

A Medieval Gospel Presentation or A Manual of Church Order?



THOMAS P. JOHNSTON
Professor of Evangelism
Midwestern Baptist
Theological Seminary
Kansas City, MO 64118
tjohnston@mbts.edu

The following text is from the bound manuscript of an Albigenian Bible dating from 1230 to 1330 A.D. Because the movable type was not invented until 1455 A.D., this text was handwritten by a scribe. It was bound to the back of a Bible in the same hand, with the title “Waldensian Bible” on the cover. The manuscript is currently housed at the library of the City of Lyons, France, as manuscript PS 36. A facsimile of the text was published in 1887 and disseminated to a number of libraries.¹ The library of Washington University in St. Louis owns one of these copies.

Jean Duvernoy, late French Medievalist, in 2001 published an online transcription of the text of the gospel presentation in the Occitan language.² The Occitan language is a dead language from a region in Southern France. In his introduction, Duvernoy explained the provenance of this interesting text, and referred to the publication of a facsimile of this text, along with the French translation of the gospel presentations at the end of the Bible by L. Clédet in 1887. The following text is titled “Ritual Occitan,” and is actually the second gospel presentation in the text. It is

¹L. Clédet, “Rituel Provençal,” in L. Clédet, *Le Nouveau Testament traduit au XIIIe siècle en langue provençale suivi d’un rituel cathar [The New Testament translated in the 13th Century in the Provençal language followed by a Cathar ritual]* (Paris: Leroux, 1887; Geneva: Slatkine, 1968), ix-xxvi. Translation mine.

²Jean Duvernoy, “Rituel Occitan”; available at: http://jean.duvernoy.free.fr/text/pdf/cledat_rituel.pdf; accessed 22 Aug 2012.

designated for someone who is “out in the field.” In other words, it was a gospel presentation or follow-up tool for someone who was not a part of an organized nighttime clandestine meeting in which people were converted into the underground Waldensian-Albigensian fellowships during the 14th Century. This time period followed the Albigensian crusades, when it was illegal to be non-Catholic the region of Southern France.

What is particularly fascinating in this gospel presentation is the use of the Great Commission passages in Matthew and Mark. These passages were discussed by the so-called Anabaptists two centuries later. Further, it emphasized the baptism in the Holy Spirit by placing a Bible on the head of the person receiving the baptism.³ This text also taught a successionism of the laying on of hands for Spirit baptism. Spirit baptism appeared to be a concept lost to Medieval theologians who considered the Holy Spirit to be resident in the seven Sacraments of the Church of Rome. By the way, according to the 1250 A.D. writing of the Inquisitor Reinerius Saccho, in his time there existed sixteen (16) denominations of Cathars existed in Southern France, Northern Italy, Northern Spain, and into the Bulgaria.⁴

³It appears that the usage of the “book on the head” parallels Rome’s ordination of a Bishop, going back to the end of the 5th Century (DS326). Some differences are: (1) in the case of Rome the book consists of the Gospels; in the case of the Cathars it consisted of a New Testament; (2) in the case of Rome the ritual is to ordain a Bishop; in the case of the Cathars it was for the Spirit baptism of a layman.

⁴“Behold the Cathar Churches.- All the Churches of the Cathars are sixteen. Please do not reproach me, reader, for calling them Churches, but reproach them, for this is what they call them: The Church of the Albanists or of Desenzano; The Church of Concorrezo; The Church of Bagnolais or of Bagnolo; The Church of Vincence or of la Marche; The Florentine Church; The Church of Val de Spolète; The Church of France; The Toulouse Church; The Carcassone Church; The Albigensian Church; The Church of Slavonia; The Church of the Latins of Constantinople; The Church of the Greeks [ibidem]; The Philadelphia Church in Romania; The Church of Bulgaria; The Church of Dragovisia. And they all have their origin in the last two.” (Brother Raynier of the Order of Preachers, “The Cathars and the Poor of Lyons”; translated into French by Jean Duvernoy; available at: http://jean.duvernoy.free.fr/text/pdf/raynier_sacconi.pdf; accessed 22 Aug 2012; Internet). Further, the perceptive reader will note that four of these named churches (France, Toulouse, Carcassone, and Albigensian) represent bishops anointed by the Bulgarian Bishop Nicetas in 1167 in Saint Felix, France (See Monique Zerner, *L’histoire de catharisme en discussion* (Nice 2001) and Jean Odol, “L’acte de naissance des évêchés Cathares: La charte de Niquinta, Saint-Félix, 1167” [the birthing act (or articles of incorporation) of the cathar bishoprics: the chart of Niquinta, Saint Felix, 1167], by Jean Odol; from: <http://www.couleur-lauragais.fr/pages/journaux/2005/cl69/histoire.html>; accessed 21 Sept 2007; Internet).

SECOND GOSPEL PRESENTATION

If he is to be consoled in a field, may he make amends [*melioramentum*], and may he take the book from the hand of the elder. The elder must admonish and preach with appropriate testimonies, and with such words that are convenient to a consolment [*consolamentum*].⁵ And may he say as such:

“Peter, you want to receive the spiritual baptism, by which is given the Holy Spirit in the church of God, with the holy preaching [*oraison*],⁶ with the laying on of hands of ‘good men.’ Of this baptism our Lord Jesus-Christ says, in the gospel of Saint Matthew (28:19, 20),⁷ to his disciples: ‘Go and instruct all the nations, and baptize them in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy spirit. And teach them to keep all the things which I commanded you. And behold that I am with you for ever until the consummation of the age.’ And in the gospel of Saint Mark (16:15), he says: ‘Go unto all the world, preach the gospel to every creature. And he that believes and is baptized will be saved, but he that does not believe will be condemned.’ And in the gospel of Saint John (3:5) he says to Nicodemus: ‘In truth, in truth I tell you that no man will enter the kingdom of God if he has not been regenerated by water and the Holy spirit.’ And John the Baptist spoke of this baptism when he said (John 1:26-27; Matt 3:2): ‘It is true that I baptize with water; but he who is to come after me is stronger than I: I am not worthy to tie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy spirit and with fire.’ And Jesus-Christ says in the Acts of the Apostles (1:5): ‘For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized by the Holy Spirit.’ This Holy baptism by the laying on of hands was instituted by Jesus-Christ, according to the report of Saint Luke,

⁵The word “consolamentum” is regularly used in inquisition records to describe the ritual that the Cathars did to people. Sometimes in these inquisition records it was used in a series of questions as such: “Did you see the heretics? Did you hear them preach? Did you worship them? Did you receive the consolment from them?”

⁶The Occitan word “oraison” is used in several ways in this text. In the Latin, *oratione* is translated “prayer.” However, in this text it is used for preaching, as sometimes is used “kerygma” for the message of the Gospel. But it is also used of a single verse, as well as the words of a person. I have translated it preaching throughout, and will mark the word with an asterisk to help the reader understand this complexity.

⁷Note: all references in the text are from Clédât’s 1887 translation; the numbering of verses has been modernized.

and he says that his friends would do it, as was reported by Saint Mark (16:18): 'They will lay their hands on the sick, and the sick shall be healed.' And Ananias (Acts 9:17-18) did this baptism to Saint Paul when he was converted. And later Paul and Barnabas did it in many places. And Saint Peter and Saint John did it upon the Samaritans. For Saint Luke says so much in the Acts of the Apostles (8:14-17): 'The apostles who were in Jerusalem having heard that those in Samaria had received the Word of God, sent unto them Peter and John. Whom having arrived prayed for them so that they received the Holy spirit, for he had not yet descended upon any of them. So they laid their hands upon them, and they receive the Holy spirit.' This Holy baptism by which the Holy spirit is given, the church of God has kept it up until now, and it has come from 'good men' to 'good men' up until now, and it will be so until the end of the world. And you must hear that the power is given to the church of God to bind and unbind, and to forgive sins and hold them, as Jesus says in the gospel of Saint John (20:21-23): 'As the father has sent me, I send you also. When he had said these things, he blew and told them: Receive the Holy spirit; those unto whom you forgive the sins, they will be forgiven them, and those of whom you retain them, they will be retained.' And in the gospel of Saint Matthew, he said to Simon Peter (16:18, 19): 'I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the doors of hell will have no strength against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And something that you bind on earth, it shall be bound in the heavens, and something that you unbind on earth, it shall be unbound in the heavens.' And in another place (Matt 18:18-20) he says to his disciples: 'In truth I tell you that something that you bind on earth, it shall be bound in the heavens, and something that you unbind on earth, it shall be unbound in the heavens. And again in truth I tell you: if two or three persons gather on earth, all things, whatever they ask, will be accorded them by my father who is in heaven. For there where two or three persons are gathered in my name, I am there in their midst.' And in another place (Matt 10:8), he says: 'Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, chase [out] demons.' And in the gospel of Saint John (14:12), he says: 'He who believes in me will do the works that I do.' And in the gospel of Saint Mark (16:17-18), he says: 'But those who believe, these signs will follow them: in my name they will chase [out] demons, and they will speak in new languages, they will remove serpents, and if they drink something deadly, it will do no ill to them. They will lay their

hands on the sick and they will be healed.’ And in the gospel of Saint Luke (10:19), he says: ‘Behold I have given you the power to walk on serpents and scorpions, and on all the forces of the enemy, and nothing will harm you.’

“If you want to receive this power and this strength, you must hold all the commandments of Christ in the new testament according to your power. And know that he has commanded that man does not commit adultery, neither homicide, neither lies, that he swear no oath, that he does not take nor steal, nor that he does to others that which he does not want done to himself, and that man forgives whoever has done him wrong, and that he loves his enemies, and that he prays for those who slander him and for his accusers and that he blesses them, and if he is struck on one cheek, that he extend [to him] the other one, and if someone takes his shirt [Occ. *la gonella*; Fr. *la 'gonelle'*], that he allow [him] his coat, and that he does not judge nor condemn, and many other commandments that are commanded by the lord to his church. For Saint John says in the epistle (1 John 2:15-17): ‘O my very dear [ones], may you not love the world, nor the things that are in the world, the love of the father is not in it. For all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of live, which is not from the father, but from the world; and the world will pass, likewise its lusts, but who does the will of God dwells eternally.’ And Christ says to the nations (John 7:7): ‘The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I bear witness of it, that its works are bad.’ And in the book of Solomon (Eccl 1:14), it is written: ‘I saw the things that are done under the sun, and behold all are vanity and torment of spirit.’ And Jude brother of James says for our instruction in the epistle (v. 23): ‘Hate this soiled garment which is fleshly.’ And by these testimonies and by many others, you must keep the commandments of God, and hate the world. And if you do well up until the end, we are assured that your soul will have eternal life.”

And may he say, “I have this desire, pray God that he gives me the strength for it.” And may one of the “good men” make amends, with the believer, to the elder, and may he say: “*Parcite nobis* [spare us].⁸ For all the sins that I may have done or said or thought or worked, I ask forgiveness of God, and of the church and to you all.” And may the Christians say: “By God and by us

⁸*Parcite Nobis* seems to refer to a prayer: “*Benedicite parcite nobis, Amen. Fiat nobis secundum verbum tuum. Pater et Filius et Esperitus Sanctus parcat vobis omnia peccata vestra. Adoremus Patrem et Filium et Esperitum sanctum [III vegadas].*”

and by the church may they be forgiven you, and we pray God that he may forgive you them.” And then they must console him. And may the elder take the book and place it on his head, and the other “good men” each with his right hand, and may they say the “*parcias*” and three *adoremus*, and then:

“And then they must console him. And may the elder take the book and place it upon his head, and the other ‘good men’ each with his right hand, and may they say the *parcias* and three *adoremus*, and then: ‘[in Latin] *Pater Sanctu, suscipe servum tuum in tua justitia, et mitte gratiam tuam et spiritum sanctum tuum super eum.*’ And may they pray with the preaching*, and the one who guides the holy service must say in a quiet voice the ‘*sixaine*’;⁹ and when the ‘*sixaine*’ is said, he should say three *Adoremus*, with the preaching* out loud, and then ‘the Gospel’ [a Latin version of John 1:1-5, 10-17]. And when the Gospel is said, they must say three *Adoremus* and the ‘*gratia*’ and the ‘*parcias.*’

“And then they must make peace between themselves [to hug] and with the book. And if there are believers, they must also make peace, and may the believers, if there are any, make peace with the book between them. And then may they pray God with ‘Double’ and with ‘*veniae*’, and they will have delivered him [the preaching].”¹⁰

ANALYSIS

Several issues surface when this gospel presentation is compared to contemporary gospel presentations, such as the “Roman Road.” This fact causes me to believe that it is more than a mere gospel presentation. Rather it appears to be a type of church manual, explaining how leaders in the church are chosen and ordained. Further it provides the reader with a Central Interpretive Motif for the New Testament.

The flow of the gospel plan begins abruptly with spiritual baptism. This emphasis embodies the main theme throughout the text. The heart of the “consolement” resides in spiritual baptism. A secondary theme is that of the spiritual authority and succession of the “good men” who can bestow this spiritual baptism:

⁹“Sixaine” or “sizain” is likely a reference to a poem with six lines (*Dictionnaire Larousse*). This may, for example, refer to the six blessings of Number 6:24-26: “The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.”

¹⁰Translation mine.

“This Holy baptism by which the Holy Spirit is given, the church of God has kept it up until now, and it has come from ‘good men’ to ‘good men’ up until now, and it will be so until the end of the world.”

In speaking of the authority of these “good men,” Pentecostal verses and phenomena are ascribed to them, including the healing of the sick, the forgiving of sin, and the casting out of demons.

The citations of texts of Scripture in canonical order are as follows: Eccl 1:14; Matt 3:2; 10:8; 16:18-19; 18:18-20; 28:19-20; Mark 16:15, 17-18, 18; Luke 10:19; John 1:26-27; 3:5; 7:7; 14:12; 20:21-23; Acts 1:5; 8:14-17; 9:17-18; 1 John 2:15-17; Jude 23. These citations of Scripture are unusual, in that no text from the Apostle Paul is used. Verses such as Romans 3:23; 6:23; and 10:9-10 were not found. Although John was cited, verses like John 1:12; 3:3, 7, 16; and 5:24 were not. Therefore, Paul’s emphasis on sin and justification by faith are absent. Also absent were John’s emphasis on the love of God and the person of Christ. The emphasis was rather on the invisible power of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual authority of the “good men” to pass on Spirit baptism.

If the entire text is considered to be a follow-up text, rather than a gospel presentation, then it appears to seek to fulfill the command of Matthew 28:20, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” In that case, it is understandable why some passages from the Pauline gospel are absent, as it would be part of a simple manual of church order at the end of this Waldensian Bible.

As far as sanctification, verses are cited to promote holiness of life. There was a major section of the paragraph on sanctification that borrowed the commands of Christ in Matthew 5. These passages were not cited in our text by Clédât, although they fit the conjecture that this is more of a follow-up text, rather than a pure presentation of the simple gospel. Towards the end of that paragraph 1 John 2:15-17 was used to encourage abstaining from sin. Jude 23 added a strong admonition to live a life free from sin, hating the world and its values. If one were to live separated from the world, then he would be assured eternal life.

Lastly, the gospel presentation or manual for church discipline became more ritualistic in describing the ritual for receiving Spirit baptism. This ritual took the following pattern:

- Verbal consent to accept Spirit baptism;
- Verbal confession of sin before all the Christians united there;
- The Bible was placed on the head, along with a number of recited prayers;

- The Christians hugged the new convert as they accepted him into their fellowship; and
- They closed in prayer.

So there we find a simple gospel presentation or church manual, 13th Century-style. Complete with Holy Spirit baptism and an invitation ritual for receiving this Spirit baptism. Perhaps the emphasis of this presentation is not too far removed from what may be found in contemporary Pentecostal churches today!