



Political Background of the Cathar Genocide

In the Languedoc, famous at the time for its high culture, tolerance and liberalism, the Cathar religion took root and gained more and more adherents during the twelfth century. By the early thirteenth century Catharism was probably the majority religion in the area, supported by the nobility as well as the common people. This was yet another annoyance to the Roman Church which considered the feudal system to be divinely ordained as the natural order. In open debates with leading Catholic theologians Cathars seem to have come out on top. This was embarrassing for the Roman Church, not least because they had fielded the best professional preachers in Europe against what they saw as a collection of uneducated weavers and other manual workers. Worse still a number of Catholic priests had become Cathar adherents (Catharism was a religion that seems to have appealed especially to the theologically literate. Whole Cathedral chapters are known to have defected, as they did for example at Orleans). Worse, the Catholic Church was held up to public ridicule (some of the richest men in Christendom, bejewelled, dressed in finery, and preaching poverty, provided an irresistible target even to contemporary Catholics in the Languedoc). Worst yet, Cathars refused to pay tithes to the Catholic Church.

The Cathar view of the Catholic Church was as bleak as the Catholic Church's view of the Cathar Church. On the Cathar side it manifested itself in ridiculing Catholic doctrine and practices, and characterising the Catholic Church as the "Church of Wolves". The Catholics accused Cathars of heresy or apostasy and said they belonged to the "Synagogue of Satan". The Catholic side created some striking propaganda. When the propaganda proved only partly successful, there was only one option left - a crusade - the Albigensian Crusade.

The Pope, Innocent III, called a formal Crusade against the Cathars of the Languedoc, appointing a series of military leaders to head his Holy Army. The first was a Cistercian abbot (Arnaud Amaury) now best remembered for his command at Béziers "Kill them all. God will know his own". The second was Simon de Montfort now remembered as the father of another Simon de Montfort, a prominent figure in English parliamentary history. The war against the Cathars of the Languedoc continued for two generations. In the later phases the Kings of France would take over as leaders of the crusade, which thus became a Royal Crusade.





From 1208, a war of terror was waged against the indigenous population and their rulers: Raymond VI of Toulouse, Raymond-Roger Trencavel, Raymond Roger of Foix in the first generation and Raymond VII of Toulouse, Raymond Trencavel II, and Roger Bernard II of Foix in the second generation. During this period an estimated 500,000 Languedoc men women and children were massacred - Catholics as well as Cathars. The Counts of Toulouse and their allies were dispossessed and humiliated, and their lands annexed to France. Educated and tolerant Languedoc rulers were replaced by relative barbarians; Dominic Guzmán (later Saint Dominic) founded the Dominican Order and soon afterwards the Inquisition, manned by his Dominicans, was established explicitly to wipe out the last vestiges of resistance. Persecutions of Languedoc Jews and other minorities were initiated; the culture of the troubadours was lost as their cultured patrons were reduced to wandering refugees known as *faidits*. Their characteristic concept of "paratge", a whole sophisticated world-view, was almost destroyed, leaving us a pale imitation in our idea of chivalry. Lay learning was discouraged and the reading of the bible became a capital crime. Tithes were enforced. The Languedoc started its long economic decline to become the poorest region in France; and the language of the area, Occitan, began its descent from the foremost literary language in Europe to a regional dialect, disparaged by the French as a *patois*.

At the end of the extermination of the Cathars, the Roman Church had proof that a sustained campaign of genocide can work. It also had the precedent of an internal Crusade within Christendom, and the machinery of the first modern police state that could be wheeled out for the Spanish Inquisition, and again for later Inquisitions and genocides.

The crusade against the Cathars of the Languedoc has been described as one of the greatest disasters ever to befall Europe.

Catharism used to be said to have been completely eradicated by the end of the fourteenth century. Yet there were more than a few vestiges throughout the 20th century, apart from the enduring memory of Cathar "martyrdom" and the ruins of the famous "Cathar castles", including the Château of Montségur.

Above text is extracted from <http://www.cathar.info/>

Catharism is alive, and the number of adherents is growing.

This website is maintained by Corascendea, Cathar Parfaite

THE CATHAR TESTAMENT

<http://www.dhaxem.com>

