

# Remembering the Cathars

by Glen Crane

An excerpt from *The Fire and the Light* by Glen Crane, reprinted with permission from Brigid's Fire Press. All rights reserved.



In medieval France, a group of enlightened mystics tried to preserve Christ's true message. The Church exterminated them during Christianity's darkest hour.

They were called Cathars—"the Pure Ones"—because they lived simple lives of poverty and embraced pacifism in the example of the Apostles. Traveling in pairs, they healed the sick and quested for a spiritual Light in meditation. They believed in two gods—one beneficent and one evil—and resisted carnal temptation to avoid reincarnating. These reform-minded Christians who paved the way for the Protestant upheaval three centuries later were so Eastern in spiritual practice that one historian called them western Buddhists.

Centuries after their bloody demise, they continue to fascinate and confound us. More than 800 years have passed since the infamous Albigensian Crusade had started, a forty-year war that left southern France in ruins and thousands dead. In 1208 A.D., Pope Innocent III unleashed a crusader army to punish heretical Occitania, the Cathar homeland bordered by the Languedoc and the Pyrenees.



Who were these Cathar mystics? And why was the Church so hell-bent on killing every last one of them? In France, two opposing camps have long debated the question. Traditionalists dismiss as unlikely Cathar involvement with the Grail, Jewish kabbalah, Sufi mysticism, Light meditation and sacred architecture, arguing that their theology had no use for magic or relics. Yet defenders of the more mystical view choose not to rely on evidence obtained from the forced Inquisition testimonies. As Simone Weil, the twentieth-century French writer, said: "Official history is believing the murderers at their word."

The inadequacy of confessions extracted by torture is made apparent by the contradictions one encounters when trying to understand the Cathars. They were said to loathe this world; yet they embraced, and were embraced by, the world-loving troubadours. The Albigensian Crusade brought unprecedented destruction upon the Catholic leaders of Occitania, but these nobles treated their Cathars subjects with great respect. The heretics were said to scrupulously avoid sexual encounters. Why then did they nurture the ideals of Chivalry and Romance? Every faith has its inner cadre of initiates whose understanding and esoteric practices are different from those of common



believers. This was particularly true for the Cathars, who carried on the ancient traditions of the first Christians, the Gnostics, and perhaps even the Druids.

The greatest mystery may be this: Why would the Cathars accept such horrific martyrdom if they did not possess evidence of a more authentic version of early Christianity? This vexed their persecutors, the Cistercians and Dominicans, who deemed such courage in the face of death to be the exclusive privilege of Christ's disciples.

Researchers such as Fernand Niel and Arthur Guirdham have found too many unexplained synchronicities to dismiss the Cathars as mere strays from the true Christian path. For them the Cathars were inheritors of a Gnostic tradition that exalted the individual quest for the God of Light, strands of which can be found threaded through the Egyptians, the Zoroastrians, the Essenes, the Nasoreans, and the Mandeans of modern Iraq. The scholar Zoe Oldenbourg left open the possibility that esoteric sun worship took place upon Montségur, a haunting Cathar temple-fortress in the Ariège. Even the most hardened rationalists concede that a mysterious "treasure" was spirited away from the mount on the night before its surrender.

During World War II, the Nazis scoured the caves and forests around Montségur searching for this treasure. In *The Da Vinci Code*, author Dan Brown suggested that the mystics guarded the secret lineage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. He may have been half right. The Cathars did indeed possess something that the Church desperately wanted suppressed, but it was likely an arcana much more dangerous than a Jewish bloodline: Ancient scrolls containing lost teachings of Christ that contradicted the canonical gospels.



*On "The Fire and the Light" by Glen Craney:*

In *The Fire and the Light*, a historical novel, the author Glen Craney, tells the tragic story of the Cathars through the life of their remarkable High Priestess, Esclarmonde de Foix, whose name meant "the Light of the World."

Decades before Joan of Arc, the Viscountess Esclarmonde gained fame by accusing Rome of corruption and deceit. Thousands venerated this woman, who was rumored to be a guardian of the Holy Grail. She abandoned her privileged status in the fabled troubadour courts of love and participated in the celebrated Disputation of Pamiers. During this public debate between the Cathar perfects (as their initiates were called) and the Vatican legates, including the future St. Dominic, father of the Inquisition, one Catholic disputant became so exasperated with Esclarmonde's quick wit and winning points that he ordered her to "shut up and go back to your spinning!"

When the Cathars prevailed in popular opinion, an outraged Dominic shouted, "I have preached, entreated, wept, but the rod must now do the work of benediction!" His warning was no idle threat. In the end, a few hundred Cathar survivors held out on

Montségur for nine months against a Catholic army of ten thousand. Their heroic defense evoked the legendary resistance of the Jews against the Roman legions at Masada. The crusade foreshadowed the demise of another esoteric group accused of heresy fifty years later—the Knights Templar, some of whom may have covertly aided the Cathars in their attempt to preserve suppressed evidence found in the Holy Land.

Today, Montségur and the crumbling Cathar castles draw thousands of pilgrims each year. The French government in Paris, once the persecutor of the Cathars, now actively publicizes their story to promote tourism to the region. Having stood on these sites and felt their power and sadness, Glen counts himself among those who believe that something remarkable thrived in Occitania, only to be crushed by a Church that could not bear the threatened revelations. These whispering ruins were the only voices that Esclarmonde and her vanquished Cathars were allowed to leave us. (Up until she returned, added by Dhaxem.com.)



Glen Craney is an award-winning screenwriter, novelist, journalist, and lawyer. The *Fire and the Light: A Novel of the Cathars and the Lost Teachings of Christ*, can be ordered from Amazon.com, Baker & Taylor, Ingram, and Greenleaf Book Group (ISBN 978-0-981-684-7-7)

For more information on Glen Craney's work you may visit his website at:

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