

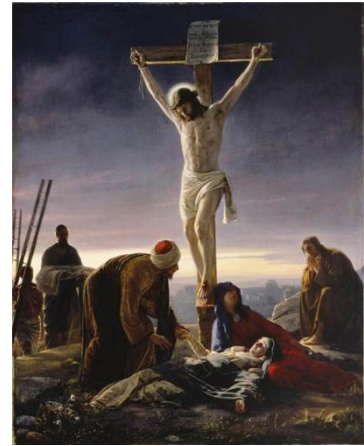
Here are a few things that may surprise you about the Roman Catholic Church

We have no reason at all to believe that Peter was ever bishop of Rome - in fact, the earliest list of bishops of Rome omits his name.

The bishop of Rome, once there was one, was a relatively minor figure for many centuries. Christian emperors and other bishops felt, and were free to decide important matters without him for many centuries.

By any objective standards the Roman Catholic Church is a schismatic faction of the Orthodox Church.

Even the Orthodox Church has questionable claims to represent the earliest form of Christianity. It is clear that there were many contending factions already when the books of the New Testament were written (they are full of jibes at other factions). If you visit the holy places in Jerusalem you will be surprised to find the Roman Catholic Church treated like a Johnny-come-lately, almost like the Anglican Church. All of the ancient sites belong to the Orthodox Church, the Armenian Church, the Coptic Church, or some other faction that long pre-dates the Roman Church.



The Roman Catholic Church does not represent the most reliable link to the practices of the early Church. We know as a simple matter of fact that the Orthodox Churches have introduced far fewer innovations than the Roman Church. There is also considerable evidence that the Cathars represent an even older tradition. So did the Arians.



The Roman Church started executing heretics (including Priscilian, an Arian and one of its own bishops) as early as the fourth century.

In its attempt to re-write history, we know beyond all doubt that it has tried to destroy and suppress information it did not want to hear, and that it has produced a very long string of deliberate forgeries. The Donation of Constantine, the pseudo Isadoran Forgeries, and the False Decretals, are just three notable examples.

The **Donation of Constantine** (Latin, *Donatio Constantini*) is a forged Roman imperial decree by which the emperor Constantine I supposedly transferred authority over Rome and the western part of the Roman Empire to the Pope. During the Middle Ages, the document was often cited in support of the Roman Church's claims to spiritual and earthly authority. Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla is credited with first exposing the forgery with solid philological arguments, although doubts on the document's authenticity had already been cast by this time. Scholars have since dated the forgery between the eighth and ninth centuries.

Pseudo-Isidore is the pseudonym given to the scholar or group of scholars responsible for the **Pseudo-Isidorean (False) Decretals**, the most extensive and influential set of forgeries found in medieval Canon law. The authors were a group of Frankish clerics writing in the second quarter of the ninth century under the pseudonym Isidore Mercator.

The Cathars: Roman Catholic Propaganda

Setting the Scene

Almost all modern historians are sympathetic to the Cathars. Even the most scholarly and objective works, laying out the bare facts as fairly as possible come across as sympathetic. Here is a quote from what is generally regarded as the best English language academic work of the twentieth century, referring to the Cathars:



None were humbler; none were more assiduous in prayer, more constant under persecution; none made more insistent claims to be "good men", and it was on those terms that they were received by many of the common people.

Walter Wakefield & Austin Evans, *Heresies of The High Middle Ages* (Columbia, 1991), p28.

and again

... the Gospels were their guide for conduct; their celibacy and their austerities were those of the monastic ideal; their criticism of the orthodox clergy was hardly more severe than that characteristic of other puritans and reformers; their disdain for the material world was rivalled by that of

anchorites whose sanctity was revered by the Church. Walter Wakefield & Austin Evans, *Heresies of The High Middle Ages* (Columbia, 1991), p50.

Even the better quality contemporary medieval opponents recognised their merits. Here is James Capelli, a friar who was lector at a Franciscan convent at Milan writing around 1240. As Wakefield and Evans say, he "displays scruples rarely encountered in other authors of polemical tracts"

... they are, however, most chaste of body. For men and women observing the vow and way of life of this sect are in no way soiled by the corruption of debauchery. Whence, if any of them, man or woman, happens to be fouled by fornication, if convicted by two or three witnesses, he forthwith either is ejected from their group or, if he repents, is re-consolated by the imposition of their hands, and a heavy penitential burden is placed upon him as amends for sin. Actually, the rumour of the fornication which is said to prevail among them is most false. For it is true that once a month, either by day or by night, in order to avoid gossip by the people, men and women meet together, not, as some lyingly say, for purposes of fornication, but so that they may hear preaching and make confession to their preaching official, as though from his prayers pardon for their sins would ensue. They are wrongfully wounded in popular rumour by many malicious charges of blasphemy from those who say that they commit many shameful and horrid acts of which they are innocent.

A number of manuscripts of James Capelli's work survive. This extract is based on Dino Bazzocchi, *La Eresia Catara: Saggio storico filosofico con in appendice Disputationes nonnullae adversus haereticos*, codice inedito de secolo VIII della biblioteca Malatestiana di Cesena, but with errors corrected by reference to other surviving manuscripts.

For further detail see Walter Wakefield & Austin Evans, *Heresies of The High Middle Ages* (Columbia, 1991), p305.

An alternative view

This is not how the Roman Catholic Church sees the Cathars and their "heresy". The Church's modern views, expressed by writers like Hilaire Belloc, are not very different from those of the Medieval Roman Catholic Church (see Hilaire Belloc, *The Albigensian Attack*, Chapter Five of *The Great Heresies*).

To most objective authorities the more serious accusations against the Cathars appear to be based on no more than propaganda. No organisation has ever used propaganda to such good effect as the Roman Church. The very word propaganda is derived from the name of the part of the Roman Church set up to propagate the faith. For many centuries the Catholic Church provided a set-menu of accusations against any group of which it did not approve: pagans, Eastern Churches, apostates, schismatics, heretics, Jews, Moslems, witches, Templars, numerous peoples of the New World, and so on.

They were all accused of black magic, worshipping Satan, consorting with demons, aping Catholic rituals, murder, cannibalism, incest, bestiality, sodomy and a range of sexual excesses. Cathars were no exception. All of the preceding accusations were made against them, however scant or contrary the evidence.

An example of the contrast between propaganda and truth is provided by the disparity between alleged and real attitudes to sex. According to Catholic propaganda, Cathars including Parfaits and Parfaites habitually engaged in sexual excesses, including regular orgies.



At the same time as propagating these calumnies the Catholic Church authorities were detecting heretics not by their sexual excesses, but by their sexual purity. We have a striking example from the twelfth century in the Archdiocese of Rheims where a group of heretics ("Poblicani") were discovered through the refusal of a young girl to submit to the attentions of a monk. The refusal of a girl to submit to a monk's sexual demands appears to have been so unusual that she was questioned and admitted that she believed she had an obligation to keep her virginity. As a result, she and her friends were investigated more closely and soon a nest of heretical believers was exposed. The heretics were described by the Archbishop, Samson, who asserted that heresy was being spread by itinerant weavers who encouraged sexual promiscuity.

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