

History of the Crusades.
Episode 156.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
The Ecumenical Council.

Hello again. Last week we saw Prince Louis, heir to the French crown, join the Crusade. Accepting suggestions from Simon de Montfort and not from the senior clerics with whom he met, Prince Louis used his army to oversee the destruction of the defensive walls around the formerly rebellious cities of Toulouse and Narbonne. This suited Simon's purposes beautifully as it insured that the cities would be unable to defy him in the future and cemented his position as ruler of the two towns.

However, two of the most senior Churchmen in southern France were not impressed. Arnold Amaury, the Archbishop of Narbonne, was incensed that his views were ignored regarding what he believed to be his city. For the first time, the paths of Simon de Montfort and Arnold Amaury diverged, and Arnold Amaury found himself sidelined completely, as the heir to the French throne was persuaded to follow the advice of the soldier of the Church, Simon de Montfort, instead of the senior representatives of the Church. Peter Benevento, the Papal Legate, found himself doing what all previous Legates in Languedoc had done before him, bending to the will of Simon de Montfort. Now remember that Pope Innocent's aims since the Battle of Muret, had been to preserve the status quo in southern France pending the meeting of the Ecumenical Council. So when Pope Innocent heard about the destruction of the defenses of two of the most important cities in the region, he was not happy. In fact, to say that he was not happy is an understatement.

He wrote Simon a letter. Now remember, we had a lengthy extract from Simon's last letter from Pope Innocent in last week's episode. Well, this letter is a little different. Pope Innocent drops all the flowery, flattering language and adopts a more direct tone. This is the part of the letter which deals with the fact that Simon de Montfort had disregarded the views of Arnold Amaury and had urged the Prince to destroy Narbonne's walls, and I quote. "You have tried to usurp the Duchy of Narbonne from the man to whom you owe everything, sullyng your reputation with a stain of ingratitude. Take care that you do not give him just cause for complaint at our Ecumenical Council, or else we will punish you in whatever manner we shall think fit." End quote. Ouch!

You can see from this letter that Pope Innocent is still waving the Ecumenical Council banner. His line is still as it has been for nearly two years: Don't worry, everything will be sorted out at the Ecumenical Council. Well, it's finally happening. In November 1215, the Ecumenical Council met in Rome.

Now this Council, which was later known as the Fourth Lateran Council, was massive. In his book, "The Papal Monarchy", Colin Morris describes it as the largest Council yet held in the history of the Church. Invited to attend were four hundred bishops, eight hundred abbots and thousands of clergymen, powerbrokers, secular lords, ambassadors and officials. Men of power from across Europe poured into Rome. The fate of southern France was only one item on a vast list of matters to be decided by Pope Innocent, and anyone who was anyone in Europe wanted to get their views heard before any decisions were made. Unfortunately, the facilities in the Lateran Palace and the audience halls weren't really designed to hold such vast numbers of people. There were crowds, there were language difficulties, and according to Jonathan Sumption in his book "The Albigensian Crusade", at least one Bishop was suffocated to death in the crush.

Pope Innocent opened the Council with a dawn Mass in the Church of St John Lateran on Wednesday 11th of November 1215. In his book "A Most Holy War", Mark Pegg describes how an anonymous German cleric recalled the first day of the Council. The cleric was unable to get into the church to hear the Mass, but after the Mass was finished, he described the scene as many thousands, even ten times a hundred thousand, crammed into the church. Pope Innocent climbed onto a raised platform inside the church, sang "Veni Creatus Spiritus," and then preached a sermon on the Sacrifice of Christ. Unfortunately for the German cleric, despite the fact that he had made it into the church, he couldn't hear most of what the Pope was saying. There were just too many people crowded into the building.

Following the Pope's opening sermon, the Patriarch of Jerusalem spoke about the new Crusade to the Middle East and the Bishop of Agde was invited to talk about the Catholic heresy. According to Mark Pegg, and I quote "the anonymous German cleric, straining against the cacophony, barely heard the Patriarch and simply had no idea what the Bishop said." End quote.

Among the crowds of people struggling to hear what was going on were the main players in the Crusade against the Cathars, with some notable exceptions. Count Raymond VI of Toulouse had been in Rome since January, trying to sway Pope Innocent to his cause. He was joined in Rome by his son Raymond, who had traveled all the way from England for the occasion. Inexplicably, he had made the journey disguised as a merchant's servant. Now, unfortunately, we have no idea why he did this. While it was true that young Raymond was heir to a vast amount of land in southern France that was under threat from Simon de Montfort, it's hard to see why young Raymond's life would be in danger because of this. None of the other rebel Counts or their relatives travelled incognito, and there were no reports of any of them being attacked or threatened during their journey to Rome. Maybe the eighteen year old Raymond had an overblown sense of drama and got carried away with the occasion. There are no details supplied about his disguise or how successful he was at carrying it off. I'd like to think that he maintained his cover all the way into the holy city, and I would dearly love to see Count Raymond senior's eyebrows raised as a lowly merchant servant approached his entourage in Rome. Young Raymond would then whip off his hat and cloak and declare "It is I, Raymond". Then the startled Raymond Senior would embrace his son. But unfortunately, we'll never know if that's the way it played out.

Joining the Raymonds of Toulouse in Rome were the Count of Foix, Folquet the Bishop of Toulouse, Arnold Amaury the Archbishop of Narbonne, Peter Benevento the Papal Legate and Guy de Montfort. You will notice in this list of attendees at the Ecumenical Council that there is one glaring omission: Simon de Montfort. Simon is not in Rome. He is back in southern France. Now to me, this is a little strange. Simon has a huge stake in the outcome of this council. It has been billed as deciding the fate of southern France and the fate of the County of Toulouse. Simon has been governing the County of Toulouse and is intent on having Pope Innocent sanction the formal transfer of the position of Count of Toulouse to him. Count Raymond, currently the actual Count of Toulouse, is in Rome to urge against this, so why isn't Simon also there to argue his case? In his book "The Occitan War", Laurence Marvin is of the opinion that Simon failed to make the journey, and I quote, "perhaps to show that he did not have anything to defend. To appear would only lend legitimacy to the arguments and pleas of those who did not like him." End quote. Simon had been able to sway the Council at Montpellier to do his bidding without him

actually attending the Council, but this was a whole different set of circumstances. Simon must have trusted his brother Guy to argue on his behalf. And maybe he believed he needed to stay in Languedoc in case the rebellion flared up while he was away. But still, it seems a little strange that he didn't attend.

Anyway, a few days after the Council opened, Pope Innocent invited everyone who had an interest in the Crusade against the Cathars to meet in a special session at the Lateran Palace, away from the main body of the Council. The primary matter which needed to be resolved, of course, was the issue of the ownership of land in southern France, and in particular the land governed by the rebel Counts of Foix and Toulouse.

Now, unfortunately, the only source we have for the conversations and debates which took place is an anonymous troubadour. Historians over the centuries have been wringing their hands in distress at this fact, not only because troubadours are not the most reliable of witnesses, but because the troubadour himself raised concerns about the accuracy of his description of what took place at this meeting. The troubadour of course, wasn't present in Rome and was relying on other peoples' recollections. In his book "The Most Holy War", Mark Pegg writes that in relation to what occurred in the session, the troubadour stated, and I quote "Here I must pass over many matters whose truth I could not ascertain, as I heard only rumors, and such half truths only gain in strength as they make the rounds." End quote. To make matters even murkier, the troubadour has the participants of the meeting all speaking eloquently in rhymed verse. Now, of course, rhyming verses are great in a song, but people don't speak in rhymed verse in real life. It would have been highly entertaining had the debate in the Lateran Palace been conducted in rhymed verse, but it clearly wasn't. So even if the troubadour had at one stage been aware of the actual conversations which took place during the debate, he changed them so they rhymed, and became a more attractive song. Clearly, there are major issues about the accuracy of this as a historical record, but I'm going to relate them to you all the same.

So according to the anonymous troubadour, this is what took place in the debate about the future outcome of the Crusade against the Cathars in the Lateran Palace in mid-November 1215. The scene commences with Pope Innocent, suggesting his preferred method of resolving the Crusade against the Cathars, a suggestion which is howled down by the clergy who are present, which sparks off an argument between the Count of Foix and the Bishop of Toulouse. The argument becomes increasingly heated until Pope Innocent has had enough and leaves to reconsider his position.

Okay, here it is in more detail. Pope Innocent commences the session by stating that it was his intention to leave Simon de Montfort in charge of the Viscounties of Carcassonne and Beziers, but that the County of Toulouse should be restored to Count Raymond VI. The clergy present at the session were aghast at this suggestion and made it clear that Simon de Montfort, in their view, should become the new Count of Toulouse. The Count of Foix was then called upon to outline the argument on behalf of the rebel Counts. He accused Simon de Montfort of conducting the Crusade not with the aim of eliminating heresy, but with his own personal ambitions at the forefront, imposing murder, savagery and destruction upon the mostly innocent population of southern France, in furtherance of his goal to rule the entire region. In response, the Bishop of Toulouse launched a vigorous attack upon the Count of Foix, pointing out the fact that the Count's sister Esclarmonde was one of the Cathar Perfect, and was currently residing in one of the Count of Foix's castles, Montsegur, along with a bunch of heretics. For this reason, suggested the Bishop of Toulouse, the Count of Foix shouldn't even be allowed to speak at this Council, let alone

be allowed to keep his lands. The Count of Foix responded forcefully, stating that he was not a heretic himself, that he was not responsible for the actions of his sister and that Montsegur was located in a region over which he had no authority whatsoever. The Bishop of Toulouse countered by addressing Pope Innocent directly, and reminding him that the Count of Foix had massacred and tortured Crusaders at Montgey. The Count of Foix then seemed to lose the plot entirely, stating in regard to the Crusaders he had mutilated at Montgey, and I quote "those robbers, those traitors and oath-breakers adorned with the Cross, who have destroyed me, neither I nor mine have laid hold on one of them who has not lost his eyes, his feet, his fingers, and his hands, and I rejoice to think that I have killed and regret the escape of those who got away." End quote.

As the clergy in the audience gasped in shock, the Count of Foix continued, this time launching a blistering attack on the Bishop of Toulouse. After calling him an evil liar, whose riches and power had protected him from being challenged, the Count of Foix stated, and I quote "Once he was elected Bishop of Toulouse, a fire has raged throughout the land that no water anywhere can quench, for he has destroyed the souls and bodies of more than five hundred people, great and small. In his deeds, his words, and his whole conduct, I promise you he is more like anti-Christ than a messenger from Rome." End quote.

Sensing that things might be getting a little out of hand, Pope Innocent adjourned to the session and retired to his private quarters, away from the yelling, the venom and the acrimony. One of the Count of Foix's nephews is said to have remarked, and I quote "There now, haven't we done well, we can all go home, for we have driven the Pope indoors" end quote.

Pope Innocent ended up seeking the quiet surrounds of a courtyard garden inside the Lateran Palace to mull over his conclusions, but his seclusion was interrupted when he was discovered by a bunch of clergymen who requested to know in what direction the Pope was leaning. Pope Innocent stated that he hadn't changed his mind. The lands within the Viscounties of Beziers and Carcassonne should remain under Simon de Montfort's control, but in the interests of exercising Christian mercy, the lands of the rebel Counts should be returned to them, with perhaps the exception that young Raymond should be awarded the County of Toulouse in replace of the current Count Raymond VI.

According to the anonymous troubadour, the Bishop of Toulouse then launched a verbal attack on Pope Innocent which, if true, is quite extraordinary. Here is what he is meant to have said, and I quote. "My lord, true Pope, dear Father Innocent. How can you covertly disinherit the Count of Montfort, a truly obedient son of the holy Church, one who supports yourself, who is enduring such wearisome strife and conflict, and is driving out heresy, mercenaries and men of war? Yet you take from him his fief, its lands, its castles which he has won by the Cross and his own bright sword. You take away Montauban and Toulouse if you separate the lands of heretics from those of true believers. And that is not the smaller share. Never have such cruel sophisms or such obscure pronouncements been declared, nor such absolute nonsense." End quote.

Gosh. With Pope Innocent now most likely concerned that denying Simon de Montfort his conquest of Toulouse would lead to outright warfare, but with the southern Counts and even Arnold Amaury pointing out that Count Raymond VI was not guilty of heresy, and that it would be blatantly unfair to dispossess him and deny young Raymond his inheritance, Pope Innocent had a difficult decision to make.

His official and final decision on the matter was formally published on the 4th of December 1215. Simon de Montfort was the clear victor. Count Raymond VI was dispossessed of his lands, because of his inability to govern his dominions in accordance with the faith, and he was to leave Languedoc and remain permanently in exile. His son, young Raymond, would inherit only those parts of his father's lands, which had formed part of his wife's dowry. As you might recall, Count Raymond VI was currently married to the late King Peter II of Aragon's sister, and the lands she brought to their marriage could pass to Young Raymond, along with some territory in Provence. Pope Innocent ordered two officials to investigate the allegations made against the Count of Foix. If he was found to be innocent of the charges, his Castle at Foix could be restored to him. The cities of Montauban and Toulouse, and most of the territory conquered by Simon de Montfort from 1209 to the current time, were now formally granted to Simon, who became the ruler of the County of Toulouse, in addition to the Viscounties he already held.

Simon de Montfort had therefore achieved his goal. He was now the ruler of most of Languedoc.

In his book "The Occitan War", Laurence Marvin points out an additional fact that many historians have overlooked. Deep within the published canons of the Fourth Lateran Council is a decree which effectively reinstates the Crusade against the Cathars. It states, and I quote "Catholics who take the Cross and gird themselves up for the expulsion of heretics shall enjoy the same indulgence and be strengthened by the same holy privilege as is granted to those to go to the aid of the Holy Land." End quote. So the indulgences for the Crusade against the Cathars, which were withdrawn back in 1213, were reinstated following the Ecumenical Council. The Crusade against the Cathars is, unexpectedly and surprisingly, given a tacit tick of approval by the Vatican to continue, despite the fact that Pope Innocent had been previously attempting to bring an end to it.

The news of the outcome of the council sent shock waves through Languedoc. As soon as Simon de Montfort received the happy tidings, he saddled up his horse to travel to pay homage to his new overlord, King Philip of France. The people of southern France, it was safe to say, did not welcome the decision. Across Languedoc, people are now going to have to decide whether to accept the Church's decision, or whether to continue to fight on. And it won't be all smooth sailing ahead for Simon de Montfort either. As Laurence Marvin intriguingly states, and I quote "Unbeknown to all, the news of Lateran Four reached Montfort at both the beginning, and the beginning of the end, of his official control in Occitania" end quote.

Hmm. I sense some interesting episodes ahead. Join me next week as we journey into the year 1216 and take a look at the fallout from the decision of the Ecumenical Council. Until next week, bye for now.

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