

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 116.  
The Crusade Against The Cathars.  
Forward Then, Soldiers Of Christ.

Hello again. Last week we finally reached the point in time at which we started our discussion of the Crusade Against the Cathars, that point in time being of course, January 1208, with the murder of the Papal Legate, Peter of Castelnau, by a servant of Raymond VI, Count of Toulouse. Up until the murder, Pope Innocent III had been trying to force Count Raymond to address the growing heresy problem within his domain, and Count Raymond had been doing his best not to address the growing heresy problem within his domain. Now one of Raymond's men had just killed the man the Pope had sent to represent him in the region. What we want to know, and no doubt what Raymond wants to know, is: how is Pope Innocent going to react to this event?

When news of the murder reached the Pope in Rome a few weeks later, a witness reported that he sunk his head into his hands, then placed his busy schedule on hold while he sought solace and guidance in prayer before the Shrine of St Peter within the Vatican Basilica. Now, up until this point, Pope Innocent has tried to solve the heresy problem in southern France in a number of different ways. He first attempted to address the issue by sending Church officials to the region to convert the Cathars to the Catholic faith. That didn't work. He tried to deter others from accepting the Cathar faith by excommunicating the heretics from the Roman Church. That didn't work. He tried to pressure the Count of Toulouse into addressing the problem. That didn't work. And he tried to convince the King of France to invade Languedoc. That also didn't work. Now one of his Legates has been murdered, and the ball is back in Pope Innocent's court.

I think it's safe to say that, from Pope Innocent's point of view, any need that he may have felt to tread softly, so far as the heresy problem was concerned, vanished with the death of Peter of Castelnau. To quote William Shakespeare, who would be born a few centuries into the future, it was time to "cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war." The question Pope Innocent needed to ask himself, though, was: what dogs of war would he let slip? The Count of Toulouse was under vassalage to the King of France, and from a technical point of view, it was up to the King of France, and the King of France alone, to move in and occupy the Count's lands. However, past action had shown that the French King was reluctant to do this, so Pope Innocent decided to bypass King Philip and appeal directly to the knights and noblemen of northern France, inviting them to take up the Cross, invade Languedoc, and help themselves to the Count's lands. At the same time, he wrote to King Philip, urging his cooperation and assistance.

Luckily for us, Peter the Monk recorded vast extracts from the letter Pope Innocent wrote to the French noblemen, in his "Historia Albigensis", and it makes for very interesting reading indeed. In his extremely lengthy letter, Pope Innocent describes the death of Peter of Castelnau, and he states his hopes that Peter's death will serve some higher purpose. He lays the blame for Peter's death firmly at the feet of the Count of Toulouse who, he says and I quote, "must be presumed guilty of the death of that holy man", end quote. As a consequence, not only was Raymond once again excommunicated from the Roman Church, all his vassals were released from vows of fealty to him, and any Catholic person was given permission, and I quote, "not only to proceed against the Count in person but also to occupy and possess his lands, in the expectation that the right-thinking of the new

occupier may purge those lands of the heresy which has hitherto so foully defiled them, in consequence of the Count's villainy." End quote.

Importantly for Raymond, Pope Innocent provides the Count with a means of escaping this punishment. Should he fully repent and show his repentance by expelling all the heretics from his dominions, then the action against him will cease. In his letter Pope Innocent makes it clear that this isn't just a plain old political land grab. No, this is a Crusade. In the same way that the Papacy called its followers to take up the Cross against the Muslims of the Middle East, Pope Innocent is calling for the noblemen of northern France to take up arms against the enemies of the Church in an arena much closer to home, not the Holy Land, but Languedoc.

I'm now going to read a lengthy extract from Pope Innocent's letter, which should indicate exactly where he is coming from, and I quote.

"Forward then, soldiers of Christ. Forward, brave recruits to the Christian Army. Let the universal cry of grief of the Holy Church arouse you. Let pious zeal inspire you to avenge this monstrous crime against your God. Attack the followers of heresy more fearlessly even than the Saracens, since they are more evil, with a strong hand and a stretched out arm. As to the Count of Toulouse who, like one who has made a covenant with death gives no thought to his own death, if his punishment starts to turn him to understanding, if his face filled with shame begins to seek the Name of the Lord, continue by the added weight of your threats to drive him to give satisfaction to ourselves in the Church, and indeed God, expelling him and his supporters from the towns of the Lord and seizing their lands, where Catholic inhabitants will take over from the displaced heretics and will serve before God in holiness and righteousness, according to the tenets of the true Faith which you follow." End quote.

In addition to sending this stirring and rousing letter calling the nobility of northern France to arms, Pope Innocent also attempts once more to call King Philip to arms. As King Philip is Count Raymond's overlord, it would make things a whole less awkward from the Pope's point of view if King Philip would lead this Crusade. Unfortunately for Pope Innocent, his letter couldn't have reached King Philip at a worse time. He was with his army at Poitou, in the middle of trying to quash a rebellion by people loyal to King John of England. He was tired and he was ill, and he was sick of getting these letters from the Pope trying to get him to do the Pope's bidding. To each of the previous letters, King Philip had responded by saying he would only move his army to southern France if Pope Innocent could guarantee that King John would not attack northern France in his absence. Since they both knew that the Pope could guarantee no such thing, that should have been the end of the matter. This time, however, the French King went to further. Sick of getting these pesky letters, he decided to give Pope Innocent, a man with a sound legal background, a lesson in feudal law. He pointed out that Count Raymond had not been formerly convicted of any crime, heresy or otherwise, and that the Pope's invitation to others to come forward and seize his lands had no basis in law. King Philip stated that, should the Count of Toulouse be convicted of heresy, and should the King be provided with evidence of that conviction, then in due course he would confiscate the Count's lands, but that was as far as he would go.

King Philip was certainly not impressed by Pope Innocent calling the French nobility to arms. As far as the French King was concerned, those noblemen and their armies should be fighting with him against the English, not high-tailing off down to southern France to fight the Count of Toulouse.

Pope Innocent, however, was not deterred. Despite failing to receive King Philip's support, he sent Peter of Castelnau's fellow Legate, Arnold Amaury, off on a Crusading recruitment drive, with directions to urge the powerful French nobleman to take up arms for the Church. Arnold Amaury met with almost immediate success. His first recruit was quite possibly the most powerful man in France, apart from the King of course, the Duke of Burgundy, Odo III.

The Duke of Burgundy had the ability to raise an army nearly as large as the French Royal Army, and his involvement at this early stage was a bonus for the Papacy. Joining the Duke of Burgundy was the Count of Nevers, who possessed a much smaller army but was an influential nobleman in his own right. Between them, they could provide around 500 knights. First, though, they were going to require the permission of their overlord, King Philip, to take up arms on behalf of the Church. Representatives from the two men met with King Philip at Chinon in May 1208, and he reluctantly provided the required permission, on the condition that no other noblemen be allowed to join them. In his book "The Albigensian Crusade", Jonathan Sumption writes that had King Philip enforced this condition, then the crusade against the Cathars would not have taken place. However, later in May, after achieving some victories in his campaign at Poitou, King Philip softened his stance, and allowed other noblemen to sign up.

Having now been assured of the involvement of at least the Duke of Burgundy and the Count of Nevers, Arnold Amaury formally proclaimed the Crusade at the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order, on the 14th September 1208. The Crusade was preached enthusiastically by the Cistercians for the next few months. So far as Crusades go, this was an interesting one. In his book "Gods War, A New History Of The Crusades", Christopher Tyreman points out that the Crusade Against the Cathars was the first anti-heresy Crusade, and the first great political Crusade. Despite Pope Innocent urging participants to rise up against the heretics in the same way that previous Crusades had fought against the soldiers of Islam, it was clear that most of the participants knew that this Crusade was markedly different from those which had preceded it. Firstly, there was zero involvement in this Crusade by the military orders. The Knights Templar, the Knights Hospitaller, and the Teutonic Knights will not be making an appearance. Secondly, this Crusade was going to be a lot easier to fight than a Crusade in the Holy Land, but participants would be awarded the same indulgences and remission of their sins as on previous Crusades. So in return for making a short trip to southern France, participants would be cleansed of their sins, and might also score themselves some land or booty. For the land-hungry French noblemen, there was a lot to like about this Crusade.

With the soldiers of Christ mustering against him, what was Count Raymond VI of Toulouse doing? Well, he was doing everything he could to shore up his alliances, and to attempt to appease the Church. Everything that is, except prosecuting the murderer of Peter of Castelnau. Count Raymond maintained that he was innocent of the murder, but he made no effort whatsoever to track down and punish the murderer. Since it's likely that he either knew who the murderer was or could have found out with a few simple inquiries, this has provided weight to the view of some historians that the murder was a Thomas-Becket-type situation, with Raymond making a throw-away comment to the effect that he wanted Peter of Castelnau dead, which was then carried out by one of his loyal subjects, who misunderstood the intent behind the statement.

To start with, Raymond traveled to Paris to meet with the King of France and beg his assistance. Now, although King Philip has avoided throwing his support behind the Papal plans to evict Raymond from his County, he's not exactly a huge fan of the Count of Toulouse. Mindful of the fact that, not so long ago, Raymond had caused him deep offense by marrying the sister of his enemy, Richard the Lionheart, King Philip is pretty much of the view that Raymond got himself into this mess, and now he's going to have to get himself out of it. Finding little satisfaction at the French royal court, Raymond then headed to the Imperial Court of Otto IV of Germany. Raymond held some territory in Provence for which the German Emperor was overlord, and he must have decided that obtaining assistance from the Emperor would have been worth incurring the displeasure of King Philip, who would be none too happy about one of his vassals trying to ally himself with one of his rivals, the German Emperor. But King Philip needn't have worried. Receiving nothing more than sympathy from Otto IV, Raymond left the Imperial Court and traveled to meet the Papal Legate Arnold Amaury. Raymond went so far as to kneel at the feet of the Legate, begging forgiveness, but yet again his actions came to nothing. With the crusade already being preached across France, it was all a little too late to be seeking forgiveness.

Count Raymond arrived back in Toulouse shortly after Christmas in the year 1208. Early in the new year Raymond met with Raymond Roger Trencavel, to try and forge an alliance to better defend his realm against the pending invasion. However, the age-old animosity between the two rival families prevented any such agreement being reached. There was really only one thing left that Raymond could do. Having found no satisfaction appealing to Arnold Amaury, Raymond decided to go over the Legate's head.

He sent an embassy to Rome in late January 1209 with instructions to agree to any terms, however humiliating, providing that Pope Innocent would appoint a new Papal Legate, who Raymond hoped would be easier to negotiate with than Arnold Amaury. To convince Pope Innocent of his sincerity, the members of the embassy were instructed to offer the Church no less than seven castles and the entire County of Melgueil, which admittedly was a small County, but a County nonetheless. Raymond was delighted to hear that the Pope apparently accepted his offer, and had appointed not one but two new Legates, both Italian, one called Milo and one Thedisius. What Raymond would have been less delighted to discover however, was that these Legates were firmly under Papal control, with Milo in particular taking all his instructions and orders directly from Arnold Amaury. Raymond returned to Toulouse, no doubt hoping that he could negotiate some sort of settlement with Milo, which would avert the coming invasion. At this stage, that is in the summer of 1209, Raymond would have agreed to just about anything in order to call off the Crusade.

What Raymond didn't realize was that the Crusade horse had already bolted from the stable. Preparations were being made, armies were being mustered, and nothing on earth was going to stop this Crusade from happening. So the humiliating act that Raymond was about to agree to would all be for nothing. What humiliating act was Raymond about to undertake? Well, he agreed to be stripped to the waist and led through the Church at Saint-Gilles, while being whipped by the Papal Legate Milo, and then having his sins publicly laid out before the congregation. Now, back in medieval France there wasn't an awful lot to do by way of entertainment. Seeing one of the most powerful men in Languedoc being whipped by a Papal Legate seemed like high entertainment indeed, and many people were keen to see it take place. Of course, in those dark days before the advent of television, YouTube and the like, the only way to watch this happen was to actually go to Saint-Gilles and see it for yourself.

So when the Count of Toulouse was stripped to the waist and led up the steps of the Church of Saint-Gilles on the 18th June 1209, to say that the Church was packed full of people was an understatement. In addition to a congregation of unusual size, no less than three Archbishops and nineteen Bishops were also assembled. Milo placed one of his garments around Raymond's neck and pulled him into the Church. Raymond made his way down to the altar, down the full length of the Church on his knees, all the while being flogged on his bare back by Milo, who was wielding a bundle of birch cuttings. Upon reaching the altar, Raymond was forced to listen while a list of his sins was read to the assembled crowd. The lengthy list included Raymond's usual transgressions of building castles on Church property, harboring heretics, using mercenaries, and employing Jews, as well as the additional sin of protecting the murderer of Peter of Castelnau. When Raymond finally turned to leave, so many people had packed into the aisles that it was physically impossible for him to make his way back to the main door. Instead, he was taken out through the crypt, which, somewhat ironically, took him past the final resting place of Peter of Castelnau.

Raymond spent the next four days negotiating with Church officials about the details of how he was going to repent of his sins, and on the 22 June, in a classic case of the saying "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em", Raymond joined the Crusade. This was a surprise move, but it was also a very clever one. By now, Raymond had seen the writing on the wall and had come to the realization that nothing was going to stop this Crusade. Taking the Cross and agreeing to participate in the military campaign meant that Count Raymond had at least some chance of being able to control events to his advantage, and the privileges granted to Crusaders meant that his lands had at least some chance of being protected.

So armies are being gathered, swords are being sharpened, and Count Raymond VI himself has taken the Cross. Yes, that's right, the time has come. Join me next week as we set off on the Crusade Against the Cathars. Until next week, bye for now.

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