

**IDENTIFYING THE ENEMY:
THE COMPLEXITY OF CRUSADE WITHIN
CHRISTENDOM**

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The Albigensian Crusade of the thirteenth century has often been considered a corruption of the crusading ideal as it differed significantly from the Holy Land endeavors of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹ The crusade against the Albigenses was distinctive in its location, enemies, and results; it was a war waged within Christendom against both orthodox and heretical Christians and resulted in the destruction of Languedoc's cultural, political, and economic independence.² The eleventh and twelfth centuries witnesses a great increase in the number of heresies within Christendom, which were not the result of an introduction of heretical ideas into Western Europe, but rather the consequence of Gregorian reform. The reform measures of Pope Gregory VII sought to establish conformity of practice within the church, which was continued by his successors, including Pope Innocent III. Establishing uniformity automatically defined nonconformists as heretics and accounts for a large portion of the heresy recorded in this period. The Albigensian Crusade was a defensive measure employed by the Papacy to eradicate the threat heresy posed to Christendom, the complexities of which are illustrated in the radically different perceptions of the leader of the crusade, Simon de Montfort, by his contemporaries, as either a pious pilgrim or a brutal opportunist.

The focus on Simon de Montfort as a figure illustrative of the complexity of crusade within Christendom's borders has yet to be attempted. Joseph Strayer and Jonathon Sumption have both produced excellent works on the Albigensian crusade which focus on the origins, events, and results of the whole war. But their work does not specifically address the issue of a

¹Jonathon and Louise Riley Smith, Crusades: Idea and Reality 1095-1274 (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 3.

²Joseph Strayer, The Albigensian Crusade (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

crusade against Christians, emphasizing instead the political motives of the papacy and the southern French nobility. This is a vital area of study in order to understand the motivations of the local nobility and the papacy, but it de-emphasizes the conflict of opinion surrounding the religiosity of the crusaders.³ Robert Kovarik examines the ideal of crusade as conceived by Innocent III and Simon de Montfort, but fails to discuss the southern French opinions of the crusade.⁴ Palmer Throop, centering around the criticism of crusade as contained in troubadour poetry, concludes that there was a growing disillusionment with crusade within the thirteenth century.⁵ Elizabeth Siberry, in response to Palmer Throop's study, primarily uses troubadour poetry to illustrate the existence of criticism towards particular aspects of crusade, but not towards the idea of crusade itself.⁶ This paper will focus on lay and ecclesiastical sources relevant to the Albigensian crusade. although the primary source under examination will be the poem, *La Chanson de la Croisade Albigeoise*, or Song of the Cathar Wars.

The song of the Cathar Wars was authored by two different poets, William of Tudela and his anonymous successor, each providing different opinions on the crusade and its participants. William of Tudela wrote the first section of the poem, and although he is sympathetic to the local nobility's position (specifically Raymond VI), he concerns his work

³see *ibid.* and Jonathan Sumption, *The Albigensian Crusade* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978).

⁴Robert Kovarik, "A Study of the Epistolary Relations Between Pope Innocent III and Simon de Montfort (1209-1216)" in *Studies in Medieval Culture*, Vol. 4, ed. E. Rozanne Elder, John R. Sommerfeldt, and Larry Syndergaard (Western Michigan University: Medieval Institute, 1973), 158-167.

⁵Palmer Throop, "Criticism of Papal Crusade Policy in Old French Provençal" in *Speculum* 13 (October 1938): 379-412.

⁶Elizabeth Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading, 1095-1274* (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1985).

more with the events of the crusade itself and offers tentative suggestions as to their motivations. The anonymous successor of William reveals strong anti papal opinions and concentrates more on the poetic aspects of the poem rather than historical events. Troubadour poetry requires careful consideration because of the anti papal sentiments of the poets as well as the local origins which set them against outsiders, but these biases do not eliminate their usefulness. The Troubadours' criticism of the crusade is invaluable as it enriches and illustrates the complex nature of crusading within Christendom.

The Albigensian Crusade and Simon de Montfort's role within it must first be understood within the framework of crusade itself, especially in order to understand the particulars of the crusade against the Cathars. in the briefest of definitions, a crusade was a war fought for religious purposes as authorized by the pope and directed against the enemies of the Church in the name of God or Christ.⁷ The ambiguity existing within this definition is apparent and deliberate. The religious purposes and the enemies of the church are fluctuating entities that are determined in each particular instance of crusade by the pope. The authorization of the pope is the essential ingredient in crusade, a war instigated under religious auspices without papal approval does not have Christ's approval. According to the ideal, a crusade is a defensive action against both internal and external threats to Christendom which justifies the use of violence as a resource for the faithful, with the provision that force was exerted lovingly "a sign of love and mercy in imitation of Christ for a loving Church in collaboration with a loving state to compel heretics to forsake the path of error for their own

⁷Jonathan and Louise Riley-Smith, Crusades: Idea and Reality 1095-1274 (London: Edward Arnold, 1981).

benefit."⁸ Personal gain should never factor into a crusader's motivations, he is, rather, concerned for the soul of the heretic and the defense of Christendom.

The spiritual dangers that heretics presented were more threatening than those of schismatics and infidels for a variety of reasons. According to Pope Innocent III, they "reject the dogmas of the true faith . . . the more they hear the truth preached to them, the more boldly they pass on to the others the false deceptions which they have invented."⁹ The pope's opinion illustrates how the development of the concept of heresy affected its perceived dangers. The Church's effort to enforce uniformity of practice and belief within Christendom, as embodied in Gregorian reform, naturally anathematized dissenting groups as unorthodox. Heresy seemed to be constantly multiplying as efforts to enforce the new practices and beliefs conflicted with local customs, and the efforts at reform also created a demand for spiritually pure individuals to embody these new religious ideals. The Cathars, and other such heretical groups, answered the religious needs of people wanting to patronize or seek membership in a group devoted to reform of the church, which helps to explain the origins of the Albigensian Crusade.

In the years before the crusade, a preaching campaign waged in Languedoc to eradicate the heretics was largely unsuccessful due to the lack of cooperation from peasants and the local nobility. The region of southern France, or Occitania, had a strong tradition of anticlericalism which stemmed from the rather lax and disgraceful state of the clergy in the area. Pope Innocent's opinion of the archbishop of Narbonne is illustrative of the reputation of

⁸Ibid., 4.

⁹Innocent to King Philip II of France, Letter. in Jonathan and Louise Riley-Smith, Crusades: Idea and Reality 1095-1274 (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 79.

the clerics of Occitania, "blind men, dumb dogs who can no longer bark . . . men who will do anything for money. All of them, from the greatest to the least are zealous in avarice, lovers of gifts, seekers of rewards."¹⁰ The disreputable state of the clergy was one of the problems the reform aimed to correct, but the enmity the local churchmen had fostered towards Rome through their behavior discouraged Occitanians from supporting the preaching effort. Instead, the call to renew the apostolic simplicity of the primitive church stressing poverty, chastity, and prayer was answered by the Cathars, who lived in communities among fellow believers with their own priesthood, known as the "perfect." These communes produced individuals that seemed more spiritually pure than the local clergy, consequently, the Church's reforms were often ignored as halfhearted measures, seen in the shadow of the Cathar priesthood's austere existences. In one letter Pope Innocent explains the damage the local clergy's reputation had inflicted, "Hence the insolence of the heretics, the scorn of the rulers and people for God and the Church."¹¹ But the same dedication to their ideals which gained the Cathar's the nobility's protection in many ways instigated the crusade. The local population's unresponsiveness to the preaching campaign was considered a refusal to recant by actively joining the Christian body of faithful, and the protectors of the Cathars were guilt of the same sin. According to the Third Lateran Council of 1179¹² and James of Vitry, "a man who is capable of opposing and confounding the wicked and fails to do so is nothing less than condoning their ungodliness; . .

¹⁰Pope Innocent, Letter in Patrologia Latina CXCIV-CCXVII, quoted in Joseph Strayer, The Albigensian Crusade (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 18-19.

¹¹Ibid., 19.

¹²Austin P. Evans, "The Albigensian Crusade" in A History of Crusade Vol. II, edited by Kenneth M. Setton, Robert Lee Wolff, and Harry W. Hazard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), 277-324.

. and he risks being suspected of being in secret alliance with it."¹³ This was the very complaint against Count Raymond of Toulouse who ignored and avoided the pressure of the papal legate to actively help suppress heresy in the region.

Peter Castelnau was the papal legate Innocent had chosen to fight the heresy in Languedoc. His strategy to push the nobility into action against the heretics necessitated the support of the count of Toulouse. The count's repeated evasion of duty was self incriminating in the eyes of the papacy, which likened heresy to a cancer which spread if unchecked. The murder of Peter of Castelnau. after and argument with Raymond, reinforced the papacy's perception that the Cathar's had subverted the faith in Occitania by testifying to the extreme actions heretics would employ to fight reform. After Castelnau's death the crusade was called against both the Cathars and Raymond VI, unless he joined the crusading army against other nobles standing in the way of reform.¹⁴ On the one hand, the Albigensian Crusade follows the precedent established by former crusades, since it was a holy war fought against the enemies of the Church and was called by the pope to preserve the integrity of Christendom. On the other hand, the conflicting opinions as to the legitimacy of a crusade against the Cathars focuses around the motivations of the crusaders, and especially Simon de Montfort.

For the papacy, Simon de Montfort was the best choice available to lead the crusade against the enemies of the Church. Philip of France had refused the Pope's offer to lead the crusade, though he did not forbid or hinder the Pope's efforts to wipe out the heresy in

¹³ James of Vitry, "Sermones vulgares," Analecta novissima vol. II; ed. J.B. Pitra (Paris: 1988), 419-420; excerpted in Jonathan and Louise Riley Smith, Crusades: Idea and Reality 1095-1274 (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 69.

¹⁴ The count actually did join the crusade but at this point it was too late to stop the momentum of the campaign and so his nephew was targeted for attack instead.

Languedoc. Innocent's experience with the Fourth Crusade emphasized the importance of a campaign under the leadership of one person who in turn answered to Rome. Simon was a seasoned crusader who had participated briefly in the Fourth Crusade, leaving the crusading host at Zara after he refused to fight against fellow Christians, especially since the Pope promised excommunication in return for any who participated.¹⁵ This is an important insight into the rationale of de Montfort, he considered schismatics Christians, but not the Cathars. The inconsistency of this view can be attributed to the Pope's threat of excommunication, as Roger of Clari gives as way of explanation,¹⁶ but Simon specifically says "I did not take the cross to kill Christians."¹⁷ This reluctance to fight the Greeks might reflect a body of opinion which still regarded schismatics as Christians, but in context with the Albigensian Crusade there are other important differences.

The Cathar heretics of Languedoc presented a more earnest and deadly threat to Christendom in the mind of the papacy and pious individuals guided by the Church. The heretics in Occitania were an integral threat to the cohesion of Christendom and therefore a more immediate danger. Furthermore, the schismatics were not the instigators of the conflict of the Fourth Crusade, whereas the Cathars' subversion of the nobility in Occitania was interpreted as an attack on the faith as well as fundamental responsible for the death of Peter of Castelnau. Simon's acceptance of leadership in the Albigensian Crusade can be explained

¹⁵ Robert of Clari, "History of them that took Constantinople", in Three Old French Chronicles of the Crusades, trans. Edward Noble Stone (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1939), 181.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Simon de Montfort, quoted in Walter L. Wakefield, Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France 1100-1250 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 103.

through the Pope's call to crusade and as the action of a pious individual.

Simon personal piety is stressed throughout the sources from both his supporters and critics. For instance, upon accepting the leadership of the crusade, de Montfort vowed to pay three annual deniers from every hearth to donate to the churches of the viscounty. Even his critics, such as William of Tudela's anonymous successor, relate an episode in which a surprise attack was launched against the crusaders while the count was attending mass. He refused to leave before the elevation of the host had been completed.¹⁸ The stress on the count's personal piety and devotion is continually used as a measure of the validity of the crusade.

The various criticisms aimed at de Montfort focus around his brutality and greed. According to Simon's critic, the anonymous successor of Tudela, de Montfort showed little mercy towards his enemies, slaughtering both Christians and heretics without attempting to distinguish between the two. In *La Chanson de la Croisade Albigeoise*, various interpretations of Simon's savagery are offered, as the accounts of the seige of Beziers illustrate. William of Tudela's section of the poem attests to the massacre of the town's population, including the clergy and those taking refuge in churches; his explanation was the crusaders' desire to make an example of Beziers in order to frighten other towns into submission. The poet seems unsettled by this event and he prays for the slaughtered, "God, if it be his will, receive their souls in paradise!"¹⁹ but he does not condemn or justify the action of the crusading army. Roger of Wendover's chronicle gives a different interpretation of events, specifically that

¹⁸ Walter L. Wakefield, *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France 1100-1250* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 121.

¹⁹William of Tudela, *The Song of the Cathar Wars*, trans. by Janet Shirley (Vermont: Scholar Press, 1996) p. 21, *laisse* 21.

Christians were spared the sword at the seige of Beziers by God's will, though there was a great slaughter of infidels.²⁰ Roger distinctly mentions that the majority of the slain were heretics, which again reveals a certain unease with killing Christians. The different accounts of the seige of Beziers illustrate that the central problem of crusading within Christendom was identifying the enemy.

This problem is central to the criticism of Simon de Montfort as well as the whole of the Albigensian Crusade. Understandably, the distinction between heretic and Christian is difficult to make during a seige, but it is a central criticism the troubadours continually restate to justify their negative interpretations of the crusaders' actions. Tudela's successor considers greed to be the main reason for the crusaders' zeal, as exemplified by the confiscation of land and riches. For example, according to this interpretation Simon's attack on the count of Toulouse, Raymond VI (after he turned against he crusaders), was driven by greed for Raymond's lands and wealth. Raymond had been excommunicated by the Pope fort he death of his papal legate as well as for his failure to suppress Catharism, but he had not been accused of heresy himself. De Montfort's attack on Christians, such as Raymond, who were merely trying to protect their property, reinforced Tudela's successor's negative opinion of the crusaders. Peter of Aragon is recorded as entering the crusade on behalf of Raymond because "the French are trying to disinherit my brother in law the count and drive him out of his fief."²¹ The Occitanians and the king of Aragon viewed the campaign as the effort of the crusaders to enrich themselves, not as protecting the internal integrity of Christendom.

²⁰Roger of Wendover, *Flowers of History* vol. II, trans. J.A. Giles (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 280.

²¹Willaim of Tudela, p. 66, laisse 132.

The accusation of deliberately attacking Christians for personal gain was not lightly set aside when Simon was accused of invading Peter of Aragon's property (as Raymond was his vassal for many of his territories) and attacking his Christian citizens, Innocent immediately stopped the crusade. The issue was further complicated by Peter's legal status as a crusader himself. Crusaders and pilgrims shared the same legal status which insured the protection of their land, family, and person by the Church. Simon clearly had to demonstrate the existence of heretics in Peter's realm before he could attack the population, which was provided when the papal legate, Arnaud Amaury testified to their infestation of Aragon's lands as well. The problem of determining a person as a heretic or Christian once again resurfaced, which could either condemn de Montfort as a greedy brute or justify him as a combatant against heresy. The pope's investigation also reveals another complexity of crusading within the borders of Christendom, the variety of political powers and interests in a given territory. Raymond was the brother in law of both King John of England and Peter II of Aragon and was first cousin to Philip Augustus of France, he owed allegiance to different lords for a variety of territories, as did many other nobles in the region. The variety of parties with interests in the crusade were many, any of which could protest the legitimacy of the crusaders' motivations when provoked. Peter's accusation could have been a lie designed to discredit de Montfort, but it does not erase the accounts of the crusaders' looting the towns.

Beziers was the first target of the crusading army directed against the viscount Roger Raymond Trencavel once Raymond VI had joined the crusaders. Roger of Wendover's account of the seige of Beziers has the townspeople taunting the crusaders by throwing a book of the gospel at the army and declaring "Behold your law, we take no heed to it; yours

it shall be."²² The citizens were offered the choice of sending out the Cathar heretics to avoid punishment, at which point the heretics could recant and declare their faith or be burned at the stake. While neither of these options were appealing, the refusal of the locals to hand over Cathars painted the townspeople as heretics themselves or heretic protectors, thus reinforcing the papacy's perception that the heresy had infectiously spread out of control.

In the cities captured by the crusaders most of the wealth was indeed taken as booty, but it does not necessarily testify to de Montfort's personal greed. Simon was left with the burden of financing the crusade from his victories, especially after Innocent diverted attention from the Albigensian Crusade to the Fifth Crusade in 1215. In one instance de Montfort laments, "this siege is costing me a great deal of money and I am losing my companions. Night and day I am worried because I cannot make the gifts I have promised."²³ In another instance de Montfort complains "All my hired troops want to go away because I have no money to pay them and do not know where to find any."²⁴ Not only did the soldiers require money but supplies and equipment were also an expense, Simon financed part of the endeavor by borrowing money from a rich merchant by the name of Raymond of Salvanhac, "It was he who financed the crusade, lending money to the count."²⁵ Simon did not have substantial personal resources, nor could he tax the population of Occitania as it was not yet docile enough. The crusading indulgence offered by the pope also created its own problems for de Montfort militarily.

²² Roger of Wendover, 280.

²³Ibid., p. 148 laisse 195.

²⁴Ibid., p. 158 laisse 199.

²⁵Ibid., p. 43 laisse 72.

The pope's issuance of a crusading indulgence to promote the Albigensian Crusade brought its own problems. A constant fluctuation in the army occurred as only forty days were required to receive the crusading indulgence which effected the cohesion of the army and caused a shortage of men to maintain captured areas. Simon was a conqueror who gained the enmity of the local population for the destruction of their homeland (no matter what his justifications). While the brutality of his attack may have been designed to wipe out resistance forever, it no doubt reinforced the population's hatred of the crusaders. Consequently, towns rebelled against Simon when the opportunity presented itself, such as Toulouse, which rebelled against de Montfort in 1211, 1216 , and 1217. The forty day soldiers attracted by the indulgence only added to the negative view of the crusaders as primarily interested in personal gain. But de Montfort himself remained a constant figure in the crusade, along with some other noblemen, most notable Simon's brother Guy. De Montfort's resilience and commitment to victory were his greatest assets in the Albigensian Crusade which he led for ten years, from 1208-1218. He inspired his men and gained their respect which in turn enhanced their own commitment to the crusade. In one battle his men "shouted 'Montfort'" and above the rest his voice cried "Holy Mary, blessed Lady!"²⁶ This dedication not only inspired the crusaders during financial difficulties, it proved de Montfort's own motivations were not merely greed. At the Fourth Lateran Council Innocent had decided to return the lands taken from Raymond VI and allow Simon to keep only the lands taken from heretics. Folquet of Toulouse protested this decision saying, "He is a faithful servant of the church, entirely devoted to your cause. He has put up with the hardship and exhaustion, thrown himself into

²⁶Ibid., p. 52, laisse 98.

the battle against heretics and mercenaries."²⁷ Simon's personal dedication to the crusade won him powerful allies who protected his interests with the pope, such as Folquet and Arnaud Amaury, but it also allowed his enemies to interpret his commitment as ambition.

The death of Simon de Montfort perhaps illustrates most clearly the deep feelings the count aroused on both sides of the conflict. De Montfort was killed in 1218 at the siege of Toulouse. the response of the crusaders and the Occitanians to Simon's death sums up the two different interpretations of the Albigensian Crusade and its leader. The reaction in Toulouse to news of de Montfort's death was, "such . . . joy that all over the town they ran to the churches and lit candles in all the candlesticks and cried out, 'Rejoice! God is merciful . . . ,"²⁸ But in the crusaders' camp de Montfort's death was a staggering blow. Bishop Folquet promised that "the lord pope who approved and chose count Simon will place him in the consistory where he interred St. Paul; let him be a most holy relic, for he obeyed the Church, he is a saint and a martyr."²⁹ Simon's sanctification rewarded his efforts to fight against the enemies of the church and remain obedient to the pope, but the celebration of his death in Toulouse illuminates the complexity of the crusade. To the Occitanians, de Montfort was a man who sought to enrich himself at their expense and at the behest of an authority they regarded as equally avaricious, the Church.

The Albigensian Crusade illustrates the complexities of crusade within Christendom, as highlighted in the character of Simon de Montfort. Simon's character was paradoxically

²⁷Folquet of Toulouse to Innocent III, quoted in Jonathan Sumption, *The Albigensian Crusade* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), 180.

²⁸William of Tudela, p. 172, laisse 205.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 173, laisse 206.

sanctified and vilified, his actions were condoned and condemned, and his motivations were both blessed and damned. He was the agent of the papacy who fought against an enemy that threatened Christendom not only by its existence, but by the admiration it inspired. The Cathars' powerful draw was an obstacle to the Papacy's goals of creating a church uniform in ritual and belief. But the eradication of the Cathars required more thorough means than a crusade, such as the Inquisition would later employ. The Albigensian Crusade reinforced the perceptions of both the papacy with regards to the virulence of the heresy and the Occitanians with regards to the Church's greed, of which de Montfort was a representative. The primary problems the crusaders faced involved the political powers with interests in the area, the financing of the crusade, and above all, the identification of its enemies. The failure of Simon de Montfort and the crusaders to distinguish between Cathar and Christian became the fundamental criticism of the Albigensian Crusade, which led to the conflicting interpretations of the appropriateness of their actions.

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