

History of the Crusades.
Episode 114.
The Crusade Against The Cathars.
The Papal Legates.

Hello again. Last week we took a closer look at Count Raymond VI of Toulouse, and saw that he was markedly different from the Raymonds who had preceded him. We saw that Raymond VI had been married to a Cathar, his second wife Beatrice from the notoriously heretical Trencavel family, and we saw him excommunicated from the Church shortly after he came to power, over a dispute involving the building of fortifications at Saint-Gilles. We also saw Count Raymond VI marry Joanna, the sister of the sworn enemy of King Philip II of France, the English King Richard the Lionheart, a marriage which didn't go at all well for Joanna. The year 1198 was to mark a change in the relationship between the Count of Toulouse and the Church, because in the year 1198, the 92 year old Pope Celestine III died, to be replaced by a Pope as different from the elderly and predictable Pope Celestine as it was possible to be: the young, energetic and ambitious Pope Innocent III.

When Pope Innocent was elected to the Papacy, he immediately recognized that there were three problems which needed fixing: the first was the fact that Jerusalem was under Muslim control; the second was that the Kings of Europe needed to realize that they were all servants of God and therefore servants of the Papacy; and thirdly and finally, the growing problem of heresy in southern France. He tried to fix the first problem by launching the Fourth Crusade. Unfortunately, as we all know, this crusade didn't result in the retaking of Jerusalem, but in the sack of the Christian city of Constantinople. He tried to solve the second problem by ordering the Kings of Europe to do his bidding; that was proving about as successful as the previous solution. So the question we all want to know the answer to is: What was Pope Innocent III going to do about the heresy problem in the south of France?

Well, he decided to start off by taking a somewhat conciliatory approach to the issue. He lifted the ban of excommunication from Count Raymond VI, no doubt, hoping it would encourage him to cooperate with the Church and root out the heresy that seemed to be springing up unabated across his dominions.

In addition, someone clearly had to go to Languedoc to find out why the Bishops of southern France hadn't been able to convince those pesky heretics to see the error of their ways. Pope Innocent would have preferred to have sorted out the problem himself, but southern France was almost a month's journey from Rome, and he really couldn't spare the time. Instead, he decided to appoint a Legate to do the job for him.

The man he chose was an Italian Cistercian called Rainier de Ponza. Rainier had quite a lot to do on his to-do list: as well as bringing southern France back firmly within the fold of the Catholic Church, he was also delegated with a task of undertaking important diplomatic duties in Portugal and Spain. It was a big job, and Rainier really wasn't up to it. Regularly during his two years spell as Papal Legate he wrote to Pope Innocent, begging to be relieved of his duties so he could return to the peace and tranquility of his cloister. Rainier had most likely discovered what the Bishops of southern France already knew - that convincing the heretics to set aside their beliefs was no easy task. The only outcome of Rainier's two year stint as Legate was his acceptance of the resignation of the elderly and infirm Bishop of Carcassonne.

The next Legate to have a crack at solving the heresy problem was John, the Cardinal of Saint-Priscus. He traveled to southern France in the year 1200, but returned to Rome the following year, having achieved even less than his predecessor.

Pope Innocent then seemed to realise that he needed a different type of Legate on the ground in southern France. What he needed was someone like himself, someone with a legal background and with the energy and the ambition to tackle the problem head on. What Pope Innocent needed was someone like Peter of Castelnau.

On paper at least, Peter of Castelnau was the ideal man for the job. A Cistercian monk, he was a Canon lawyer and theologian. More importantly however, Peter of Castelnau had been born and raised in southern France. He came from a town near Montpellier, a region that had always been staunchly Catholic and which was currently a possession of the Spanish King of Aragon. His Abbey, however, was located in Narbonne, deep within territory which owed allegiance to the Count of Toulouse. Peter of Castelnau knew the politics of the region. He knew the people and he spoke their language. He also held an unwavering belief that the whole of southern France needed to be brought firmly under the control of the Papacy, and that almost any means could be justified to achieve this end.

What's better than one effective Papal Legate on the ground dealing with the heresy problem? Three Papal Legates on the ground dealing with the heresy problem. Joining Peter of Castelnau was the forgettable Ralph, followed the next year by the unforgettable Abbott of Citeaux, Arnold Armaury. Why is Arnold Armaury unforgettable? Well, because this Abbott with fanatical views ends up playing a key role in the Crusade Against the Cathars, and is awarded the title by Jonathan Sumption in his book "The Albigensian Crusade" of "The Father of the Inquisition". So we now have three Papal Legates, all from southern France, all intent on succeeding where their previous counterparts have failed.

Now, in order to have an impact on the local population, the Legates need power. No problem. The power of the local Bishops to deal with heresy was transferred to the Legates, as was the ability to excommunicate people from the Catholic Church, and the authority to dismiss clerics from their office without notice or right of appeal. The ability to dismiss clerics even extended to the rank of Bishop, and Peter of Castelnau put this power to good use during the first few months of his legation. Peter was convinced that the heresy was spreading due to the failure of the local Bishops to take appropriate action, so he set to work. He dismissed the Bishops of Beziers and Viviers. He discovered that the aristocratic Bishop of Toulouse had been using Church funds to finance a private army, so he was shown the door as well.

Showing that he was happy to wield his power without fear or favour, Peter of Castelnau then turned his attention to the Archbishop of Narbonne. Now dismissing an Archbishop is an act that is generally approached with caution, particularly if the said Archbishop is the uncle of the King of Aragon, a committed Catholic and staunch ally of the Papacy. Peter of Castelnau's charge against the archbishop was that he was the puppet master behind a complex system of rules which encouraged administrative inertia, which according to Peter, ultimately resulted in no action being taken against the heretics. The Archbishop of Narbonne however, was too big a fish to fry. Quiet words were spoken to Peter of Castelnau, and the regally-connected archbishop suddenly found himself no longer on the hit list.

Despite Peter of Castelnau's efforts with the Bishops, it became clear, a few years into his legation, that even he was struggling to make inroads into the heresy. Pope Innocent then attempted a new strategy: he would direct the Kings of Europe to use their power and their armies to expel the heretics from southern France. The first King he approached was, unsurprisingly, the Spanish King Peter II of Aragon. King Peter held land in the region and was always keen to gain more vassals on the other side of the Pyrenees. He had indicated his willingness to assist the Church by personally attending a debate at Carcassonne, in which some heretics were to be convinced of the error of their ways. They failed to be so convinced, and so were excommunicated. Now Pope Innocent dangled a tasty morsel in front of the Spanish King. The Cathars had recently taken control of the town of Lescure in Languedoc, a town which actually was a Papal possession. Pope Innocent told King Peter that he could have the town if he took it by force and expelled the heretics. King Peter promptly took the necessary action and the town was his.

Pope Innocent, had less success with the French King. Requesting that he sent an army southwards to deal with the heresy problem, King Philip told the Pope that he was busy at the moment and couldn't spare any men. King Philip of France was busy because of King John of England. Concerned that King John was planning to invade France, King Philip was not only preparing his defenses, he was even considering taking the offensive and invading England. With all this happening in the north, there was no way he could spare men to head off down south on a Papal mission. This didn't stop Pope Innocent from trying to convince him otherwise. In the years 1204, 1205, and 1207, Pope Innocent wrote to King Philip, urging him to address the Cathar problem, all to no avail.

Pressure was then brought to bear on Count Raymond VI of Toulouse. It was well known by this time that Count Raymond was harboring heretics and had done nothing to assist the Church in its aim of stamping out the heresy. Count Raymond had managed to duck and weave around the Legates' demands, but in 1205 he found himself cornered. He ended up placating the Legates by swearing an oath to expel all the Cathars from the lands subject to his control. Raymond, of course, had absolutely no intention of carrying out this promise. Even if he had the will to do so, the Cathars were by this stage so entrenched within Toulouse and the surrounding regions that expelling them would be all but impossible. Happy that he had managed to keep the Pope off his back for the moment, Raymond swore his oath, then returned to his castle and his cosmopolitan court of Cathars, Jews, and other non-orthodox characters.

By this stage, all three Papal Legates were ready to declare their mission a failure. Sacking a handful of Bishops hadn't helped; debating the heretics in public gatherings hadn't helped; and despite throwing themselves wholeheartedly at the problem for the past couple of years, anyone could see that the Cathar religion in Languedoc was not being vanquished by the might of the Catholic Church. Far from dying out, the heresy appeared to be thriving and expanding. Luckily for the demoralized Papal Legates, they were about to get some assistance from none other than the future Saint Dominic, founder of the Dominican Order.

At this stage in his life, Dominic was a lowly sub-prior of the cathedral of Osma and was traveling homeward to Castile with the Bishop of Osma, a man called Diego. In June 1206 they happened upon the three Legates, who poured out their woes to the sympathetic Castilians. Diego and Dominic had a suggestion, and it sounded like a good one. If the Cathar heresy was attracting such a large following due to the preaching of the Perfect who lived in poverty, what if the Legates tried to win the same level of support by

themselves mirroring the poor status of a Perfect? The three Legates, accompanied by their new Castilian friends, gave it a shot, walking barefoot and penniless from town to town, doing their best to persuade the Cathars to convert. It didn't work. A few months later Diego left to return to Spain and the Papal Legate Ralph withdrew to an abbey, and died shortly thereafter. Dominic, however, remained in Prouville in southern France, where he founded a community of converted Cathar women.

What did Peter of Castelnau do? Well, perhaps inspired by Dominic's persistence, he decided to tackle the heresy problem from a different angle. More specifically, he decided to tackle the problem from the Count Raymond of Toulouse angle. More than two years had now passed since Raymond had sworn to clear all the Cathars from his territory, yet in fulfillment of this promise, Raymond had done precisely nothing. So Peter of Castelnau set his pieces into play, intent on forcing Raymond into a checkmate type situation. Firstly, Peter traveled to Provence, where he ordered the warring local nobility to stop hiring mercenaries to engage in their local battles and instead focus their attentions on persecuting the Cathars. This actually benefited Raymond so, aside from the fact that it was a little surprising that the Papal Legate was getting so involved in local affairs, so far so good.

Then Peter of Castelnau travelled down the coast to Narbonne, an area under vassalage to Count Raymond, and did exactly the same thing. He forbade the use of mercenaries amongst the nobility and ordered them to start focusing on the Cathars. This time though, he went further. He created a league to formalize the arrangement and invited Raymond to join. Raymond, who relied heavily on the use of mercenaries, refused to join, so Peter excommunicated him.

This wasn't just any old excommunication. Leveled at Raymond by Peter were the accusations not only that he kept mercenaries, but that he had appointed Jews to public offices, that he had fortified church property, and of course, that he had been protecting heretics. The excommunication was sent to Rome for verification by Pope Innocent.

Not only did Pope Innocent wholeheartedly agree with the actions of his Legate, he personally wrote a letter to Count Raymond, giving full vent to his frustration and anger at the fact that Raymond had failed to comply with Church orders and was still harboring heretics within his lands. I'm going to read an extract from that letter. Although it's lengthy, it will give you an idea of how Pope Innocent was feeling at this stage, and just how angry he was at Raymond. So here we go, and I quote.

"Do not forget that life and death themselves are in God's hands. God may suddenly strike you down, and his anger deliver you to everlasting torment. Even if you are permitted to live, do not suppose that misfortune cannot reach you. You are not made of iron. You are weak and vulnerable like other men. Fever, leprosy, paralysis, insanity, incurable disease may all attack you like any other of your kind. Are you not ashamed of breaking the oath by which you swore to eradicate heresy from your dominions? The hand of the Lord will no longer be stayed. It will stretch forth to crush you, for the anger which you have provoked will not lightly be evaded." End quote.

With Papal fury raining down upon him, Raymond retreated to his court at Toulouse. At his castle, he is about to receive a surprise visit from probably not his most favorite person of the moment, Peter of Castelnau. Join me next week to see some serious head clashing between Raymond and Peter, a battle which will culminate in the much awaited murder of

Peter. Yes, I promise that we will most definitely deal with the violent death of Peter of Castelnau in our next episode. Until next week, bye for now.

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