

History of the Crusades.
Episode 169.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
The Inquisition, The Early Years.

Hello again. Last week we saw Pope Gregory IX lay the foundation for the Inquisition against the Cathars, establishing a tribunal to, and I quote "make inquisition of heretical depravity" end quote, and manning it with friars from the Dominican Order.

Now, prior to the establishment of this tribunal, a heretic would be brought before the ecclesiastical courts, presided over by a Bishop, to answer charges related to heresy. Canon law and Roman law would be applied in these courts, meaning that the defendant could only be charged with an express accusation by a named accuser, and that witnesses called to give evidence against the defendant must be of good standing. Pope Gregory's tribunals, however, ditched these legal niceties. The defendant was not told who made the initial accusation, and was not entitled to call witnesses on his or her own behalf, which of course made defending the charge pretty much impossible. Often, the evidence of witnesses was accepted without question by the tribunal, leaving the defendant no option other than to confess to the accusation, and accept the punishment meted out by the tribunal. The only other option was to deny the charge, whereupon he or she would be found guilty, then be sentenced to being burnt alive as a heretic.

For a person who confessed to being a heretic, the punishments were varied. Traditionally, the ecclesiastical courts had a range of punishments they could mete out, and these were generally adopted by Pope Gregory's tribunals. Property of any person who was found to be a heretic was confiscated, and under Pope Gregory's tribunals, that property was divided between the Church, the person who made the initial accusation of heresy, and the crown. People who died as heretics were denied burial in consecrated ground, and if their guilt was established after their death, their remains were dug up, removed from the cemetery and burned. Children of heretics, even if innocent of heresy themselves, could not inherit property. And a convicted heretic could not hold public office, act as an advocate, or be a witness, notary or physician. Imprisonment was the favored punishment for those admitting heresy, although people who revealed the names of other heretics or people who supported heretics were given a much lighter sentence, sometimes even escaping imprisonment altogether. Convicted heretics were often made to wear a cloth Cross sewn onto their clothing, and those who were convicted of supporting heretics were subject to imprisonment, or were sentenced to a fine or flogging, or were ordered to undertake a pilgrimage to a holy site in Europe or the Holy Land.

Now, prior to the actions of Pope Gregory, both Count Raymond VII of Toulouse and the various authorities within Languedoc had put in place measures to identify and persecute heretics. King Louis VIII and King Louis IX of France had both issued formal ordinances against heresy in the late 1220's, and in 1233 Count Raymond issued edicts of his own. The Council of Toulouse made it a requirement that every person in Languedoc swear an oath of loyalty to the Catholic Church, combined with a promise to denounce heretics. This was a requirement for every male citizen over the age of 14 and every female over 12, and was to be renewed every two years.

However, Pope Gregory took things to a whole new level. The Inquisition in Languedoc formally commenced in 1233 with the issuing of two Papal Bulls. Pope Gregory IX wrote to the Archbishops of Bourges, Bordeaux, Narbonne and Auch, telling them he was sending

some friars from the Dominican Order their way to help them in their struggles to combat heresy. To help implement his program, Pope Gregory appointed a new Legate, the Archbishop of Arles, John of Bernin, who had a sound reputation as an administrator. The Legate was to travel to Languedoc and oversee the appointment of a panel of judges in Toulouse, and Inquisitors were to be appointed in Valence, Montpellier and at Toulouse.

Now, there's not a huge amount of information available on the operation of the Inquisition in its early days. While there was some unrest and disquiet about the abandonment of basic legal rights, such as the right to legal representation and to call and question witnesses, as well as about some of the actions of the Inquisitors, such as digging up remains of those declared to be posthumous heretics, on the whole in Languedoc at least, there wasn't too much opposition to the process initially. The penalties handed down tended to favor the wearing of cloth crosses and the imposition of pilgrimages, rather than summary execution. Elsewhere, however, things didn't go as smoothly. In the Rhineland, the Inquisitor Conrad of Marburg quickly developed a reputation for pursuing heretics with a bloodthirsty savagery, which resulted in his eventual murder. Likewise, in northern France Robert Le Bougre interpreted his Inquisitorial powers in such a violent and haphazard way that his actions were eventually condemned by the Church, and he was thrown into prison.

As the months passed, however, and the reach of the Inquisition extended across Languedoc, and as the penalties grew harsher, opposition to the process began to grow. In Toulouse in the year 1233, a laborer named John Texter was being questioned by the Inquisitors when, according to a chronicler, he yelled out to passers-by on the street, and I quote, "Gentlemen, listen to me. I am not a heretic, for I have a wife and sleep with her. I have sons, I eat meat, I lie and swear, and I am a faithful Christian. So don't let them say these things about me, for I truly believe in God. They can accuse you as well as me. Look out for yourselves, for these wicked men want to ruin the town, and honest men, and take the town away from its Lord" end quote. Soon a small crowd had gathered and the passers-by laughed, whistled, and applauded the laborer's words. His words weren't however, appreciated by the Inquisitors, and he was thrown into prison.

During the following year, in 1234, the Inquisitors made their first visit to the town of Moissac, where they ended up burning 210 heretics, an act of violence which Jonathan Sumption in his book "The Albigensian Crusade" describes as placing the Cathars of Languedoc on the defensive for the first time since the death of Simon de Montfort.

And it was not only the Cathars who are growing concerned about the practices of the Inquisitors. Even loyal Catholics were unsettled to see the remains of people, suddenly declared by the Inquisition to be heretics, being dug up and paraded through the streets before being publicly burned, bringing shame and the taint of heresy to the person's surviving relatives, and bringing general disquiet to the region.

Day by day during the summer of 1234 resistance to the Inquisition grew. In his book "Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France", Walter Wakefield describes some of the events which occurred during this summer of discontent. In Cahors, two widows found themselves questioned by the Inquisition, then sentenced to spend the rest of their lives in a convent. Disturbed, not only by the sentence but by the total lack of foundation for the charges against them, they took the unusual step of appealing directly to Pope Gregory to have the sentence overturned. Reports circulated of citizens digging up the bones of their relatives and moving them to safety before they could be exhumed and

burned by the men of the Church. Crowds of citizens jostled and harassed Inquisitors on the street, and in Toulouse crowds managed to temporarily prevent the execution of an alleged heretic.

But nothing illustrates the unfairness and the unpopularity of the early days of the Inquisition like the events which occurred on the 5th of August 1234 in Toulouse. On the 5th of August 1234 a wealthy elderly resident of Toulouse lay dying. She told her servants that she wished to receive the consolamentum before she took her last breath, so her servants were sent to search Toulouse for a Cathar Perfect who could administer the rights. Discreet inquiries were made, and the servants managed to return to the house with a Perfect, who administered the consolamentum and then left.

One servant, however, was missing. This servant, instead of searching for a Cathar Perfect, had made his way to the Dominican monastery where the Bishop of Toulouse was about to join the Prior of the monastery in a meal to celebrate the feast day of St Dominic. The servant informed the Dominicans that an elderly Cathar woman lay dying in her bed in a house nearby. Deciding to make an example of the woman, the Bishop ordered the servant to lead them to the house. Not only the Bishop but the Prior of the monastery and a number of Dominican monks followed the servant to the woman's house, climbed the narrow stairs to her bedroom and entered the room. Her startled relatives attempted to let the dying woman know what was going on, telling her that the Lord Bishop had arrived. The elderly lady, however, misunderstood, and addressed the Bishop as if he were the Cathar Bishop of Toulouse, and not the Catholic bishop. Smugly letting the dying woman condemn herself in front of the Dominicans and her horrified relatives, the Bishop waited until she had stated in unequivocal terms that she was faithful to the Cathar faith, then triumphantly revealed his true identity, sentencing her to immediate execution.

The dying woman was unable to stand, so the Dominicans tied her to her bed and carried the bed out onto the street. A bonfire was ordered to be set in a field outside the city gates, and as word spread through Toulouse, crowds of people gathered to witness the event. Once the bonfire was burning strongly enough, the elderly lady was thrown onto the flames and burned alive. In the words of a Dominican Inquisitor who chronicled the event, and I quote "This done, the Bishop, together with the monks and their attendants, returned to the refectory and, after giving thanks to God and St Dominic, fell cheerfully upon the food set before them." End quote.

It was incidents such as this which led Count Raymond VII of Toulouse to make a formal complaint to Pope Gregory in 1234. Pointing out the lack of fair procedure exercised by the Dominican Inquisitors, Raymond listed the ways in which the Dominicans had erred: they heard testimony from witnesses in secret; they accepted false accusations against reputable citizens; they allowed the accused no opportunity to engage an advocate or to lodge any defense to the charges; and anyone who dared to appeal or question the outcome of the Inquisition was harassed by the Church. In conclusion, stated Raymond, the friars acted, and I quote "as though they were intent on driving the faithful into error" end quote. And it wasn't just Raymond who felt this way. Blanche of Castile, Regent for the French crown, was moved to write a similar letter of complaint to Pope Gregory.

Pope Gregory responded to the concerns in November 1234. He ordered the senior clergy in Languedoc to correct any errors they discovered in the inquiries being run by the Dominicans, and the Papal Legate was ordered to assure Raymond of the good intentions of the Inquisitors. In a victory for Raymond, one of the senior Inquisitors against whom

many concerns had been raised was ordered by the Legate to leave Toulouse and start the Inquisition in the Quercy region.

If resistance to the Inquisition was rising in Toulouse, it was all but exploding in Narbonne. The citizens of Narbonne had for some time enjoyed a system of justice that was fair, equitable and very popular. Every citizen who was charged with a criminal offense had the right to be tried in a criminal court by a jury of their peers, and in a radical departure from what was occurring at the time in other jurisdictions, sins of the father weren't visited upon the sons. The only person punished for a transgression was the transgressor him or herself, and not their sons or daughters. To complicate things further, Narbonne traditionally had a rather testy relationship with their Archbishop, and the Archbishop of Narbonne in the early 1230's was an extremely ambitious man named Peter Ameli, who had managed to convince King Louis VIII back in 1226 that all property confiscated from heretics in Narbonne would automatically pass to, you guessed it, the Archbishop of Narbonne. The Archbishop of Narbonne was also technically overlord to the powerful Viscount of Narbonne. So when the Archbishop of Narbonne appointed a Dominican monk, Friar Ferrier, to be the Inquisitor for Narbonne in 1229, it was always going to be interesting to see how things played out.

Now, Narbonne at this stage didn't really have a Cathar problem. There were barely any heretics in Narbonne, and in fact the city of Narbonne had been one of the few places to support Amaury de Montfort in the dying days of the Crusade against the Cathars. But while there were barely any heretics, that means, of course, that there were some of them, and Friar Ferrier was determined to seek them out, interrogate them, and punish them. The Archbishop of Narbonne of course, was keen to see their properties confiscated, as those properties would then be acquired by him.

In March 1234 Friar Ferrier marched to a house in Narbonne in order to arrest its owner. However a crowd gathered, overpowered the guards accompanying the friar and freed the suspected heretic. The next day the friar, this time accompanied by the two town heavyweights, the Archbishop and the Viscount, again attempted to arrest the house owner. Again a crowd of citizens prevented the arrest. As a result, the Archbishop placed an interdict on the city. Instead of being cowered into submission by this act, the citizens of Narbonne responded by seizing and occupying property of the Archbishop within the town.

A truce was eventually brokered, but tensions continued to simmer beneath the surface, erupting into a full blown confrontation in 1235, when the city's councilmen opposed Friar Ferrier's attempts to restart the Inquisition. The friar responded by branding the councilmen as heretics, and they responded with violence, attacking and ransacking the Dominican convent within the city. The councilors then appealed to that other fiercely independent southern French city, the city of Toulouse, for assistance. Count Raymond VII attempted to intervene, but violent clashes continued on and off for the next couple of years, and only died down after Friar Ferrier decided to withdraw from Narbonne, to seek out heretics elsewhere. It seems that the citizens of Narbonne were the victors in this conflict, with the result that virtually no persecutions of heretics in the city of Narbonne took place for the next fifteen or so years.

So, the Inquisition in southern France has gotten off to a rather rocky start. The Inquisitors had better hold onto their hats, as the ride is about to get even rockier. Join me next week as the city of Toulouse follows the example set by the city of Narbonne, and rises in full revolt against the Inquisitors. Until next week, bye for now.

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