

ANNE BRENON INTERVIEW WITH FRENCH TV CHANNEL ARTÈ

I present ANNE BRENON (b. 1945), an internationally recognized specialist in the history of Catharism. She is the founder of the newspaper HERESIS*, the author of numerous books and articles on Catharism, and the keeper of the French Archives. However, before providing the translation of this interview, I want to say one important thing: the French Cathar Church is alive*.



Anne Brenon

Since I had the opportunity to study (in my postgraduate studies at Vilnius University) the culture and philosophy of the French Renaissance, I translated "ESSE" by the most famous French thinker of that time, M. de Montaigne. This collection from Old French, it goes without saying that I am familiar with the history of that country. It is extremely dramatic, varied and surprising. When someone writes about the crisis of Christianity in France, does not tell the truth about where the crisis in *that* country came from. Being interested in Gnosticism, the so-called "secret" Teaching of Jesus Christ, and how it was brutally persecuted in France (and not only there), I was very happy to find the works of the historian of Catharism, Anne Brenon. Reading the biography of this author, I understood that she was a person called by God to mourn and describe the call of the French martyrs, called Cathars, to follow Christ and their life.

After reading Anne Brenon's interview with the editor of the TV channel ARTE, I decided to translate and briefly retell Anna's story.

When asked where Anna's interest in the history of Catharism came from, she was at first confused and admitted that it was not easy to answer this question, because she felt that she was "born with this calling", hidden in her "genetics", that she herself had a "genus hereticum", something like a "heretical nature", which, as the inquisitors claimed, had marked the stubborn Cathar families. Heresy was passed down with mother's milk, rooted in the very soil, in the culture, in the whole environment, permeated from early childhood. Anna was born with that passion

the past and admits that he sought to understand it all more deeply, to find out how it happened *before...as if I were missing something today.*

ARTE: Where did your interest in history and Catharism come from? What was your professional path as a scholar?

Anne says: "It was not by chance that I had a desire to see texts and documents that would allow me to get at least a little closer to that *"earlier"* reality, and not through the writer's imagination. How those people of the past looked at this land and how they perceived the world. From the age of 10-12 I dreamed of becoming an archaeologist, a medieval historian. The Middle Ages appeared to me like a huge beautiful fresco, framed by the silhouettes of strong castles, under which we walked with our parents... Then came the turn of the medieval literature, which very quickly conquered me. I started reading d'oïl texts (in old French language) to make it easier - after all, I was French (I lived 80 kilometers north of Lyon). I "ate" everything indiscriminately: heroic poems and especially manor novels, then came the turn of ... for the troubadours. At first I had great difficulty with the old Occitan language, but over time I assimilated it too. And when I did, I suddenly understood what my grandmothers meant,



Toulouse Capitole and the square of the same name with the Occitan cross on the pavement designed by Raymond Moretti.

Bressan, a French-Provençal dialect, sounds, but not d'oïl. I had the best French at the Lycée, professors of Latin and history who helped me, encouraged me, inspired me, gave lectures, and guided my studies. I remember those very lively and passionate discussions about Cathar life. Various I found many references to these mysterious heretics in the margins of publications about the troubadours, and I was terribly eager to learn more about them. Like everyone else, I began

reading everything that came to hand...In August 1959, my parents finally decided to give me a short excursion to the south of France. It was a wonderful play of light and shadow, the discovery of the sea, Carcassonne, Foix, Montségur, Querebus, Minerva, then almost immediately I promised myself that *one day this land would be mine*. We were free-thinking atheists, secular people, nourished by the spirit of the Enlightenment and even fiercely anti-clerical. My father expressed his indignation at intolerance, the Crusades, the Inquisition, he was sincerely indignant about it... Without going into too much detail, I will only say that when I was in third grade

When I entered the lyceum class, I was only 13 years old, my choice was already clear. I decided to devote myself to the study of the troubadours and Cathars of medieval southern civilization, about whom so little and contradictory information is written in books. But I wanted to know everything! The only path that led to this was the Charters School. The Lyceum professors warned that it would be very difficult. After the bachelor's degree, I had to take a two- or three-year preparatory course, and then the entrance exams, which, among other things, required an amazing knowledge of Latin. But I was ready for anything, even to leave my family cocoon and hometown and rush to Paris. In July 1965, these gates opened before me. After two years of preparatory courses at the Lycée Henri IV, I entered the Charters School with fairly good grades. In 1967, when I finished my second year of studies, I had

to choose a topic for my thesis. I talked about my passions with Jacques Monfrin, a great novelist, professor of romance and Provençal philology, whom I had chosen as my supervisor: "I would like to write something on the troubadours." He shook his head: "A critical study on this topic would be too difficult for a debutante." And then I decided to tell him: "But I would even more like to write a work on Catharism..." His answer was quite categorical: "Cathars? But that's not serious for a graduate of our school!" Even then, they, my poor medieval heretics, had a bad reputation among French intellectuals. I didn't know that it could be so bad. But then I had to write a thesis on the Waldenses. It was a philological work: 24 manuscripts of religious texts in Occitan, written by the Waldenses of Piedmont in the late Middle Ages. And this work was extremely useful to me - it forced me to take up religious culture

analysis, which I sorely lacked, and which was essential for serious medieval studies, especially heresies, for research! And thanks to those Waldenses – especially because of their clear and uncompromising position: **"It is better to obey God than men"** – I discovered the reality of Christian Scripture. Without it I would never have been able to approach Catharism. Unfortunately, I did not come to that until recently. I defended my thesis and graduated from school in 1970, receiving a diploma as an archivist-paleographer, and I still had to work in a repository for some time to formally complete my education.

A librarian, an archivist? I was hoping they would send me to work at some small prefecture, the best in Occitania**. However, the reality was more prosaic: I had to classify archival collections, often quite recent, just received from the prefecture's offices, and prepare them for archiving. These were mainly documents about the administration and the local aristocracy, and nothing, absolutely nothing, reminded me of my passionate love for the Middle Ages, especially literature and heresies. Was I to get caught up in all this? I had absolutely no chance to devote myself to the work that interested me most. I had to close myself off in the archives. And to my former colleagues, comrades and friends, whom I met along the way of life, I was forced to admit: I was a very bad archivist...



Castles of Occitanie

In October 1981, I accepted with great joy the proposal of the scientist René Nelli: to help him to find a small center in Carcassonne, in the Aude (Od) department, suitable for the scientific investigation of heresies for research, namely **the National Center for Cathar Studies**. That's how it all began. After eight years of intensive work, a team of old and young researchers, sketches and publications, and finally the heresy itself emerged before us in its historical context with the people who were its bearers. In 1998 I was forced to leave the center to devote myself entirely to attention to Catharism, in the Aude department, "Cathar country", which became for me a "klondike" for new "gold hunting" and the desire for fame. I continued to work with the same people, the same researchers and our friends; we met at the colloquium and in private life, in Montailou and elsewhere. We corresponded, we published our works. And we lived our lives. In short, I realized that you need to devote yourself completely to this craft, because history is first and foremost a craft. Being a historian is not improvisation.

ARTE asked Anna: is it true that the life of the "Cathari Perfects" ("perfect Cathars" - as the inquisitors called them) was actually as difficult as it is said?

Anne Brenon says that "such is the life of monks! The Benedictines and Cistercians also had no property, they had taken vows of chastity...so there was nothing special about Cathar austerity, at least in the heyday of the Middle Ages. I would also like to point out that their message was very optimistic: they proclaimed that "all souls are created good and equal" and that "all will be saved", even the souls of the inquisitors, at least according to Peyre Authier, one of the

of the last great preachers. They loved to joke so that their words would be more understandable to the people.

And yet Catharism was cruel - its members, having taken vows of "consolation", were condemned to death... Anne Brenon explained why she calls these heretics "good people" and never uses the word "Cathar". She does not like the word, because that is how their enemies in the Rhineland called them. The word "Cathar" is of German origin. It is a play on words: something between the Greek word "katharos", meaning "pure", and the word "Ketter", which can be translated as "sorcerer who worships a cat". And from the word "Ketter" the Germans later created the word "Ketzer", which generally means heretic. In Occitanie, this word was almost never used. It became popular after the publications of the Alsatian Karl Schmidt in 1848 and the German Publications by Arno Borst in 1951. At that time, the German word "Katharrer" was translated into French as "Cathares".

"So, these Cathars should be called 'good people'?" asks Anna's TV journalist.

Anne Brenon: The most honest way would be to call them what they called *themselves* : Christians or apostles. They considered themselves **"the true Church of Christ and the Apostles."** I want to give another explanation on this point. Those who were called Cathars or heretics were monks of this church. The believers were simply called believers.

The believers said they were "turned to Good," that is, to those who were their clergy, now called Cathars—"good men" and "good women." However, the Inquisition came up with another name for them—"perfect ones"—to equate them with the ancient Manichaeans.*** This was an additional way to discredit them.

ARTE: But were they dualists, like the Manichaeans?

Anne Brenon: No, they were dualists precisely because they were Christians.

ARTE: But the Christian religion is not dualistic. God created the world. The Cathars said what another is that the devil created it. How can you say they were Christians?****

Anne Brenon: As our common teacher Georges Duby said: "All of eleventh-century Christianity was completely and spontaneously Manichaean." Catholic antidualism only became dogma at the end of the twelfth century. And the latent dualism of the New Testament was more or less developed throughout history, at different periods, by different Christian groups, Roman Christianity in general and the Cathars in particular.



Carcassonne Castle

ARTE: What does "latent dualism" mean?

Anne Brenon: For example, what is said in the Gospel and in the first letter of John, where God and the world are opposed. This is an interpretation of the famous quote: **“My kingdom is not of this world.”** So, the world is not of God either.

And as long as Catharism existed, the motif of this opposition between the Kingdom of God and "this world" (of which Satan is the prince) resounded in their sermons, complementing the opposition between the true Church of God, that is, the heretical Church, and the hypocritical, usurping Church of Rome, which had made a pact with this world. Here are the true roots of the famous Cathar dualism! I quote the good man Peyre Authier: "There are two Churches: one persecuted and forgiving, the other ruling and tearing off the skin." Understand: one Church is a good one, fleeing persecution, and the other is a malicious persecutor. /.../ The emergence of the Inquisition as an instrument of persecution only perfectly confirmed the fact that the Church of Rome is a persecuting Church. It was at this time that the social order that Robert Moore called "the persecuting society" was born.

ARTE: Who is Robert Moore?

Anne Brenon: Robert Moore is a great British medievalist, professor at Newcastle University, author of the famous book "Persecution and its Origins in Europe." Moore's great contribution to history is that he showed very clearly that, starting in the Millennium In the 19th century, our Western European Christian society was defined and structured by identifying and declaring categories of people who were to be considered exceptions. First it was heretics, then Jews, then lepers, etc. It was a long list, which only grew over the centuries, the beginning. From this perspective, heretics appeared not

as a dangerous and aggressive force for Christianity, from which it should defend itself, and as a Christian a force of resistance against the innovations of the Gregorian Church: the Crusades, the knightly orders...

ARTE: Orders of knights?

Anne Brenon: For example, the Templars! The Cathars had no greater enemy than the Templars. The medieval historian Jean Flory, a specialist in the Crusades and chivalry, argued that the Templars were a "terrible formation" from the point of view of Christian ethics: monks who carried weapons and killed under the guise of Christ, who commanded: "Thou shalt not kill! Do not forget that none other than Bernard of Clairvaux—our Saint Bernard!—was the theorist of all this. He invented this function of the monk-warrior, defining it as "the killing of evil," which turned into "the killing of man." It is therefore not surprising—perhaps there is a dark humor in this?—that modern esotericism so easily assimilates "Cathars" and "Templars."

ARTE: But if Catharism had survived the persecutions and become victorious, as happened to Roman Catholicism, are you sure that it would have managed to avoid the traps and in turn not have taken advantage of the persecutions?

Anne Brenon: If that had happened, he would have lost his place as a Christian, having dualistic tendency, identity, that is, the identity of Christianity, which has renounced any divine right to intervene in this world. The argument "This is how God wants it" would have been for the Cathars not enough to be worthy of the name, to justify any violence. If it were
If that had happened, they would no longer be Cathars. This was the path of the "madmen of God" in the context of dualistic evangelization...

Interview prepared by Pascal Cornuelle / <https://www.arte.tv/fr/>

Source: <https://artifact.org.ru/>

***All about the French Cathar Church and its activities** <https://catharisme.fr/ab/anne-brenon/>

Anna Brenon founded the magazine - "HERESIS" <https://www.circaed-heresis.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Heresis-2017-1.pdf>

****Occitanie** (Occitan: *Occitània*) is a region of Europe where the Occitan language is spoken. It covers the southern part of France, Monaco and adjacent territories in Italy and Spain. This region is home to more than 16 million inhabitants, and its territory covers about 200 thousand km². Occitan is a branch of the Romance languages, formed on the basis of Latin. The Catalan language is very similar to Occitan, and there are quite strong historical and cultural ties between Occitanie and Catalonia.

*****Manicheism** - a strictly dualistic religious movement that existed in the 3rd-13th centuries and combined features of Christianity, Gnosticism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and other religions. The founder of Manichaeism is considered to be Mani (c. 215-277 AD), who came from Ctesiphon (then Sassanid-ruled Iraq). Born into a Jewish-Christian (Ecclesiastic) family, he sought to complete the Revelation of Jesus, and saw himself as the successor of the great religions.
the successor of the founders – Jesus, Zarathustra and Buddha.

