

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Understanding the Good: Medieval Inquisitions and Modern Religion

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Abstract

This essay responds to scholarly arguments that “religion” arose in the particular circumstances of the modern West, distinct chronologically and conceptually from medieval *religio*. It argues that in the Middle Ages, Christian persecution helped to form that very notion of religion. It does so via the register of heresy inquisitions conducted by Bishop Jacques Fournier in Pamiers (1318–1325), which contains a curious and overlooked Occitan phrase: *entendensa del be* (“understanding of the good”). In three provocative ways, *entendensa del be* helps us to reconsider the origins of “religion.” First, one possibility is that the phrase represents an organic proto-religion among the heretics known as Good Christians. A second possibility is, conversely, that scribes presented an insignificant phrase as a technical term, helping to identify the group as heretical. This would highlight coercive inquisitorial agency in reinterpreting language and behavior, anticipating early-modern and modern constructors of “religion.” Third, by its links to troubadour culture, the phrase reminds us how in Occitania, conquest and resistance intertwined with inquisition’s policing of “religious” behavior in a way that resembles claims for modernity. Regardless of which possibility, and most importantly, we discover how medieval persecution helped to form modern religion.

Keywords: heresy; inquisition; religion; troubadours

I. Introduction

To begin with what sounds like heresy: inquisitorial texts from the European Middle Ages are not sources for religion.¹ That is, while the medieval Latin West had its *religio* – the monastic life – the “religion” presumed by modern scholars of the period, and imposed upon it, greatly exceeds the limited semantic capacity of that earlier term.

That anachronism results because religion as we know it arose at a particular moment.² Scholars have argued for two separate, but related, historical processes of

¹Jean-Claude Schmitt, “Une histoire religieuse du Moyen Age est-elle possible?” in *Il mestiere di storico del Medioevo*, eds. Fernando Lepori and Francesco Santi (Spoleto: CISAM, 1994), 73–83. Ancient Latin authors disagreed about the etymology of *religio*, chiefly whether it derived from *relegere* (to read through or to read again) or *religare* (to bind or to fasten). Its classical meaning generally settled on a reverence toward the gods that manifested itself in both internal feeling and an external scrupulousness of behavior. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879), 1556.

²The literature on the modern construction of religion, and the debate over retaining or abandoning it in scholarship, is enormous. See, e.g., Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New

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constructing a “religion” that does not necessarily fit the people to whom it is applied. Both are linked to modernity. The first is the very shaping in the early modern and modern periods of the general concept of “religion,” a category within which certain human beliefs, actions, and attitudes are distinguished, located, and bound. It is a category presumed to be present and visible throughout history, regardless of time or place. Why did “religion” originate in the early-modern period? It is credited to European Christians’ exposure to diversity, as they confronted both intra-European confessional conflict, and also different cultures through exploration, imperialism, and colonialism. Christian division and atomization, amid ecclesiastical reformations, became a model for Europeans to interpret new global experiences. Unsurprisingly, then, the historical evolution of “religion” in the West was inseparable from Christian hegemony. In Catherine Bell’s words, early modern and modern Europeans were responsible for “the enduring paradigm created with the solidification of Christianity as the prototype for religion in general. . . .As the prototype for religion, Christianity provided all of the assumptions with which people began to address historically and geographically different religious cultures.”³ Readers can likely surmise the major ingredients of the modern-Western notion of “religion” that developed: a god or gods, the supernatural, cosmogony and cosmology, the sacred, ritual, scripture, ethics. So while medieval Europeans had deployed a Latin *religio* quite restricted in its meaning and application, post-medieval Europeans reified, expanded, and globalized “religion.”⁴

The second process of constructing religion was a consequence of the first. Just as Christianity provided the instrument by which early-modern Europeans built the general concept of religion, it also provided a structure and principle by which to organize scattered beliefs, practices, and behaviors into particular “religions.”⁵ Scholars have recognized this tendency from the sixteenth into the nineteenth century, as Protestant and Catholic, European and British missionaries, bureaucrats, linguists, and academics applied a model of Christianity to what they encountered, cobbling together new,

Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013); Russell McCutcheon, “The Category ‘Religion’ in Recent Publications: Twenty Years Later,” *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 62, no. 1 (December 2015): 119–141. McCutcheon’s piece is an excellent short, recent introduction. See too his earlier “The Category ‘Religion’ in Recent Publications: A Critical Survey,” *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 42, no. 3 (January 1995): 284–309.

³Catherine Bell, “Paradigms Behind (and Before) the Modern Concept of Religion,” *History and Theory* 45, no. 4 (December 2006): 29–31.

⁴Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, trans. William Sayers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); and David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 1–20. See also Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in his *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 179–196; Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 32–48; John Bossy, “Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim,” *Past & Present* 95, no. 1 (May 1982): 4–8; Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 85–131.

⁵Denisa Cervenková argues that it was not until the end of the second century that Christian writers expressly characterized their faith as *religio*, a process that intensified in the fourth century in an unsurprising process of faith harmonizing with the Roman state. Denisa Cervenková, “De Religione: How Christianity Became a Religion,” *Theologica* 4, no. 1 (2014): 87–114. See also Edwin Judge, “Was Christianity a Religion?” in *The First Christians in the Roman World: Augustan and New Testament Essays*, ed. James R. Harrison (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 404–409.

putatively systematic and organized, “isms.” For example, N. J. Girardot elegantly describes the process of “taxonomic crystallization” by which “Taoism” was formed by westerners as a “reified entity.”⁶ These newly tidy faiths were subsequently categorized, together with Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as “world” religions.⁷ Moreover, these now-cohesive particular religions – together with the transhistorical, universal notion of religion itself – were not just synchronically present everywhere humans could be found. They could also be diachronically projected back into, and discovered in, the past. Several scholars have remarked upon the zeal for classification that drove these processes of developing “religion” and religions in these centuries, as the “explosion of data” about other beliefs and practices that resulted from global encounters, in tandem with the drive to map the world along the lines of Europe’s own sectarian diversity, led to the “scientific” organization of human experience.⁸ We see reflections of this in the way in which the pouring of Asian “religions” into a Christian mold by nineteenth-century British and European orientalists was tightly bound to the creation of new academic fields and their scholarly output. It is visible too in the coeval birth of the “science of religion” (*Religionswissenschaft*) and in Darwinist-influenced models of religions as “progressing” or “declining.”

In this narrative, these historical processes distance modern religion far from our medieval *religio*. And given the birth of “religion” at a discrete, post-medieval moment, we risk anachronism or simple inaccuracy with every blithe application of “medieval religion” to the European past. Several escape routes are available to us, from simply not caring, to noting other anachronistic terms consciously deployed by scholars for the purposes of analysis, to observing medieval Latin and vernacular terms that are analogous to modern religion. However, we might also proceed by shrinking the

⁶As David N. Lorenzen summarizes the argument about “Hinduism”: “Europeans, and more specifically the British, imposed a single conceptual category on a heterogeneous collection of sects, doctrines, and customs that Hindus themselves did not recognize as having anything essential in common. . . it was only after the concept of Hinduism was constructed by these Europeans that the Hindus themselves adopted the idea that they all belonged to a single religious community.” David N. Lorenzen, “Who Invented Hinduism?” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (October 1999): 632. On other non-European “religions,” see Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Norman J. Girardot, “Finding the Way: James Legge and the Victorian Invention of Taoism,” *Religion* 29, no. 2 (1999): 107–121. Other scholars argue that the “inventing” or imposition model overcredits European influence, devalues non-European agency, and straitens a more diffuse, long-term, and organic process. Lorenzen, e.g., sees premodern Muslim rule in India as a prompt in developing self-conscious Hindu identity, long before European arrival: Lorenzen, “Who Invented Hinduism?” 630–659. See too Benjamin T. Fleming, “Mapping Sacred Geography in Medieval India: The Case of the Twelve Jyotirlingas,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 13, no. 1 (April 2009): 51–81; Jeffrey R. Halverson, “Religion Before the Academy: Jonathan Z. Smith, Eurocentrism, and Muslim Demarcations of Religion,” *Journal of Religion* 104, no. 1 (January 2024): 26–44, on medieval Islam’s “demarcations” of faiths while ruling diverse demographics. There were also those “who, though operating in a context established by others. . . responded by creating conceptual linkages and vocabulary representative of their own interests.” McCutcheon, “The Category ‘Religion’ in Recent Publications: Twenty Years Later,” 129, commenting upon Jason Ananda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Likewise, Richard King maintains that Indian Brahmins with privileged access to British elites shaped in their own image the orientalist construction of “Hinduism.” Richard King, “Orientalism and the Modern Myth of ‘Hinduism,’” *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 46, no. 2 (January 1999): 169–172.

⁷Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁸Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” 186; Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 107–120.

distance between the Middle Ages and that development of religion presumed to post-date it. For one thing, we can readily see how the argument that modern religion resulted from western Christians' new circumstances was tacitly undergirded by a persistent premise – itself beholden to the Protestant Reformation – that medieval Latin Europe was homogenous, monocultural, and conformist in faith. Religion's formation putatively depended upon an exposure to internal and external diversity that was presumed to be novel in the early-modern world. But scholarship has dissolved an earlier picture of medieval Europe's unitary religious character, and of Latins' ignorance of global faiths, whether Christian or non-Christian.⁹ Before the Reformation, it was not only in the East that Latin Christians were exposed to variegation, and to its theological and epistemic ramifications. Nor, then, did that awareness and its consequences for "religion" only arise in the West *after* the Reformation. The medievalist must, with some force, assert an earlier date for that awareness of multiplicity and pluralism, with consequences for a developing "religion."¹⁰ We might then look more closely at other proposed ingredients and conditions for religion's modern invention, and explore the possibility of earlier origins.

To do so, I would like to examine a far earlier "explosion of data" for beliefs and practices that were subsequently defined as religious: an inquisitorial trial transcript. The inquisitorial dossier of Jacques Fournier, Bishop of Pamiers in Occitania (modern southern France), is one of our best sources for the voices and experiences of laypeople in the European Middle Ages. Fournier belonged to the monastic order of the Cistercians, and in 1311 he became abbot of Fontfroide, a monastery that had long been active in the Latin-Christian church's fight against heresy. Fournier was appointed Bishop of Pamiers in 1317, and after about a decade in that post was elevated to the cardinalate. Elected to the papacy in 1334, he served as Pope Benedict XII until his death in 1342. From 1318 to 1325, as Bishop of Pamiers, Jacques Fournier conducted heresy inquisitions, deposing scores of men and women of varying social and economic status, ages, and backgrounds. The dossier recording these interrogations in Latin is massive; its modern edition totals about 1500 pages. Fournier's dossier is most famous as the source for French historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's best-selling *Montaillou*, which reconstructed (rather imaginatively) the social "ecology" and *mentalité* of that village, whose residents had been subject to mass arrest as heretics in 1308 and who were well represented in the dossier's depositions.¹¹

⁹E.g., Jana Valtrová, "'Religion' in Medieval Missionary Accounts about Asia," *Religion as a Colonial Concept in Modern History (America, Asia)*. *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 82, no. 2 (2016): 571–592.

¹⁰As Peter Biller has asked, "Did mental grappling with these new 'religious' phenomena and an increased sense of 'religious' diversity press men further towards a sense of religion as a system of faith and worship, a thing, a plurality of such?" Peter Biller, "Words and the Medieval Notion of 'Religion,'" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36, no. 3 (July 1985): 363. See now, however, Biller's more hesitant "Mind the Gap: Modern and Medieval 'Religious' Vocabularies," in *The Making of Medieval History*, eds. Graham A. Loud and Martial Staub (York: York Medieval, 2017), 207–222.

¹¹The register exists in one copy, contained in Vatican Library MS Latin 4030. (A second Fournier register is lost.) Its modern edition is *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier*, ed. Jean Duvernoy, 3 vols. (Toulouse: Privat, 1965), hereafter cited as *RIJF*. All English translations included here are mine. I have been unable to access Duvernoy's later corrections: Jean Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier: Corrections* (Toulouse: Privat, 1972). However, the original manuscript is digitized at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.4030, to which I have compared the edition. The most recent scholarly study of Jacques Fournier is Irene Bueno, *Defining Heresy: Inquisition, Theology, and Papal Policy in the Time of Jacques Fournier* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: village occitan de*

To Ladurie, Fournier missed the import of the vivid depositions he heard. But Ladurie's own fascination by deponents' folkloric *mentalité* skirted the import of Fournier's efforts. Certainly, if we search the dossier for heresy as Fournier understood it, it is there. Most of the deponents were the heretics known as "Good Christians" and their adherents; some were heretical devotees of apostolic poverty; a few were merely idiosyncratic in belief. Famously, there was one Jew forcibly converted to Christianity, on trial for apostasy.¹² But I say above that the dossier contains material "*subsequently* defined as religious" for a reason. While an inquisitorial dossier may appear now to be an obviously religious source, neither Bishop Fournier, his staff, nor his deponents would have described it as such. However, this indicates not so much anachronism as it does how – beyond state formation and implanting European persecution – medieval inquisitions were preparing the way for modern religion.¹³ Just like the encounters, (re)interpretations, and arrangement (or manipulation) of impressions, words, and facts that scholars argue helped to form and to solidify the modern concept of religion, the medieval "explosion of data" that was a protracted inquisition record like Fournier's did similar work.¹⁴ And inquisition was especially equipped to do so. It could curate and redefine beliefs and practices from the top down, and its various persecutory strategies could also squeeze persons holding those beliefs, spurring their own articulation of meanings.

Fournier's dossier is particularly useful as a case study by containing a curious phrase – *entendensa del be*. In three provocative ways, this phrase can serve as a tool to revisit the origins of "religion." First, one possibility is that the phrase represents what looks like an organic proto-religion among the heretics known as Good Christians. A second possibility is, conversely, that the phrase highlights coercive inquisitorial agency in reinterpreting language and behavior, anticipating those early-modern and modern constructors of "religion." Third, by its links to a distinct troubadour culture, the phrase reminds us how in the specific case of southern France, conquest and resistance intertwined with inquisition's policing of "religious" behavior in a way that resembles claims for modernity. Most importantly, and regardless of which possibility, we discover how medieval persecution helped to form modern religion.

II. The Vernacular Religion of *Entendensa del be*

To be scrupulous, there is no reason to call almost all of the material in the Fournier dossier "religious" in an emic medieval sense. In the European Middle Ages, *religio*

1294 à 1324 (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), translated into English as *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Vintage, 1978).

¹²RJFF, 1:177–190. The dossier is itself evidence for Latin Christians' familiarity with diversity, including Judaism and Islam. Bueno sketches how as Pope Benedict XII, Fournier approached the religious difference of Greek and Armenian Christians, Muslims, and Mongols; Bueno, *Defining Heresy*, 296–331. See too Irene Bueno, "Late Medieval Heresiography and the Categorisation of Eastern Christianity," in *Inquisition and Knowledge 1200–1700*, eds. Peter Biller and Lucy J. Sackville (York: York Medieval, 2022), 135–156.

¹³Robert I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950–1250*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006); Mark Gregory Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels: The Great Inquisition of 1245–1246* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). On the vibrant debate over the construction of heresy in the Middle Ages, see most recently *Cathars in Question*, ed. Antonio Sennis (York: York Medieval, 2016).

¹⁴A comparable inquisitorial dossier, Toulouse Bibliothèque Municipale MS 609, records the testimony of over 5000 deponents around Toulouse in 1245–1246. Although *ecclesia*, *heresis*, *hereticus*, and *fides* each appear in this dossier hundreds of times, *religio* is absent. Toulouse 609 is digitized at <https://medieval-inquisition.huma-num.fr/>.

meant the monastic life. If we cast away everything in the dossier beyond that strictest definition, almost nothing “religious” remains. *Religio* there, expectedly, is a religious order or life within it, and “the religious” are monks.¹⁵

It is this narrow use in Latin-Christian sources that seems to render much of “medieval religious history” as anachronistic. However, reality in medieval Europe was more complex. In the Middle Ages, this closely defined *religio* coexisted with various forms of hybrid religious identity, from the monk-soldiers Knights Templar to Beguines, lay women living in community without monastic vows.¹⁶ Persons holding such hybrid statuses are not really visible in the Fournier dossier. But the dossier does provide another path linking medieval sensibility to modern religion: what Robert Ford Campany, writing about premodern China, terms “analogy” – “categories and terms that did something like the same work in premodern Chinese discourses that ‘religious’ does in Western ones.”¹⁷ Some scholars would suggest that for a medieval Latin Christianity with its strict *religio*, we might nevertheless seek such analogues in words that approached the notion of religion as conceived by the modern West.¹⁸ Indeed, the dossier’s conversations with and about diverse deponents, Christian and non-Christian, deploy several Latin terms to connote opinions, practices, and identity shared by a group: *fides* (faith), *secta* (sect), *lex* (law), *credencia* (belief), *ritus* (ritual), *modus vivendi* (way of life), *status* (state), *gens* (nation), *genus* (race). Of course, Jacques Fournier defined none of this as *religio*.

Yet in Fournier’s dossier, we find another term, in Occitan and arising from witnesses: *entendensa del be*, or “understanding of the good.” The phrase often recurred in the dossier, and *entendensa* and *be* could also appear alone. The term belonged to the group that dominated Fournier’s interrogations: the Good Christians, heretics formerly known as “Cathars.” The origins and nature of this heresy are fiercely debated for the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, when clerics in Occitania, northern Italy, and Germany warned about a vague heresy whose dualist adherents believed that the God of light and spirit (visible in the New Testament) was opposed by the Devil, a god of darkness and matter (visible in the Old Testament). According to these ecclesiastical writers, the group’s leaders adopted a façade of chastity, poverty, and veganism to seduce the faithful into heresy, concealing their sexual license and impiety. In Occitania, clerics’ claims that this heresy was both rampant and tacitly tolerated by ruling nobles prompted Pope Innocent III in 1209 to call the Albigensian Crusade, a brutal war that eventually saw Occitania’s independent counties falling under the authority of the French crown. The war’s end in 1229 also saw the introduction into Occitania of inquisitorial tribunals, to eradicate the heresy that a bloody invasion by hostile forces had – oddly enough – failed to erase. It is nearly impossible to distinguish clerics’

¹⁵See, e.g., the testimony of Arnaud de Verniolles in 1323; *RJIF*, 3:14–50.

¹⁶On intersections of hybridity and heresy, see Karen Sullivan, *The Inner Lives of Medieval Inquisitors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

¹⁷Robert Ford Campany, “‘Religious’ as a Category: A Comparative Case Study,” *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 65, no. 4 (May 2018): 335–336; see too his “On the Very Idea of Religions (In the Modern West and in Early Medieval China),” *History of Religions* 42, no. 4 (May 2003): 287–319.

¹⁸Biller, “Words”; Valtrová, “Religion.” In addition, the late Middle Ages saw increased theoretical pondering of the nature of *religio*, particularly by Renaissance humanists revisiting classical or patristic precedents. See, e.g., Ficino’s Platonic discussion (c. 1474) of *religio* as a God-given universal phenomenon common to humanity, chiefly connoting modes of worshipping and honoring Him. God permits variety in such *religio* while Christianity remains its perfect form. Marsilio Ficino, *On the Christian Religion*, trans. Dan Attrell, Brett Bartlett, and David Porreca (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022).

(self-serving) panic about this supposed heresy from its reality in the earlier period. Yet by the time of Fournier's interrogations in 1318–1325, things are clearer. In Occitania, Catalonia, and Lombardy, people of diverse backgrounds, the “believers,” were led by “perfects” like Peire Autier, Prades Tavernier, and Guilhem Béliabaste. Believers were obliged to honor, to protect, and to support financially the perfects, who lived clandestinely to avoid inquisitorial capture. They traveled from house to house, preaching sermons and initiating believers with an end-of-life “hereticating” ritual that inquisitors called the *consolamentum*. Central in the group's theology was metempsychosis, or the transference of a soul at death to a new (not necessarily human) body. Central in its identity were both the spiritual dimensions and the practical challenges of ecclesiastical persecution.

The use and meanings of *entendensa del be* have not been explored at length by scholars of medieval heresy.¹⁹ As we will see, it vividly enhances our knowledge of the Good Christians' community of heretics in its fourteenth-century decline. And for our purposes here, it provides us with a concept that transcends “analogies,” by emphasizing the role of persecution in its formation.

Entendensa, be, and *entendensa del be* are scattered among the testimonies of several witnesses in the Fournier dossier. Yet their appearance is most concentrated in two major, lengthy depositions: those of Arnaud Sicre de Ax, testifying in 1321, and of Pierre Maury, testifying in 1323–1324. Pierre Maury's family were heretics; he was a shepherd whose peripatetic life put him into irregular, but faithful, contact with the heresiarch Guilhem Béliabaste and others. Arnaud Sicre was the product of a mixed marriage, the son of heretic Sybille den Balle and the Catholic Arnaud Sicre. Arnaud was a shoemaker in the village of Sant Mateu in Catalonia, living among fugitives who had fled to Iberia to escape the mass arrest of heretics in Montailou in 1308. The exiles clustered around Béliabaste, who had himself escaped from prison in the Occitan city of Carcassonne. In 1319, Arnaud Sicre visited Bishop Jacques Fournier in Pamiers, informing him that Béliabaste and the other fugitives were in Catalonia. He promised Fournier that he could engineer their return to Pamiers, or at least to the domains of the Count of Foix, Gaston II (r. 1315–1343), where they could be licitly arrested. Fournier gave Arnaud money – which Arnaud told the community was a gift from his rich aunt – and authorized him to act as spy and to perform the “pious deceit” of outward sympathy with heresy, so long as he held no sincere inward belief. Arnaud eventually raised the exiles' suspicions, leading Béliabaste and Pierre Maury to try to gauge his sincerity by getting him drunk, with Maury then luring him into a pretend plot against Béliabaste.²⁰ Fortunately for Arnaud, he caught on quickly and convincingly feigned drunkenness, reaffirming their trust by reacting with slurred outrage to Maury's suggestion of betraying Béliabaste. Unfortunately for Béliabaste and the others, Arnaud Sicre successfully effected their capture, ultimately leading to Béliabaste's execution by burning in 1321, and Pierre Maury's life imprisonment.

¹⁹There is brief treatment in Michel Roquebert, “*Entendensa del Be*: L'entendement du bien, savoir et lien spirituel,” *Mélanges et Documents, Association d'Études du Catharisme/René Nelli* (2019): 1–4. Malcolm Lambert mentions it briefly as an individual's “understanding of God,” in the context of reincarnation. Malcolm Lambert, *The Cathars* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 253. René Weis, *The Yellow Cross: The Story of the Last Cathars, 1290–1329* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 37, 288–295; Karen Sullivan, *Truth and the Heretic: Crises of Knowledge in Medieval French Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 33–35. While Sullivan is chiefly interested in *be* for its contributions to discussions of secrecy and coding, she observes correctly both its multivalence and that “At times, the *be* seems to signify the cluster of believers who surround the heretic as well as the heretic himself” (33).

²⁰*RJF*, 2:76–77.

The testimonies of Arnaud Sicre and Pierre Maury particularly show the centrality of “understanding the good” to the exile community in Catalonia, the diversity of its meanings, and its applications to all members – from birth to death, and from novice adherent to elite Good Christian. When deployed by the perfects and their followers, *entendensa*, *be*, and *entendensa del be* were multivalent. Jean Duvernoy, the dossier’s modern editor, defined “the good” (*be*) as the Holy Spirit present in the perfects, which “possède une valeur. . .magique.” “Understanding” it was its recognition and pious appreciation.²¹ Michel Roquebert emphasized its reasoned, intellectual quality distinct from the “irrational adhesion that is faith.”²² As this reflects, in the Fournier dossier *entendensa del be* expressed multiple things. And in its multivalence, it could be contradictory, demonstrating its complexity.

We can certainly interpret *entendensa* theologically, an “understanding” that constituted a faith. People – not just elite “perfects” – had *entendensa* or not; it could develop over time; it could be an immediate gift. It was a profound, even necessary, component of one’s individual identity as a believer.²³ As it had to be cultivated or gifted by God, *entendensa* was not inherent in children. Arnaud Sicre was too young when his mother Sibylle became a “believer” in heresy. However, his older brother Bernard “already had the use of reason and began to have *entendenciam de be*.”²⁴ Ideally, one had *entendensa* as a prerequisite for “baptism,” or the Good Christians’ ritual of heretication, which remitted all sins and was usually done at the end of life. Bélibaste once preached a sermon against Catholic baptism, problematic in part because “infants. . .were not at the age where they might promise something nor could answer the priest to anything about which they were asked.” True baptism instituted by God was

that baptism which is given to a person after he came to the years of discretion, and especially after age 20, when already a person discerns between good and evil, has been instructed in their faith and promises them that he will keep their faith: that is good baptism, and believers began to be baptized because they had *la entendensa del be*, but then they were completely baptized when they were received by them and hereticated, and made Good Christians.²⁵

Pierre Maury also testified that heresiarchs Peire Autier and Prades Tavernier once had a theological disagreement:

When a certain very little girl who was still nursing. . .had been hereticated, [Maury] heard from. . .Peire Autier. . .that he did not think it well done that

²¹RIJF, 1:417, n.165; 2:269, n.334. See too Jean Duvernoy, *Le catharisme: la religion des cathares* (Toulouse: Privat, 1976), 143, where he describes *entendensa del be* as “gnosis.” Francesco Zambon, “Dissimulation, secret et allégorie dans le dualisme chrétien du Moyen Age: paulicianisme, bogomilisme, catharisme,” *Annali di Scienze Religiose* n.s. 4 (2011): 187.

²²“Le sens ne fait aucun doute: avoir l’entendensa del ben, c’est partager les croyances des bons-hommes ou bons chrétiens. . .l’express traduit moins un acte de foi, q’un acte de connaissance. . .Mais l’entendensa del ben n’est pas seulement un savoir qui peut s’apprendre. Elle est aussi un lien spirituel.” Roquebert, “*Entendensa del Be*,” 2.

²³“Être cathare, c’est avoir l’entendensa de be.” Duvernoy, *Le catharisme*, 274.

²⁴“*Vos et Petrus frater vester non habetis entendensa de be, quia illo tempore quo incepit mater vestra esse credens, vos duo eratis parvi. . .Sed quia Bernardus iam habebat usum rationis et incipiebat habere entendenciam de be. . .*” RIJF, 2:28. The Latinizing here is rare.

²⁵RIJF, 3:202.

the girl had been hereticated, because she did not have understanding [*entendencia*]; and. . . a Good Christian ought not to lay his hands on such who do not have *la entendensa*, but such children are to be given up to God. . . And when [Maury] afterwards spoke with the heretic Prades Tavernier about Peire Autier's words concerning this heretication, the heretic responded that for such children a Good Christian ought to do what he could, and God would do what He wanted.²⁶

However, this "understanding" was neither simple cognitive reason nor the ability to consent to principles. *Entendensa* was also described as the *result* of that ritual of heretication as well as its prerequisite. Pierre Maury testified that "Baptism is nothing other than 'to give *la entendensa del be*,' that is to have the faith of the heretics. . . he heard from them that nothing happened when children were hereticated (or according to them baptized), because they did not have *la entendensa*."²⁷

Beyond the individual's development in the faith and readiness for spiritual ascent through heretication, *entendensa* played a role in the Good Christians' grand theology and cosmology:

The aforesaid spirits who fell from Heaven, seeing themselves deceived by the enemy of the holy Father, remembering for themselves the glory that they had with the holy Father that they had lost, were daily supplicating the holy Father that he might grant [it] to them, because they had abandoned him by following his enemy. The devil, perceiving this, said, "*Those spirits who remember the glory that they lost, for that reason they beg the holy Father to take pity on them. I will give them tunics, clothed with which they will not otherwise remember the glory that they have lost.*" And then Satan, the enemy of God, made human bodies in which he enclosed the said spirits, so that they might not remember the glory of the holy Father. Which spirits, when they exit one tunic – that is, one body – go quickly, very fearful, *espaurucatz* [fearfully], and so quickly do they run that if a spirit had left one body in Valencia and had to enter another in the county of Foix, and it was raining hard, throughout the whole space that is between those two places, scarcely three drops of rain would touch it. For thus running *espaurucatz*, it puts itself in the first opening that it can find empty, that is in the womb of whatever animal conceiving an offspring that is not yet animated, whether it be a dog. . . or a horse. . . or even in the womb of a woman. So. . . if the said spirit had done evil in the first body, it was incorporated into the body of a brute animal; but if it had not done evil, it entered the body of a woman. And thus the spirits went from tunic to tunic until they might enter a beautiful tunic, that is into the body of some man or woman who had *entendensa de be*, and in that body they might be saved and might return, after they had gone out from that beautiful tunic, that is from the body of someone of their sect. . . If nevertheless the said spirits entered by stealth into the body of a woman who has *entendensa de be*, having left the body of a woman they were transformed into men, because the holy Father had sworn that no woman should otherwise enter his kingdom.²⁸

²⁶*RJIF*, 3:144.

²⁷*RJIF*, 3:228.

²⁸*RJIF*, 2:34–35.

Yet here too there was complexity, as entering the body of someone without *entendensa* meant, then, that need for the soul during its new lifetime to cultivate *entendensa* or be gifted it. One heretic recalled having been a horse in a previous life: “Finally, the horse having died, his spirit entered the body of a pregnant woman, and was incorporated in the body of the boy whom the woman carried in her womb. Which boy, when he had grown, came to *entendensa de be*.”²⁹

Although it is not quite compatible with the group’s theory of metempsychosis, *entendensa* also had a tinge of the genealogical, as if one’s susceptibility to *be* was influenced by relatives’ possession of it. We might see this as the heretics’ own manifestation of Jacques Fournier’s occasional application during questioning of “race” (*genus*) or “nation” (*gens*) to describe a group united by belief and ritual. Arnaud Sicre’s mother Sybille den Balle was a heretic, but his father was Catholic. When Arnaud visited the heretic Guillelma Maury in Sant Meteo, a village in Catalonia where the exiles had settled, she asked him privately:

“Would you not thank God if *le be* were shown to you?” And he answered her: “And what kind of thing is that *be* about which you speak?” She responded that that *be* was what his mother had had, and his maternal grandfather, but not his father; “because your father did not have *entendement de be*, and for this reason your mother kicked him out of her house.” He, understanding that she was speaking about heretics, answered her that he did not want to see that *be*, because he and his father’s household had sustained much harm because of those heretics.³⁰

This was one way in which *entendensa de be* stood at (or, created) the intersection of individual believer and the community of believers. Another way was the juxtaposition of *le be* as denoting both the knowledge that someone “had,” and the community itself. Pierre Maury encouraged Arnaud Sicre to find his family: “If you can find Alazaicis [Arnaud’s rich aunt] and [brother] Bernard and lead them here, so that together we might stay next to *le be*, I would be very happy, because there is no one who sometimes has *la entendensa de be* who does not gladly wish to stay next to *le be*,” because, as he said, “no one knows when he might die, and it is fitting that a person strive to be next to *le be*, so that if he becomes ill, he can have *le be*.”³¹

As this suggests, *be* could connote the group itself. One of the dossier’s mentions of *le be* not from the Sicre or Maury depositions is the testimony in 1321 of Arnaud Tesseyre, son-in-law of Peire Autier: “Asked if Bon Guilhem [Autier’s son] said to him that Peire and Guilhem had found heretics or Good Christians or *del be de Dieu*, he answered no. Asked if he asked Bon Guilhem if Peire and Guilhem had yet found good Christians or heretics, or *del be*, or [if] the aforesaid heretics or good Christians or *del be* had even come to them, he answered no.”³² In Pierre Maury’s encouragement to Arnaud, *le be* might also be “the good” personified and radiated by Guilhem Bélibaste, as *be* could also signify an individual heresiarch. The deponent – or Fournier and his scribes – sometimes glossed this explicitly in testimony. The heretic Emersende Marty told Pierre Maury after an absence that “he acted badly, because he so

²⁹RIJF, 2:36.

³⁰RIJF, 2:22; 3:103–104, 3:120.

³¹RIJF, 2:29, see too 2:43.

³²RIJF, 2:217.

removed himself from the *be* (that is, from the heretic).” Béliaste likewise told Maury that “a person ought to keep himself near the *be* (that is, the heretic).”³³

Extending from its connotation as the group, *entendensa del be* could serve as a password amid the secrecy imposed upon believers after decades of inquisitorial pursuit. When Arnaud Sicre first encountered Guillelma Maury in Sant Meteo, she pretended not to be from Montailou, although Arnaud recognized her dialect. Guillelma knew Arnaud’s mother, but not his brother Bernard, who had assumed another name: “And then sighing she said, ‘Oh my, how many wandering friends of God go through the land, [each] of whom does not know the other!’ and added: ‘Do you not have *entendensa de be*?’ . . . He responded yes, of every ‘good,’ if God wished it. And then she said, ‘We live in that town and we can see each other on Sundays and holidays.’”³⁴ This was a cagey answer, transforming Guillelma’s group-specific “Knowledge of the Good” into a vaguer “good” about which any fine person might have knowledge. But Arnaud’s affirmative answer worked. Pierre Maury warned Arnaud that believers would not readily “show themselves” to him unless he gave “certain signs” of his contacts with the group’s leaders. Pierre’s advice perfectly combined *le be* as the group, and as individual theological knowledge: “As a sign, he should say the following words: that he had found *le be*, that is [the names of six particular heretics], who had given him *la entendensa de be*.”³⁵ *Entendensa* then served as the glue of an unstable community as well as the community itself. As Pierre Maury said, “heretics among themselves call each other brothers and . . . ought more to love believers, however foreign they may be, than a believer ought to love his own brother who is not a believer. . . .because both have *la entendensa*.” Bodily “consanguinity or affinity” meant nothing, as earthy and transitory as physical bodies themselves, and *entendensa* was not merely superficial knowledge that the group existed. “Only union according to the spirit, which is through *la entendensa*, they judge to be true propinquity.”³⁶

Notably, *entendensa* often arose in the context of mixed heretic-orthodox marriages, dividing marriageable from unmarriageable. In this culture of fear, marriage was a double risk: a non-heretical spouse might reveal the group to the authorities, and might refuse to arrange a heretication for a dying believer. That second risk fused group belonging with the practical demands of its belief in metempsychosis. Without heretication, the dead person’s soul could not shed its “tunic” (its physical body) and return to heaven. Instead, it must fly to a new, available body on earth.³⁷ According to Pierre Maury, Guilhem Béliaste gave an explanation flavored by the New Testament:

He told [Arnaud Sicre] that if he wished to take a wife. . . it would be better that he should take Mathena, because she was *de la entendensa*. . . because. . . a man ought not to plant a thornbush or brambles at the door of his house, but a good fig tree. [Pierre Maury understood] by this parable that believers who take wives who are not *de la entendensa* are constrained and prohibited by their wives, as by thornbushes, so that their husbands in a mortal illness [are not] received by heretics.³⁸

³³RJF, 3:182; see also 2:65, 3:196–197, 3:203–204.

³⁴RJF, 2:22.

³⁵RJF, 2:44.

³⁶RJF, 3:242.

³⁷RJF, 2:35.

³⁸RJF, 3:209–210. Cf. Matthew 7:15–20 (this passage also includes the warning about wolves disguised as sheep); Luke 13:6–9; etc.

Bélibaste complained that “if their wives are not of the *entendensa*, we cannot enter their houses.” He refused to attend such weddings.³⁹ The key was physical safety and spiritual development, which in this inquisitorial environment could not be untangled: “when a husband and wife are of *la entendensa del be*, among themselves they may better speak about that *entendensa*, and if one of them were sick, the healthy spouse could arrange that the sick spouse might be received into the sect of the heretics, and also they might better and more securely gather the lords (that is, heretics) and hear their preachings and consolations.”⁴⁰ On the contrary, possessing *entendensa* imposed upon the believer moral obligations to the community: “After a person had *la entendensa*, he ought to do only good to the good, that is to heretics or to believers of heretics.”⁴¹ When Pierre Maury asked if someone “was of *la entendensa*,” the answer was “yes, and that she would not do evil, but rather good, to them, that is the heretics.”⁴² This meant discretion and protection from arrest, as well as financial support. Those with *entendensa* who betrayed their colleagues to inquisitors were even more culpable than betrayers without it, and would receive a greater punishment from God.⁴³

Although Fournier’s dossier includes testimonies from dozens of devotees of the Good Christians, *entendensa* appears most often in the depositions of Arnaud Sicre and Pierre Maury, both associated with the exile community in Catalonia. One reason was the environment of fear among these exiles, who had fled arrest and were liable for the severest punishments, death by burning or life imprisonment, if caught. Many accused “heretics” in the Fournier dossier, and in other medieval-inquisitorial registers, maintained close spiritual and social connections with Latin Christianity. But the Catalanian exiles were explicitly and self-consciously heterodox, separatist, and anti-clerical. This intensified the sociological dimension of *entendensa*, its character as a password, a badge, an adhesive, and a preserver of closed (and hence theoretically risk-free) community. It is ironic that its supposed ability to distinguish insiders and outsiders produced precisely the community’s vulnerability at the hands of Arnaud Sicre. A fractured family like Sicre’s – one parent a heretic, the other a Catholic kicked out of the house, a lost inheritance, a brother who had changed his name and disappeared – was not unusual. One shocking episode recounted in the Fournier dossier is the plan to murder Jeanne, the Catholic daughter of heretic Emersende Marty. The group, including Emersende, debated whether Jeanne should be poisoned, stabbed, or pushed off a cliff, justifying the murder by fear of her betrayal. Citing the Latin church’s common biblical justification for punishing heresy, but reversing its symbolic referents, the group wondered: Had Jesus Christ not said to separate the wheat from the tares, and burn the tares?⁴⁴ In this inquisitorial context of fear, secrecy, flight, pursuit, and exile, familial bonds dissolved – a dissolution that had theological as well as practical

³⁹RIJF, 3:189.

⁴⁰RIJF, 3:204.

⁴¹RIJF, 3:185.

⁴²RIJF, 3:143.

⁴³RIJF, 3:233.

⁴⁴Matthew 13:24–30. RIJF, 2:55–57. Evoked in Christian heresiology since antiquity, Christ’s parable of the wheat and tares initially seemed to prescribe toleration, preserving heretics in hopes of their eventual conversion. But especially after Pope Innocent III used it when defining heresy as treason against God in *Vergentis in senium* (1199), it prescribed repression. To keep wheat wholesome, tares must be destroyed. This interpretation reached laypeople via its use in anti-heretical sermons; e.g., Humbert of Romans, *De eruditione praedicatorum*, in *Maxima bibliotheca veterum patrum*, 28 vols., ed. Marguerin de la Bigne (Lyon: Apud Anissonios, 1677), 25:554–555.

grounds. Bodies and bodily ties were nothing. *Entendensa del be* not only meant individual enlightenment and salvation; it also replaced (and excelled) these lost bonds, re-identified a person, was open to anyone, and formed connective tissue, an elective community.⁴⁵

Entendensa del be, then, had for Good Christians many interlocking meanings: theological, sociological, and genealogical; individual and collective. We might identify it as “vernacular theology.” Discussion of medieval vernacular theology has often concerned texts by fifteenth-century English writers, and especially those attached to the heretics branded as “lollards.”⁴⁶ Closer chronologically to Good Christians was vernacular writing by the hybrid religious women known as Beguines, including Marguerite Porete, whose French *Mirror of Simple Souls* led to her execution in Paris about a decade before Fournier’s investigations.⁴⁷ *Entendensa del be*, however, was oral, disseminated by the Good Christians’ preaching elites in sermons and by believers in conversation. And our awareness of its use only comes via testimony in inquisitorial trials. Certainly this renders *entendensa* and *be* more difficult to apprehend than theology in knowingly composed and circulated vernacular texts, as scholars of medieval heresy have long struggled over our (in)ability to access and to reconstruct beliefs solely apparent in trial transcripts, given the various layers of obstruction between deponent and finished dossier. And fourteenth-century Occitania did not experience the same kind of public reflection on the respective theological capacities of Latin and vernaculars, occurring within the broader context of medieval discussions of *literati* and *illiterati*, as occurred elsewhere.⁴⁸ But we might still see *entendensa del be* as part of an organic vernacular theological vocabulary that encompassed, but also exceeded, “belief.”

More pointedly, we might compare the vernacular *entendensa del be*, in its plentitude – an emotive affinity for and thoughtful acceptance of a credal system about the divine, felt inside by the individual and manifested outwardly, self-consciously claimed and joined to group belonging and boundary-establishing – to what arose in the modern West as “religion.” As stated above, some scholars, echoing arguments about analogies for modern religion beyond the West, have proposed Latin terms that collectively, if unintentionally, mapped similar territory to “religion” despite *religio*’s semantic strictures. But the significance of *entendensa del be* is not to discover another medieval term, in the vernacular, that demonstrates a “sense of religion” before the concept matured in the modern West. Rather, it is to observe inquisition’s role in shaping that

⁴⁵This harkens back to the etymology of “heresy” in the Greek *haeresis*, “choice.”

⁴⁶Nicholas Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409,” *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (October 1995): 822–864; Nicholas Watson, *Balaam’s Ass: Vernacular Theology before the English Reformation. Vol. 1: Frameworks, Arguments, English to 1250* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022); Vincent Gillespie, “Vernacular Theology,” in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 401–420.

⁴⁷Discussions of medieval vernacular theology in languages other than English has emphasized the prominence of female writers; see, e.g., Bernard McGinn, “Introduction,” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994), 6–14; Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012); and the foundational Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

⁴⁸Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change”; Shannon McSheffrey, “Heresy, Orthodoxy and English Vernacular Religion 1480–1525,” *Past & Present* 186, no. 1 (February 2005): 47–80.

phenomenon. Visible throughout the Fournier dossier is the environment of fear, flight, and secrecy that was inseparable from heterodox belief by the fourteenth century, a clear change from, say, mid-thirteenth-century trial transcripts. Again, the phrase is concentrated precisely among the exiles who had so much to lose. The Good Christians' experiences of inquisitorial repression helped to solder the vernacular concept of *entendensa del be*. If that concept was as meaningful and multivalent as the dossier suggests, then we would have an earlier instance of what has been argued for the modern notion of religion. But here, power and persecution would have driven the oppressed, and not the oppressors, to develop it.

III. *Entendensa* Untranslated

Our second possibility for how *entendensa del be* suggests earlier origins for "religion" is the opposite of the above. What if it was not meaningful at all? One might simply object that Fournier's witnesses spoke in Occitan, and they used Occitan to describe a plain thing: understanding of the good. No more fanciful or profound interpretation, whipping the phrase up into vernacular theology or proto-religion, is required. But in the dossier's dozens of depositions over several years, *entendensa del be* was one of the rare terms that Fournier's scribes left untranslated. (Vernacular testimony was recorded in Latin. It was then read back to the deponent in the vernacular to confirm its accuracy; the dossier often mentions that Fournier did this himself.) Much of the reason may be the idiosyncrasy of notary Guillaume Peyre-Barthe. Peyre-Barthe's regular job was as priest in the village of Vira in the Pyrenees, within Bishop Fournier's diocese of Pamiers. Peyre-Barthe enjoyed making himself visible in the dossier; on a few occasions he explained that scribe Batalha de Penna had recorded a citation and sentence because he himself had been sick.⁴⁹ When transcribing inquisitorial depositions in the Latin register, Peyre-Barthe seems to have been especially fond of keeping words in Occitan. (Note *espaurucastz* above, which was his doing.) More pointedly, Peyre-Barthe and other scribes often did not translate what they perceived to be Good Christians' technical terms, such as *la endura* for the suicide-by-starvation adopted by dying believers after the ritual of heretication, and *senhor* as an honorific for heresiarchs. Guillaume Peyre-Barthe's failure to translate *entendensa* and *be* suggests that he accepted them as similar technical terms, components of what Fournier's inquisitorial personnel categorized as heretics' "law," "faith," or "belief."⁵⁰ Those terms were not to be translated into Latin, as a marker of difference. Fournier and his scribes were speakers of Occitan, with their own resonances for *entendensa* and *be*. In other words, they may themselves have concluded that *entendensa del be* constituted vernacular theology.

But a weightier possibility leads us again, albeit differently, to how *entendensa del be* is suggestive for rethinking the formation of modern religion. Fournier and his scribes may have misinterpreted *entendensa del be* as a technical term. They may even have wished to present it as one. An especially striking appearance of *entendensa* is in the 1323 testimony of Jean Pelissier from Montailou. Here, *entendensa* was introduced not in Pelissier's answer, but instead in Fournier's question: "Asked if he saw. . .heretics or men about whom it was said that they were good men or good

⁴⁹*RJF*, 2:267, 1:349, 1:518.

⁵⁰Compare a contemporary scribe's bilingual approach in 1329: "Dixit quod dum semel predicabat dixit. . .hec verba: 'Tienhe sen donques an le plus fort,' Latine: 'Teneant se ergo cum fortiori.'" Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Collection Doat 27, fols. 203r-v.

Christians. . . or about those men [of] ‘*la entendensa de be*’. . . he answered no.”⁵¹ We also mentioned above that *be* was sometimes glossed as “the heretic” in recorded testimony. This may have been a written gloss by the scribe, not an oral gloss by the deponent. Pierre Maury’s case is also noteworthy. The scribe who recorded Arnaud Sicre’s confession was Guillaume Peyre-Barthe.⁵² But Pierre Maury, after his arrest in 1323, was first examined in Barcelona by inquisitor of Aragon Bernard of Puigcerdà, recorded by the notary Jaume de Monviejo. After Pope John XXII ordered that Maury be sent from Barcelona to Carcassonne’s inquisitorial jurisdiction, a transcription of the Barcelona trial was sent to Jean de Beaune, inquisitor of Carcassonne. And when Jean de Beaune in turn sent Maury to Jacques Fournier in Pamiers, a copy of the Barcelona testimony was sent too, for inclusion in Fournier’s dossier. Although *entendensa* occurred frequently in Maury’s testimony in Pamiers, the term never appeared in his record from Barcelona, despite similar questions about Guilhem Bélibaste’s beliefs and actions that might be expected to evoke it.⁵³ This may be due to comparative length. Maury’s testimony in Pamiers, unlike that in Barcelona, was a remarkable marathon session, handled by four scribes – Guillaume Peyre-Barthe, Jean Strabaud (who wrote most of it), and Guillaume Nadini, with the final copy made by Jean Jabaud. But the prominence of *entendensa del be* in Pamiers may also have resulted from the presumption, or direction, of Fournier or his scribes. And, significantly, this particular “technical” term would confirm theologically the group’s character as heretics.

Medievalists have often remarked upon the problems of language and interpretation in reconstructing heresy, and the impossibility of reading trial transcripts as transparent windows onto belief. (That was indeed how Ladurie approached Fournier’s dossier.) But here we should particularly note how, as we saw above, modern scholars have positioned language as crucial in the historical process of building religion as a concept. Whether early-modern Jesuits or Victorian Orientalists, they translated, interpreted, filtered, and cohered what they heard in other languages and among other cultures into a “religion” modeled upon Christianity.⁵⁴ The argument is strikingly applicable to Latin-Christian heresy in medieval Europe. The Good Christians are central to a debate among scholars, divided between so-called “skeptics” and “traditionalists,” on the reality of medieval heresy. The debate turns on whether high-medieval churchmen invented heresy, in the sense of rebranding scattered dissent into an organized “heresy” linked to heresies in the church’s past, creating marginalized “others” as a means to expand power. In this view, some laypeople who heard clerics’ panicked claims of mysterious Good Christians eventually adopted their supposed beliefs and rites for themselves, ultimately leading to Fournier’s fourteenth-century deponents. Or, on the contrary, did medieval Europe experience genuinely coherent and thriving movements of self-conscious, organized separatists, like the Good Christians whose origins lay in centuries-old Byzantine sects, and whose existence in western Europe was due to evangelism from the east?

⁵¹The internal quotation is Duvernoy’s. *RJIF*, 3:77; Vat. Lat. 4030, f.239v. As we saw above, Fournier had asked Arnaud Tesseyre about *le be* in 1321; n.52.

⁵²*RJIF*, 2:213.

⁵³*RJIF*, 3:110–118.

⁵⁴Lorenzen, “Who Invented Hinduism?,” 632; on late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philology in this process, see also Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 147–178, 207–256; Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 24–29. On philology as key in medieval Latin-Christian approaches to Islam, see Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qur’an in Latin Christendom, 1140–1560* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

That is, the debate is fundamentally over whether medieval clerics, in earnest from the twelfth century, did exactly what David Lorenzen describes as a common argument about the modern British–European formation of Hinduism: imposing a “single conceptual category” upon unconnected, incidental opinions and practices, which was eventually embraced as an identity by those to whom it had been applied. Likewise, we saw above Girardot’s description of the “taxonomic crystallization” by which British and European elites formed “Taoism” as a “reified entity.” But if the skeptics are correct, such a process had already occurred in the Middle Ages, *within* European Christianity – as the formation of “heresy” and heresies like the “Good Christians.” While that reification took place via ecclesiastical treatises and sermons against heretics, inquisitorial trials were also dynamic venues for “taxonomic crystallization,” with their formularies for questions, inquisitors’ assumptions, circulating documentation, and so on. And as we may see here, inquisitions and their documentation allowed the presentation of something like *entendensa del be* – perhaps a wholly banal and unexceptional “understanding of good” – as a theologically meaningful technical term, by not translating it. Here, too, as we see in the genuine dualism of Fournier’s fourteenth-century deponents, elite reification eventually led to others embracing a now-cohered *fides*.⁵⁵

This is how we might reposition that irresolvable debate between skeptics and traditionalists over medieval heresy. Regardless of whether Good Christians were always an organized, sophisticated church with links to Byzantine predecessors, or instead originated as an applied ecclesiastical fantasy, the significance of the encounter between inquisitors and accused heretics remains. It was not just an early stage in a history of European persecution, although it was that. More specifically, as the inquisitorial encounter contributed to the “crystallization” of medieval heresy, it anticipated – or even initiated – the strategies by which Europeans would build modern religion. Even if (especially if?) *entendensa del be* means nothing, the very presentation of untranslated “technical terms,” the transmutation of witness statements into organized and value-laden conceptual categories, and into cohesive groups, helps us to see how Europeans left *religio* behind for “religion.” Once again, inquisitorial persecution was the crucible.

IV. Conquest, Inquisition, and Religion

Our final possibility for anticipating religion in the Fournier dossier via *entendensa del be* relates to our above questions about its character as vernacular theology, or conversely as the misleading product of inquisitorial agency. But we will recede from our tight focus on the dossier, for a broader view. The role that *entendensa* plays here is more allusive and suggestive. Nevertheless, it encourages us to locate the Fournier dossier within an environment in which papal efforts against heresy in Occitania intersected with the imposition of Capetian royal power, and consequent resistance. And that environment again contributes to re-evaluating the origins of religion.

At the time of the Albigensian Crusade (1209–1229) and after it, resistance to the Latin church’s authority appeared, among other places, in the troubadour culture of

⁵⁵Girardot, “Finding the Way,” 108. As Mark Pegg argues about the Occitan ritual of *courtesia*, interpreted by clerics as the heretical rite of *adoratio*: “the friar-inquisitors objectified a style of highly contingent politeness into the classifiable form of *adoratio*, so that it forced people to see their past and future nods and benedictions as much more formulaic than they ever were – a reciprocal sharpness of vision was produced within the good men and good women themselves.” Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels*, 103.

Occitania and Catalonia. Many scholars have theorized links between southern troubadour culture and the heresy of the Good Christians, both sometimes argued to have germinated in the liberal cultural atmosphere of pre-Crusade lordly rule in Occitania. Older theories that linked the development of courtly love with that heresy are insupportable.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the personal and cultural relationships between troubadours and the Occitan nobility are certain. This included troubadours patronized by and loyal to the supposedly pro-heretical lords, like Count Raymond VI of Toulouse (r. 1194–1222), who were the Crusade’s targets. During the Crusade and in the wake of its victory by the northern French, several troubadours wrote *sirventes* (acerbic political songs) lambasting the war, the Latin papacy that had summoned and supported it, and invading foreign, French crusaders. Troubadours celebrated Raymond and his son and successor, Count Raymond VII (r. 1222–1249), as heroic defenders of Occitan independence against venal conquest by greedy Frenchmen allied with corrupt clerics.⁵⁷ Writing in a Toulouse besieged by crusaders in 1229, Guillem Figueira (fl. 1216–1250) bitterly castigated in *Un sirventes farai en est son que m’agensa* the “Rome” responsible for wolfish papal Crusades that brutally sheared Christian sheep, killing them and persecuting the honorable Raymond VII. Guilhem cleverly reversed here the church’s long-time rhetoric that depicted clerics as protective shepherds guarding vulnerable Christian sheep against heretical wolves (Matthew 7:15).⁵⁸ After the French victory, Figueira fled Toulouse for Lombardy.⁵⁹ Figueira knew troubadour Aimeric de Peguilhan (c. 1175–c. 1221), also from Toulouse, who had left for Lombardy as the Crusade erupted. Aimeric dedicated songs to a “count” (surely Raymond VI of Toulouse) and to King of Aragon Pedro II, who died fighting the French crusaders at the Battle of Muret in 1213.⁶⁰ According to one manuscript of Aimeric’s contemporary biography, the troubadour died in *eretgia* – heresy.⁶¹

⁵⁶See Linda M. Paterson, *The World of the Troubadours: Medieval Occitan Society, c. 1100–c. 1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 332–343; René Nelli, “Le catharisme vu à travers les troubadours,” *Cathares en Languedoc* (Toulouse: Privat, 1968), 177–197; Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, rev. ed., trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York: Pantheon, 1956), 75–102; Jeffrey Burton Russell, “Courtly Love as Religious Dissent,” *Catholic Historical Review* 51, no. 1 (April 1965): 31–44; Duvernoy, *Le catharisme*, 271–280; and the very thorough and skeptical Robert Lafont, “Catharisme et littérature occitane: La marque par l’absence,” in *Les cathares en Occitanie*, eds. Robert Lafont et al. (Paris: Fayard, 1982), 345–407.

⁵⁷Linda M. Paterson, *Singing the Crusades: French and Occitan Lyric Responses to the Crusading Movements, 1137–1336* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 154–166; Alfred Jeanroy, *La poésie lyrique des Troubadours* (Toulouse: Privat, 1934), 2:212–232; Joseph Anglade, *Histoire sommaire de la littérature méridionale au moyen âge* (Paris: Boccard, 1921), 85–98.

⁵⁸“Etz vos e Cistel, qu’a Bezers fezetz faire/Mout estranh mazel. . . Car’ avetz d’anhel ab simpla gardadura./ Dedins lops rabtaz./Serpens coronatz/De vibr’ engenratz, per quel diableus apella/Comals sieus privatz.” Guilhem Figueira, *ein provenzalischer Troubadour*, ed. Emil Levy (Berlin: Liebrecht, 1880), 2:35–43. Figueira referred here to Arnaud Amaury, the Crusade’s spiritual leader, who reportedly authorized brutality in Béziers in 1209 with “Kill them all, God will sort them out.” English translation in *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade: A Sourcebook*, eds. Catherine Léglu, Rebecca Rist, and Claire Taylor (London: Routledge, 2014), 115–118. Palmer A. Throop, “A Criticism of Papal Crusade Policy in Old French and Provençal,” *Speculum* 13, no. 4 (October 1938): 383–384. Based on this *sirventes*, René Nelli argued that Figueira was “surely” a Good Christian. Nelli, “Le catharisme vu à travers,” 184.

⁵⁹*Biographies des troubadours: textes provençaux des XIIIe et XIVe siècles*, eds. Jean Boutière and Alexander Herman Schutz (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1964), 434–435.

⁶⁰*Biographies*, 425–431.

⁶¹*Biographies*, 428, n.8.

After the Treaty of Meaux ended the Crusade, papally sponsored heresy inquisitions arrived in Occitania in the 1230s. These complemented extant bishops' inquisitions, like those Jacques Fournier would conduct in Pamiers. Inquisitions also aggravated the increasing visibility and effects in Occitania of French rule. This was especially so after Count Raymond VII's last failed rebellion against the French in 1242, and then the deaths in 1271 of Jeanne de Toulouse (Raymond's daughter) and Alphonse de Poitiers (brother of French King Louis IX), whose betrothal had sealed the peace. At that point, the conquered southern territories were wholly absorbed into the Capetian Kingdom of France, with all the practicalities and emotions that implied.⁶² In the decades surrounding 1300, fierce and sometimes violent opposition to inquisitions in Occitania intermingled with antipathy to French rule. For instance, amid his episcopal inquisitions Jacques Fournier helped to judge the notorious trial in 1319 of anti-inquisitorial activist and friar Bernard Délicieux. Bernard, who initially petitioned French King Philip IV (r. 1285–1314) to transfer Dominican authority over southern inquisitions to his own Franciscan order, turned on the king when royal support evaporated. Among other charges, Bernard was accused of treason for plotting with several laymen in 1304–1305 to overthrow the French, inviting Prince Ferrand of Majorca to usurp Capetian rule. Philip, Bernard fumed, was an invader who allowed inquisitors' corrupt exploitation of orthodox southerners.⁶³

This was an environment in which *sirventes'* anti-clerical, anti-French themes still resonated – now more bitterly flavored, amid the loss of independence. In 1323, seven troubadours in Toulouse formed a “joyous company,” the *Consistori del Gai Saber*, in order to reinvigorate Occitan amid a fear of decline via French linguistic and cultural influence. In this sense, *sirventes* circulating at the time of Fournier's inquisitions constituted patriotic dissent against new rule by what were often understood to be foreign conquerors.⁶⁴ And that dissent embedded hostility against a Latin church that was (usually) allied with, and offered moral justification for, those conquerors, while actively policing faith via inquisitions.⁶⁵ Unsurprisingly, inquisitors could brand as heresy this heady brew of Occitan spirit, resistance to French rule and to inquisitorial authority, and angry *sirventes*. For example, in 1274 one Bernart Raimon Baranhon was interrogated by Toulouse inquisitors about Guilhem Figueira's

⁶²There is copious literature on the transition to Capetian authority in Occitania. See, e.g., Justine Firnhaber-Baker, *Violence and the State in Languedoc, 1250–1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); John Hine Mundy, *Society and Government at Toulouse in the Age of the Cathars* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997). On “nationalist” feeling in thirteenth-century Occitania, see Andrew Roach, “Occitania Past and Present: Southern Consciousness in Medieval and Modern French Politics,” *History Workshop Journal* 43, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 1–22.

⁶³Guillaume Peyre-Barthe served as notary in this trial, too, and recorded Délicieux's torture. *Processus Bernardi Delitiosi: The Trial of Fr. Bernard Délicieux, 3 September–8 December 1319*, ed. Alan Friedlander (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1996), 142–143, 180–181.

⁶⁴Gisèle Clément-Dumas, *Des moines aux troubadours IXe–XIIIe siècle: La musique médiévale en Languedoc et en Catalogne* (Montpellier: Les Presses du Languedoc, 2004), 110–117, 125–129. While post-1229 northern composers readily imitated and adopted the musical characteristics of southern troubadours, the reverse was not the case. Elizabeth Aubrey, “The Dialectic between Occitania and France in the Thirteenth Century,” *Early Music History* 16 (October 1997): 1–53.

⁶⁵To King Philip III of France, “the land of. . .Toulouse had been handed over to him by God [terram. . .Tholose a Deo sibi traditam]” and he viewed southern resistance to royal authority in this light. Guillaume de Puylaurens, *Chronique*, ed. Jean Duvernoy (Paris: CNRS, 1976), 204.

Un sirventes farai en est son que m'agensa, "which *cobla* the witness recited in public many times and in front of many people."⁶⁶

Returning to the Fournier dossier, the posthumous trial of the knight Bertrand de Tays in 1324 also targeted a *sirventes*. A witness, Jean Davy, testified that about 20 years earlier he and others were at the Cathedral of St Antonin in Pamiers for a Mass celebrated by then-Bishop of Pamiers, Bernard Saisset (r. 1295–1311). Bernard Saisset was a notorious partisan of Pope Boniface VIII in his protracted dispute with French King Philip IV, and was truculently involved in several politico-ecclesiastical conflicts in Occitania. Bernard had been charged with treason and heresy at King Philip's instigation in 1301, and temporarily expelled from France. The event recounted by Davy was presumably in 1305, when Bernard Saisset had returned to Pamiers after a few years in exile.⁶⁷ Jean Davy testified that during Mass, Bishop Bernard's brother, the knight Guillaume Saisset, recited part of the anti-clerical song *Li clerc si fan pastor*. That *sirventes* was composed by troubadour Peire Cardenal (d. c. 1272), who had served at the courts of both Crusade-era Counts of Toulouse, Raymond VI and Raymond VII. Like Guilhem Figueira's *Un sirventes*, which also attracted inquisitorial attention, Cardenal's *Li clerc si fan pastor* reversed the church's claim to follow Christ by guarding its faithful sheep from heretical wolves: "Clergy make themselves shepherds and they are killers."⁶⁸ According to Davy, Bertrand de Tays "begged" Guillaume Saisset to teach him *Li clerc si fan pastor*, and then recited it as part of his "frequent" blasphemy and anti-clerical invective. As well he would: Bishop Saisset had once asked him "whom he hated, clerics or the French," and Bertrand answered "that he hated clerics more, because clerics had introduced the French into those parts, and if there had been no clerics, the French never would have come there."⁶⁹

As Bertrand de Tays' posthumous trial shows, the waning of troubadour culture by the mid-fourteenth century meant little amid the continued circulation of thirteenth-century songs, and inquisition's penchant for decades-old memories. And those long memories incorporated the tense aftermath of the Crusade and the imposition of French rule. Jean Davy began his testimony in Bertrand de Tays' trial by remarking

⁶⁶Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Collection Doat 25, f.198v-199r; Jeanroy, *La poesie lyrique*, 2:225 n.1. See also Catherine Léglu, "Vernacular Poems and Inquisitors in Languedoc and Champagne, ca. 1242–1249," *Viator* 33 (2002): 117–132.

⁶⁷*RIJF*, 3:312. Jeffrey H. Denton, "Bernard Saisset and the Franco-Papal Rift of December 1301," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 102, no. 2 (2007): 399–427; Yves Dossat, "Patriotisme méridional du clergé au XIIIe siècle," in *Les évêques, les clercs et le roi* (Toulouse: Privat, 1972), 424–428; Jean-Marie Vidal, "Bernard Saisset: Évêque de Pamiers (1232–1311)," *Revue des sciences religieuses* t. 5 (1925), fasc. 3, 416–438 and fasc. 4, 565–590; t. 6, fasc. 1 (1926), 50–77 and fasc. 2, 177–198. The manuscript containing the Fournier dossier includes three letters that Archbishop of Narbonne Gilles Aycelin de Montaigu sent to Bernard Saisset in 1309, forwarding instructions from Pope Clement V – an ally of King Philip IV – about inquisitions against the Templars. Vat. Lat. MS 4030, fols. 3r-6v.

⁶⁸The version recited by Guillaume Saisset and subsequently by Bertrand de Tays had "deceivers" [*galia-dor*] rather than "killers" [*aucizedor*]. On this *sirventes*, see Peire Cardenal, *Poésies complètes du troubadour Peire Cardenal (1180–1278)*, ed. René Lavaud (Toulouse: Privat, 1957), 170–177; Patterson, *Singing the Crusades*, 156–158; *Il trovatore Peire Cardenal*, 2 vols., ed. Sergio Vatteroni (Modena: Mucchi, 2013); English translation in *Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade*, 112–113. One scholar has argued that Cardenal was influenced by the Good Christians: Suzanne Nelli, "Le troubadour Peire Cardenal (1180–1278), une poésie satirique anticléricale et qui s'inspire des thèmes cathares," *Heresis* 26–27 (1996): 115–125.

⁶⁹*RIJF*, 3:319–320, 328–329. On Bertrand de Tays, see also Catherine Léglu, "Defamation in the Troubadour *Sirventes*: Legislation and Lyric Poetry," *Medium Aevum* 66, no. 1 (1997): 28–41.

upon even earlier events “40 or 50 years ago,” significantly defining that moment as “that time. . .when lord Roger-Bernard [III, the Count of Foix from 1265–1302] had been arrested in France by the lord King of France.” Davy meant 1272, when Roger Bernard was at war with King Philip III the Bold (r. 1270–1285). Philip’s military action against the Count of Foix was an express and intentional assertion of Capetian royal power in Occitania, which was especially necessary after the then-recent deaths of Jeanne and Alphonse.⁷⁰ That 1272 conflict between count and king had already appeared in another inquisitorial deposition, soon after the event. In Toulouse in 1274, one Bernard Hugo testified that he had heard heretics say that King Philip III had greatly harmed Count Roger-Bernard by taking his land, and that the count if he could “would be a friend to the church of the heretics.”⁷¹ Another witness in the Fournier dossier claimed that Roger-Bernard was himself a Good Christian, having been hereticated on his deathbed at Tarascon-sur-Ariège in 1302 by heresiarch Peire Autier.⁷²

This was the turbulent context for the Fournier dossier: new institutions of church and state asserting authority; anger over lost Occitan independence and resistance to invasive oppression; troubadour songs expressing that anger still resonating, and (coming full circle) being read as heresy. It is then striking that *entendre* and its derivatives – including *entendensa* – were prominent and dynamic in troubadour lyric. The Occitan term underwent significant lyrical evolution during the twelfth century, and as in the Good Christians’ use of *entendensa*, here too it was multivalent. From the strictest, Latin-derived meaning of “direct something (or oneself) towards,” it had developed more expansive senses of “direction,” connoting not only cognitive comprehension and intention, but also the emotional inclinations of love and affection.⁷³ For example, the contemporary biography (*vida*) of troubadour Guilhem de Montanhagol (fl. c. 1229–1268) recorded that he *entendia se*, “loved,” the lady Jausserande. *Entendensa* could further connote “understanding” in the sense of committing to memory, as in learning a song by heart.⁷⁴ Moreover, in the mid-thirteenth century, *entendre* often teamed with *trobar*, which from its original “to find” had evolved into “to compose songs” or, we might say, “to troubadour.” For example, cleric and troubadour Arnaut de Maruelh (fl. 1195) belonged to the court of Azalais, who was related to two Crusade-era Counts, Raymond VI of Toulouse and Roger II Trencavel of Béziers-Carcassonne. Arnaut’s *vida* praised him as one who “knew to troubadour well, and loved well” [*sabia ben trobar e s’entendia be*]. The meaning of *trobar e entendre* as a compound term is debated, with perhaps both verbs signaling troubadour action (to conceptualize and then deliver a song), or conversely action by troubadour

⁷⁰Firnhaber-Baker, *Violence and the State*, 75.

⁷¹“*magnum damnum erat de comite Fuxi qui nunc est, quia sic amitebat terram suam, et sic damnificabatur per dominum regem. . .et quod sic posset, amicus esset ecclesie hæreticorum.*” *Inquisitors and Heretics in Thirteenth-Century Languedoc: Edition and Translation of Toulouse Inquisition Depositions, 1273–1282*, eds. Peter Biller, Caterina Bruschi, and Shelagh Sneddon (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 344, 346.

⁷²*RJF*, 2:427. Roger-Bernard also had a protracted conflict with Bishop Bernard Saisset over rights in Pamiers. Dossat, “Patriotisme méridional du clergé,” 424–425.

⁷³In Jules Coulet’s words, *entendre* was “tourner ses désirs, sa volonté, son esprit vers une personne ou une chose.” Jules Coulet, *Le troubadour Guilhem Montanhagol* (Toulouse: Privat, 1898), 217. Anna M. Mussons, “*Entendre, S’Entendre En, Entendedor* en a lírica trovadoresca,” *Anuario de estudios medievales* 45, no. 1 (2015): 55–77; Roquebert, “*Entendensa del Be*,” 2–4; François-Just-Marie Raynouard, *Lexique roman ou dictionnaire de la langue des troubadours*, 6 vols. (Paris: Silvestre, 1836–1844), 5:326.

⁷⁴*Biographies*, 518; Amelia E. Van Vleck, *Memory and Re-Creation in Troubadour Lyric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 54–55.

and listener (whose understanding completed the troubadour's creative composition).⁷⁵ Regardless, forms of *entendre* were highly visible, and far transcended simple "understanding." Understanding could be love, which could be piety. As Lanfranc Cigala (fl. 1244), a troubadour from Lombardy who supported the Albigensian Crusade, sang to the Virgin Mary in *Gloriosa Santa Maria*: your healing and mercy "makes me rest my heart and all my understanding [*entendensa*] in your pure love."⁷⁶

No troubadour uses *entendensa del be* in the (seeming) technical sense with which it appears in the Fournier dossier. And anti-clerical troubadours did not equal heretical troubadours. One example is Guilhem de Montanhagol, who as we saw above used variants of *entendre* in his songs. Montanhagol, another court troubadour for Count Raymond VII of Toulouse, lived amid the imposition of Capetian and inquisitorial authority in Occitania.⁷⁷ Soon after inquisitions were established in Toulouse in 1231, Guilhem wrote a *sirventes* addressed to Raymond VII, *Del tot vey remaner valor*. It attacked Dominican inquisitors, who failed to correct genuine error while arbitrarily judging and abusing their power.⁷⁸ In the late 1230s, Montanhagol left for Catalonia, after Toulouse had become too hot for vocal critics of inquisition. He later returned to Occitania, and his *sirventes Bel m'es quan d'armas* lamented the final end of Occitan independence with Raymond's failed last resistance to the French in 1242.⁷⁹ Montanhagol hated inquisitions, but he was no heretic. But we do not need a smoking gun. The prominence and multivalence of *entendre* among troubadours, and the broader context in which political resistance, ecclesiastical oppression, and cultural conflict intersected – in which patriotic troubadour songs could be Christian heresy – directs our thinking on religion in two ways. One is to consider these wider cultural resonances of *entendensa* for Good Christians, and, if *entendensa del be* does signal an incipient "religion" among them, the possible intersections of its valences with religion. The second is to link *entendensa*'s prominence in troubadour lyric to the possibility provided by that "untranslation" above. Like the Toulouse scribes in 1274, the scribes for Bertrand de Tays' trial – Guillaume Peyre-Barthe and Guillaume Nadini – used the Occitan word *cobla* ("stanza") when recording quoted bits from Peire Cardenal's *sirventes* in 1324.⁸⁰ These Occitan-speakers had their own knowledge of troubadour culture, and their own resonances for *entendensa*. Those may also have

⁷⁵*Biographies*, 32–35, n.2. Alexander Herman Schutz, "A Preliminary Study of *trobar e entendre*, an Expression in Medieval Esthetic," *Romanic Review* 23, no. 2 (1932): 129–138; A. H. Schutz, "More on *trobar e entendre*," *Romanic Review* 26, no. 1 (1935): 29–31; Don A. Monson, "L'Expression 'trobar e entendre' dans les *vidas* des troubadours," in *Atti del Secondo Congresso Internazionale della Association Internationale d'Etudes Occitanes*, vol. 1, ed. Guiliano Gasca Queirazza (Turin: Università di Torino, 1993), 255–268.

⁷⁶"*E que ' m fassas. . . mon cor e tota m'entendensa/pausar en vostra fin'amansa.*" *I trovatori d'Italia*, ed. Giulio Bertoni (Modena: Orlandini, 1915), 341–342; Throop; "A Criticism of Papal," 395–396.

⁷⁷Roquebert, "Entendensa del Be," 2–4. On the ambiguous religious identities of Cardenal and Montanhagol, see Sullivan, *Truth and the Heretic*, 105–114.

⁷⁸Guilhem de Montanhagol, *Les poésies de Guilhem de Montanhagol*, ed. Peter Ricketts (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1964), 43–48; Coulet, *Le troubadour Guilhem Montanhagol*, 87–94, 179–180.

⁷⁹Coulet, *Le troubadour Guilhem Montanhagol*, 11–13, 160–167; Anglade, *Histoire sommaire*, 90–91; Michael Routledge, "The Later Troubadours," in *The Troubadours: An Introduction*, eds. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 99–103. Alfred Jeanroy, "Le soulèvement de 1242 dans la poésie des troubadours," *Annales du Midi* 16, no. 63 (1904): 311–329.

⁸⁰See n.66. *RJFF*, 3:319–320, 328–329.

influenced any scribal direction (or manipulation) of *entendensa del be* as meaningful technical term for Good Christians. It certainly emphasizes the not-unusual position of Occitan inquisitorial personnel as liminal mediators absorbed within, while also policing and condemning, local culture.⁸¹

That leads to a weightier point. What are the consequences for “religion” if we consider southern inquisitorial texts like Fournier’s dossier as imperial sources? I mean this in the sense that they reflect the imposition of a foreign state and its affiliated institutional, ecclesiastical, cultural, and linguistic power. Yes, the grounds for heresy inquisitions were prepared well before the end of the Albigensian Crusade; the interpenetration of imposing French rule and installing heresy inquisitions in Occitania after 1229 is well recognized by scholars; church and crown could themselves be in conflict; and heresy inquisitions existed in lands unaffected by defeat and conquest. Nevertheless, the specific circumstances of post-1229 Occitania prompt us again to consider resemblances between what is argued for the later evolution of “religion” and what we witness in the high Middle Ages. Scholars of early-modern Spanish and Portuguese inquisitorial trials in the Americas, India, and Africa have well explored the ways in which inquisitors – their bureaucracies teamed with their theologies – were tools for imperialism.⁸² More specifically, we might note Jeremy Schott’s argument that if “the category ‘religion’ emerges largely as a product (and instrument) of the subjugation of native cultures by (Christian) European imperialism,” then the “seeds of this process” can already be located in the fourth century. Schott contends that after Constantine, Christian strategies of apologetics and anthropological comparison among peoples undergirded Roman imperial power. Schott was inspired by David Chidester, who has described the role in forming religion of “frontier” personnel like missionaries and colonial officials, directly engaging with those upon whom power was exerted, and who absorbed and categorized knowledge about beliefs and practices.⁸³ But if feasible in the fourth century, so the thirteenth. Capetian France was neither the Roman nor the British Empire. But Schott’s reminder is important that the active imposition of power, and negotiations with people resisting it, the disciplining of language, beliefs, and practices placed within particular Christian categories and concepts, are not restricted to the period post-1500. A figure like Fournier or Peyre-Barthe was aware of diversity in belief and ritual; aware of the fraught circumstances of installing inquisitorial and royal authority; aware of the dynamics of translating words and transmuting concepts from Occitan to Latin, surely aware of their own liminal role. More concretely,

⁸¹During the Crusade, Count Raymond VI had authorized reprisals against traitorous Occitan-speakers (“*malefactores. . . de hac lingua nostra*”) who collaborated with the French. Dossat, “Patriotisme méridional du clergé,” 420. In another example, Dominican friar Armand de Belvèzer cited Peire Cardenal’s *Ben teinh per fol e per muzart* in his *Collationes psalterii*. In 1326 Jean Duprat, inquisitor of Carcassonne, asked Armand to interrogate a witness held in Montpellier. In the same year, when Jacques Fournier was translated to Mirepoix and Dominique Grima succeeded him as bishop of Pamiers, Armand replaced Grima as master of the sacred palace for Pope John XXII in Avignon. Antoine Thomas, “Armand de Belvèzer, frère prêcheur,” *Histoire littéraire de la France* 36 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1927): 270, 291–292; Jeanroy, *La poésie lyrique*, 225, n.1; Cardenal, *Poésies complètes*, 10–14.

⁸²E.g., Irene Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Toby Green, “Policing the Empires: A Comparative Perspective on the Institutional Trajectory of the Inquisition in the Portuguese and Spanish Overseas Territories (Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries),” *Hispanic Research Journal* 13, no. 1 (2012): 7–25.

⁸³Jeremy G. Schott, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 10–11, 14, 167–176; Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 7–11, 20–26.

thirteenth- and fourteenth-century inquisitions in France (south and north) segued into the French crown's appropriation of religious persecution, anticipating those early-modern state inquisitions.⁸⁴

V. Conclusion

It seems either paradoxical or perverse to say that what appears to be a self-evidently religious source – a Christian bishop's record of heresy trials from the European Middle Ages – is not religious at all. In one sense this paradox is wholly true. In investigating heresy, Jacques Fournier investigated neither medieval *religio* nor the ripe "religion" of modernity. "Medieval religion" is not self-evident, and the dossier does not embed a transhistorical, natural, universal reality that may be safely recognized and isolated in any moment anywhere, a phenomenon that has always existed as it does now.

But the way in which that paradox is strictly true should not occlude what the Fournier dossier, like other contemporary inquisitorial texts, contains. I have focused here tightly on the curiosity of *entendensa del be* – was it an organic phrase with real theological meaning? or does it only look special because scribes did not translate it? what about its broader cultural sense in an atmosphere of power and discipline? – as all of its possibilities help us to think about scholars' challenges in defining "religion," and in understanding its historical development. It is impossible to determine if some untranslated words in an inquisitorial register were a careless contingency; a commitment to recording the theology and sociology of a cohesive community; or a conscious manipulation of language driven by expectations or desires about Christianity. But these words, whether Latin *religio* or Occitan *entendensa*, gesture toward the role of medieval Europeans – persecuted heretics or persecuting inquisitors – in the evolution of the modern concept of religion. Religion was a product of historical circumstances, dependent upon the hegemonic Christianity that served as its template, and that reinforced the political and cultural conditions in which it was created. This is what is proposed for the early-modern and modern periods. Through the heresy inquisitions recorded in Fournier's dossier, we glimpse earlier appearances for what has been claimed as the modern crucible of "religion," within an increasingly sophisticated institution expressly intended to curate beliefs and practices.

My goal here is modest. It is to use one seemingly, inarguably "religious" source, and more narrowly one unusual, untranslated phrase within that source, in order to ask what happens if we dislodge that source from the tidy entity that is "medieval religion," and place it instead within a more contingent, fluid, vaguer process in which "religion" did not always exist. We allow ourselves to see, then, how some medieval sources were *constructing*, rather than embodying, "religion." Ignoring the anachronism of the term, using it without reflection, obscures the historical process of religion's formation – for medievalists, a process embedded within our period of study. That is, reflecting upon that historical process helps us better to understand both components of "medieval religion."

Fournier's dossier is only one possible case study. In it, we have found not just familiar beats in the general narrative of religion's development, earlier manifestations of the circumstances of its rise. Rather, we see how persecution *within* Christianity, among

⁸⁴Sean L. Field, "The Heresy of the Templars and the Dream of a French Inquisition," in *Late Medieval Heresies: New Perspectives. Studies in Honor of Robert E. Lerner*, eds. Michael D. Bailey and Sean L. Field (York: York Medieval, 2018), 14–34.

Latin Christians, played a role in that development. Medieval inquisitions were perhaps the first non-theoretical way to work out “religion” in the West. Although anti-heretical treatises followed ancient generic conventions, inquisitions relied less on profound anthropological musings on human difference or subtle theological arguments, and more upon the gritty, corporeal work of reshaping and punishing individuals. And through that work, they shaped concepts, conventions, and expectations.⁸⁵ This emphasizes more insistently the role of Christianity in generating modern norms about “religion.” The Christianity that provided paradigms for “religion” and religions was not the dynamic flux and multiple options of a European Christianity amid Reformations, but instead the curated, top-down Christianity that was asserted (although not always successfully) through heresy inquisitions. Shedding the notions both of a medieval Europe that was merely one of many similar stops in religion’s transhistorical, global journey, and of a religion that could not arise until modernity, we arrive at a crucial moment: when the modern religion that we have inherited was being built, upon the grounds of medieval persecution.

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⁸⁵This is a key difference from Renaissance theoretical musings on *religio*, which could proceed without any real-life engagement with those deviating from orthodox Latin Christianity. Ficino, for example, incorporated Islam in *On the Christian Religion*, but knew no Muslims. See n.18.

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