy Spirit via the imposition of hands, and there are numerous passages that deal with baptism and anointing throughout the New Testament. Furthermore, there are evidently biblical passages which can be read to support a strictly dualist view, however a dualist reading of the Bible seems to have never been a majority stance, given the extensive polemics across more than a millennium denouncing this worldview. Still, once a group has come to a dualist conclusion about Christian cosmology, including that the material world is inherently flawed and cannot have been created by a perfect creator, it stands to reason that some method

by which adherents can escape the material realm must necessarily be developed. Furthermore, the differences that do exist amongst Marcosian and Cathar rituals as a whole certainly demonstrate innovations not present in both groups. For example, the Marcosian focus on gematria, lesser deities or emanations, bridal chamber imagery and, at times, Hebrew incantations is all but absent from Cathar thought, and the Cathar use of the Book in their ritual, as well as the Lord's Prayer specifically certainly shows enough difference that the rituals cannot be said to be identical, and certainly some independent exegesis and cultural influence factored into either ritual's development.

With that said, that both rituals can be so well explained using a novel ritual typology does lend credence to the notion that the Cathars may indeed be recipients of early Gnostic doctrine. The exact method of transmission remains to be seen, but several possibilities exist by which some aspects of ritual or doctrine may have reached the Bogomils and later the Cathars. The Cathars' reception of the *Vision of Isaiah* demonstrates that at least some early Christian dualist literature survived for centuries to be received by the Cathars. While this does not prove a genealogical relationship between the Marcosians and Cathars specifically, it establishes that there were ideas and aspects of theology from outside of Christian orthodoxy that were maintained by 'heretical' groups across over a millennium either continually, or via rediscovery of texts. It is certainly evidence that furthers the notion of Gnostic influence over the Bogomils and Cathars more generally. Furthermore, a distinct possibility remains that aspects of Bogomil and Cathar theology arose from readings of heresiologists themselves. That the Bogomils and Cathars composed such complex texts such as the *Interrogatio Iohannis*, the *Book of Two Principles*, and the *Rituals* demonstrates that at least some Cathars were highly literate and well-read. It is likely that at least some Bogomil and Cathar predecessors had access to and read the

works of Irenaeus and Hippolytus. For example, the Arundel manuscript of Irenaeus's *Against Heresies* has been dated to 1166 and has been determined to be based on a model in La Grande Chartreuse monastery with a prologue written by Florus of Lyons in the mid-ninth century.¹⁸⁷ This is the nearest example to the Cathars, both temporally and geographically, but other medieval and ancient manuscripts are attested throughout western Europe, eastern Europe, and into Asia, presenting a plausible path of transmission of Irenaeus's writings into the hands of the Cathars. While this is by no means conclusive evidence, it nonetheless demonstrates that Marcosian notions of ritual could have been received by medieval dualists. Whether this directly influenced them or not, it still may have sowed ideas about spiritual imprisonment in fleshly bodies and the need for the inner spirit to be liberated from the material realm by means of ritual practice which reifies this de-incarnation. Definitive proof of direct Gnostic to Cathar ritual transmission likely does not exist. Still, there remain many pieces of strong evidence that point to a direct link between the two eras of dualist Christians. The typological ritual category of the Christian de-incarnational rite of separation demonstrates that there is a genuine depth and breadth of parallels inherent to the two rituals regardless of whether they are the result of convergent Christian exegesis or genuine historical transmission. Scholars have long theorised a historical path of transmission of other Gnostic ideas via ancient Gnostic groups to the Paulicians and Bogomils, the latter of which are known to have shared ideas with contemporary Cathars. Alternatively, the path of transmission may have taken a heretofore unknown path via other extinct Gnostic lineages, or even via the medieval reading of ancient heresiologists such as Irenaeus and Hippolytus. Regardless of the plausible paths of transmission, this framework has

¹⁸⁷ Dominic J. Unger and John J. Dillon, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the Heresies*, Vol 1. Book 1. (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), p. 12.

demonstrated that the *apolytrosis* and *consolamentum* share genuine typological affinity which stretches beyond surface-level similarities and serves as a guidepost by which further comparative analyses can be performed using other rites and rituals. While definitive transmission from the Marcosians to the Cathars may never be proven, this analysis demonstrates that the question is nonetheless salient and is worth investigating further.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

A thorough and judicious examination of both the scholarship and primary sources surrounding the Marcosian *apolytrosis* and Cathar *consolamentum* has revealed several things. Namely, the *consolamentum* is not best explained as an analogue to orthodox baptism, as its underlying purpose as a Christian de-incarnational rite of separation puts it in direct opposition to orthodox ideals. Instead, it should be viewed as a distinct dualist rite with complex underlying logic and overarching themes not well-mirrored in mainstream Christianity. Second, several avenues exist by which Marcosian, and more broadly Gnostic, ideas may have influenced the Cathars, Bogomils, and their predecessors. Namely, it is entirely plausible that the writings of heresiologists influenced the particular dualism of these groups and even informed their rituals, or at least the underlying ritual logic and theology present in both the *apolytrosis* and *consolamentum*. That literate and well-read medieval dualist Christians may have had access to Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and others, is no unreasonable assumption as demonstrated by the existence of contemporaneous and geographically close manuscripts of Irenaeus's works. Furthermore, that internal friction between material-facilitated rituals and anti-material ritual goals arose in both Marcosians and Cathars is indicative of the genuine utility and necessity of the novel typological category of Christian de-incarnational rite of separation. This ritual genre demonstrates that despite persecution from orthodox Christians across centuries, highly complex ritual systems and logic nonetheless developed in these two dualist movements, separated by nearly one thousand years of history. This ritual genre, the Christian de-incarnational rite of separation, describes the underlying theological urge of the Marcosian and Cathar to 'de-incarnate', essentially separating their inner spiritual self from their physical body, which is

accomplished via their respective rites. While this novel typology does not, and indeed cannot, definitively demonstrate a direct transmission and reception between the two groups, it nonetheless serves as a useful analytical framework that demonstrates the meaningful parallels in both rituals which includes parallels of function, theology, and indeed parallels of practice. Furthermore, this framework can be used as a blueprint by which to examine other rituals to determine if the Christian de-incarnational rite is limited to the Marcosians, Bogomils, and Cathars, or if the typology can be broadened to encompass other dualist groups such as Manichaeans, Mandaean, and the myriad of so-called Gnostic groups of Christianity's first several centuries. For example, that the 'spiritual auditing' ritual of the Manichaeans mentioned earlier is relatively dissimilar in function and purpose is immediately clear using this framework.

Further investigation is certainly warranted to the end of exploring the link between the Marcosians and Cathars, and the quest for further evidence of a broader relationship between ancient Gnosticism and Catharism will likely continue indefinitely. Several avenues exist in order to further this goal, including closer exegesis of Cathar-received texts such as the *Vision of Isaiah*, *Interrogatio Iohannis*, as well as Cathar-authored texts. While these endeavours extend beyond the scope of this dissertation, they nonetheless pose viable avenues for further investigation into the Gnostic-Cathar relationship. Further, more detailed analyses of other Gnostic rites as well as reconstructing the possible rites of Bogomil predecessors such as the Paulicians will be invaluable if transmission and reception is ever to be proven, although as of yet there is little known about the aforementioned Paulicians' beliefs. For now, the only case to be made of transmission and reception is one of plausibility, and the establishment of a new typological category of ritual does much to demonstrate that the similarities between *apolytrosis* and *consolamentum* go far beyond mere coincidence. In this sense, the Christian de-incarnational

rite of separation offers a meaningful framework not only to aid in the assessment of whether transmission and reception between the Marcosians and Cathars occurred, but also to determine whether this phenomenon represents a broader pattern of dualist Christianity, or whether these features are genuinely unique to these two movements.

Bibliography

- Barber, Malcolm, *The Cathars* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014)
- Behr, John, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)
- Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'inquisiteur*, translated by W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 375-445
- Biget, Jean-Louis, 'Les « bons hommes », les « bonnes dames » et leurs communautés avant 1209', *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*, 55 (2020), pp. 245-284
- Biget, Jean-Louis, 'Réflexions sur «l'hérésie» dans le Midi de la France au Moyen Âge', *Heresis : revue d'hérésiologie médiévale*, 36-37 (2002), pp. 29-74
- Catharist Rituals (Part A)* translated by W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 468-483
- Catharist Rituals (Part B)* translated by W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 483-494
- Czarnecki, Piotr, 'A New Paradigm: "The Middle Ages without Catharism" and the Testimony of Inquisitional Sources', *Perspektywy Kultury*, 31.4 (2020), pp. 89-108 <DOI: 10.35765/pk.2020.3104.08>
- Czarnecki, Piotr, 'Eastern Elements in Cathar Doctrines – an Argument for the Traditional Interpretation of Catharism', *Studia Ceranea*, 14.14 (2024), pp. 21-47

- Czarnecki, Piotr, 'The Cathar Myth of the Fall. A Late Invention of Independent Heretical Exegesis?', *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Studia Religiologica*, 51.1 (2018), pp. 47–65 <DOI: 10.4467/20844077SR.18.004.9493>
- Czarnecki, Piotr, "'Time-Focused Dualism'"—An Argument for the Eastern Origins of Catharism', *The Catholic historical review*, 107.4 (2021), pp. 482-502
- Duvernoy, Jean, *Le Catharisme: La Religion des Cathares* (privat, 1976)
- Förster, Niclas. 'Marcosian Rituals for Prophecy and Apolytrosis'. In *Practicing Gnosis*, ed. by April DeConick, Gregory Shaw, and John D. Turner (Leiden: Brill, 2013) pp. 433-448
- Freiberger, Oliver, 'Elements of a Comparative Methodology in the Study of Religion', *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)*, 9.2 (2018), pp. 38-51, <DOI: 10.3390/rel9020038>
- Hagman, Ylva, 'Le catharisme, un néo-manichéisme ?' *Heresis : revue d'hérésiologie médiévale*, 21 (1993), pp. 47-59
- Hagman, Ylva, 'Le rite d'initiation chrétienne chez les Cathares et les Bogomiles', *Hérésis* 20 (1993), pp. 13-31 (p. 27).
- Hamilton, Bernard, *Crusaders, Cathars and the Holy Places*, e-book (London and New York: Routledge, 2018)
- Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutation of All Heresies*, Book VI, Chapter XXXVI, translated in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 'Vol. 5 The Fathers of the Third Century:

Hippolytus; Cyprian; Caius; Novatian; Appendix' (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1885), pp. 9-153.

Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* translated by Robert M. Grant in *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997)

Iricinschi, Eduard, 'How Gullible Were the Women of Late antique Rhone and Asia Minor?

Redescribing the Valentinian Marcosians in Irenaeus of Lyon's *Against the Heresies* (I,13-15)', *ASDIWAL. Revue genevoise d'anthropologie et d'histoire des religions*, 15 (2020), pp. 115-132, <DOI: 10.3406/asdi.2020.1183>

Lambert, Malcolm, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002)

Lansing, Carol, *Power and Purity: Cathar Heresy in Medieval Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

Lewis, Nicola Denzey, 'Apolytrosis as Ritual and Sacrament: Determining a Ritual Context for Death in Second-Century Marcosian Valentinianism', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 17.4 (2009), pp. 525–61 <DOI: 10.1353/earl.0.0290>

Loos, Milan, *Dualist Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Prague: Springer, 1974)

MacCulloch, Diarmaid *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking, 2010)

Mack, Burton L., 'On Redescribing Christian Origins', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 8 (1996) pp. 247-269

Moore, R. I., *The War on Heresy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012)

Obolensky, Dmitri, *The Bogomils: A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948)

Pegg, Mark Gregory, 'On Cathars, Albigenses, and Good Men of Languedoc', *Journal of Medieval History* (Oxford), 27.2 (2001), pp. 181–95, <DOI: 10.1016/S0304-4181(01)00008-2>

Pegg, Mark Gregory, 'The Paradigm of Catharism; or, the Historians' Illusion' in *Cathars in Question* (York: York Medieval Press, 2016) ed. by Antonio Sennis pp. 21-52

Rainier Sacconi, *Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno*, translated by W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 329-346

Roberts, Alexander and W. H. Rambaut, *The Writings of Irenaeus*, Vol. I. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868)

Runciman, Steven, *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955)

Sagnard, François, *La gnose Valentinienne et le témoignage de saint Irénée* (Paris: Vrin, 1947)

Sharma, Arvind, *Religious Studies and Comparative Methodology: The Case for Reciprocal Illumination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

Smith, Jonathan Z, *Drudgery Divine : On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990)

Smith, Jonathan Z., 'Prologue: In Comparison a Magic Dwells', in *A Magic Still Dwells*, ed. by Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000) pp. 23-44 <DOI: 10.2307/j.ctv11hpsn2.6>

Stausberg, Michael, 'Comparison' in, *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* ed. by Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 21-39

Stoyanov, Yuri, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000)

Teigen, H. F. 'Manichaean Rituals: Elect and Lay Practices' in *The Manichaean Church in Kellis* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 215-250 <DOI: 10.1163/9789004459779_009>

The Secret Supper translated by W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) pp. 458-465

The Vision of Isaiah translated by W. L. Wakefield and A. P. Evans in *Heresies of the high middle ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 449-456

Thomassen, Einar, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* (Leiden: Brill, 2006)

Tsiamis, Costas, Eleni Tounta, and Effie Poulakou-Rebelakou, 'The "Endura" of The Cathars' Heresy: Medieval Concept of Ritual Euthanasia or Suicide?', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 55.1 (2016), pp. 174–80 <DOI: 10.1007/s10943-015-0021-x>

Unger, Dominic J. and John J. Dillon, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the Heresies*. Vol 1. Book 1. (New York: Paulist Press, 1992)

- van Den Broek, Roelof, ‘The Cathars: Medieval Gnostics?’ in *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 1996)
- van Gennep, Arnold, *Rites of Passage*, translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffé (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1960)
- Wakefield, W. L. and A. P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991)
- Young, Stephen L, ‘The Marcosian Redemption: Mythmaking, the Afterlife, and Early Christian Religiosity’, *Journal of Early Christian History*, 6.2 (2016), pp. 77–110 <DOI: 10.1080/2222582X.2016.1184883>