

How successful was the Albigensian Crusade for the Kings of France and the Popes?

A Crusade is a war carried out under Papal sanction; the Albigensian Crusade was a crusade against the Cathars, and their protectors in the Languedoc region in the South of France. The Cathars were a highly organised religious group who had a clear hierarchy, that included Bishops, Deacons, and Perfecti, that gave spiritual guidance to the group's followers. The Cathars had alternative views to Catholicism, with Gnosticism and dualism beliefs at their religious core. Catharism had come to southern France from the Bogomils in Bulgaria and was allowed to grow in Southern France due to the tolerance from local Lords in the region. These local Lords such as, Rouergue and the Trencavel, also protected the Cathars from persecution from leaders of the Crusade such as Simon de Montfort. The Albigensian Crusade was a very stop-start conflict, with different powers taking control of the region, and the Crusade at various points. The first Albigensian Crusade was approximately from 1209 to 1225 and was guided by the Papacy. The Papacy's reason for calling the Crusade in 1209, was to crush the Cathar heresy, and to strengthen Catholicism in the area, after Papal legate Peter de Castelnau was murdered in Toulouse, a clear sign of a lack of Catholicism's strength in the area. After the deaths of Innocent III in 1216, and Simon de Montfort in 1218 the Crusade was hijacked by the Kings of France, and thus beginning the second Albigensian Crusade; which lasted from 1225-1229, ending with the Treaty of Paris. The aims of the Kings of France were to impose central control on the region by bringing the Languedoc nobility under their control. The period 1225-1255 sees the Crusade guided by Inquisition, and siege warfare, where Cathars were persecuted and killed, and the nobility that protected them was made to submit to the power of the French Monarchy. This nearly 50 yearlong conflict, that saw four Popes, and three Kings, lasted this long due to the geographical makeup of the areas that the Cathars retreated to; which was dangerous and mountainous. Castles such as Termes and Queribus, where they found sanctuary, can be found high up in the mountains of the Pyrenes. The Papacy, and Kings of France were ultimately successful in their aims, with the Papacy managing to eradicate the Cathar movement, and re-establish Bishopric power, whilst the French Kings established overlordship over the Languedoc nobility, however, it is at what cost they achieved these aims. Whilst their aims might have been achieved, their success can only be defined by its lasting effects; such as precedents that were established, and implications of their success.

The Papacy was successful in completing their aims for the Albigensian Crusade. Innocent III initially condemned the Cathars at the Third Lateran Council in 1179, declaring them and their defenders under 'anathema' and that everything related to the Cathars should be 'destroy[ed]' and laid to waste. ¹ This condemnation set the path to the eventual crusade against them, the murder of Papal legate Peter de Castelnau's in 1208 which prompted the call for the Crusade at the Fourth Lateran Council, where temporal lords were 'required and instructed' to clean their territory of 'heretical filth'. ^{2 3} This call for temporal lords to

¹ Norman P Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils Volume 1 Nicaea I – Lateran V*, (London, Sheed & Ward Limited, 1990) pg 224-225

² Charles D Stanton, *Medieval Maritime Warfare*, (London, Pen and Sword, 2015, (Google Books Edition) pg 95

³ Norman P Tanner, Norman P Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils Volume 1*, pg 233-235

cleanse their land of 'heretical filth' made it abundantly clear that the Papacy's aimed to eradicate the Cathars, and other heretics. Further evidence for the Papacy wanting the eradication of Catharism is found in contemporary accounts of the siege of Beziers in 1209, where it is estimated 20,000 to 40,000 people died: firstly from Catholic Abbot Amalric who cried 'Kill them all; God will know his own' as the slaughter took place in front of him, and secondly from Chronicler of the Crusades, Pierre de Veux de Cernay who claimed in his *Historia Albigensia*, 'we exterminated them with unbound joy'.⁴ By Innocent III's death in 1216, thousands of Cathars had massacred, burnt, and hanged after successful victories, and sieges at; Carcassonne, Termes, Beziers, Minerve, Las Casses, and Lavaur. There is also evidence that Innocent was perhaps attempting to establish the Languedoc region as a Papal State. Innocent III claimed to have been 'given the whole world to rule over by God' and acted as if he was the apex of the feudal system, and during his Pontificate he was claiming lands 'named in imperial privileges from the time of Louis'.^{5 6} Innocent III, who was the apogee of Papal Primacy, was able to establish several major kingdoms, England, Portugal, Aragon and Hungary, as Papal fiefdoms, this shows that he considered himself above God's anointed rulers on Earth, and that he was attempting to establish much more temporal power than the Papacy had previously had, claiming that he had been put 'above peoples and kingdoms to tear out and to destroy, to disperse and to reject, to build and to plant.'⁷ This is a follow on from The First Crusade in the 11th, and 12th Centuries in which a Crusader State was established in the middle east upon the authority of the Pope Urban II. The sheer violence, and numbers of Cathars killed up until 1216 shows that Innocent III was successful in his actions, as his intentions to cleanse 'heretical filth' were being followed and actioned, however, he ultimately wasn't successful as Catharism wasn't eradicated in the region. It became harder to eliminate the Cathars as they were learnt about their attackers, and their methods, and withdrew to places, such as Queribus in the Pyrenes, that were hard to reach and attack.

Pope Honorius III can be seen to be continuing Innocent III's subliminal temporal expansion by granting the Languedoc, and title Count of Toulouse to Simon de Montfort in 1216. The right to bestow the title of Count of Toulouse belonged to the Holy Roman Emperor, as Charles the Bald had bestowed the title to the Rouergue family in 844 and 865; the ignoring of this right shows the Papacy attempting to act as the font of power in Europe, and as a secular overlord.^{8 9} Honorius III brought in burning as the punishment for heresy in 1224, through this we can see that focus and structure had been given to the inquisition as punishments had been set, showing that the inquisition was successful as it needed set guidelines to prevent further abuses during its growth.¹⁰

Pope Gregory IX was more successful in his methods in eradicating Catharism, he called the inquisition after realising that it was far more effective to target individuals rather than

⁴ Raphael Lemkin, *Lemkin on Genocide*, (London, Lexington Books, 2012) pg 75-76

⁵ Johannes Haller, *Lord of the World in Innocent III Vicar of Christ or Lord of the World*, (Washington D.C, CUA Press, 1994) pg80 (Haller, 1994)

⁶ Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989) Pg420

⁷ Johannes Haller, *Lord of the World* pg79

⁸ Wikipedia, *Fredelo*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fredelo,_Count_of_Toulouse

⁹ Wikipedia, *Bernard II*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_II,_Count_of_Toulouse

¹⁰ Malcom Lambert, *The Cathars*, (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2000) pg114

target and attack whole areas where there might be Cathars. Gregory IX's granting of inquisitional powers to the Dominicans gave rise to one of the 'most formidable instruments of repression'; whilst they were not entirely successful in the first inquisition, the actions of Dominican Peter Seila in the second inquisition were far more successful.¹¹ The inquisition was successful in the finding of Cathars, often discovering huge networks of Cathars through interrogation. The aim of the inquisition, and the crusade, was to eliminate Catharism, this was either through conversion to Catholicism, or by death; whilst these methods might have been successful, many innocent people were tied up in the punishments. Whilst it was only supposed to be true heretics that were burnt, some innocent people were also burnt, many innocent men went to prison, and many innocent families suffered the heavy burden of large financial penalties, such as the confiscation of property, and goods that crippled them.¹² The actions of the inquisition were sanctioned by the Church, and there many people largely held the Church responsible for these actions, furthermore, many people also claim that the Church committed genocide in their successful efforts to destroy the Cathars¹³. The term 'genocide' is heavily inspired by the word Albigensian, with it being claimed that the Crusade and the inquisition led to 'one of the most conclusive cases of genocide in religious history', this claim shows that the Crusade, and the Inquisition were successful in their aims as in modern terms, has been called a genocide, due to the total eradication of Cathars in the region.¹⁴ The actions of the church had the effect of making the Church more unpopular in an area where it was already largely disliked, and this dislike of the Church can even be seen 300 years later during the reformation where the Languedoc region was one area where Calvinists, and Huguenots, were allowed to freely worship after the 1598 Edict of Nantes.¹⁵ ¹⁶ Gregory IX, unlike his predecessors was successful in the Church's aims of temporal expansion; the 1229 Treaty of Paris granted the Church the Marquisate of Provence, and Avignon.¹⁷ This shows success as Gregory IX was able to achieve what Innocent III and Honorius III had attempted via feudal over-lordship. The whole of the Languedoc was not a Papal dominion, as Innocent III possibly envisioned, however, these territories still became the home of the Papacy during the Avignon Papacy from 1309 to 1376, showing successful temporal expansion. The Church had been successful in its aim to eradicate Catharism in the region, after the fall of Queribus in 1255; and in its aim to re-establish power in the region, which came after the granting of powers to Bishops throughout the crusade, it had achieved these aims at a huge cost; as it had lost the full support of the people by imposing orthodoxy at the point of a sword. Furthermore, as the Papacy had been unable to complete this crusade without the support of the Kings of France, the age of Papal Primacy had ended, and as seen during the Avignon Papacy period during the 1300s, the Papacy was unable to survive without the support of France.

¹¹ Malcom Lambert, *Medieval Heresies: Popular Movement from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 3rd Edition, (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2002) pg146

¹² Joseph R. Strayer, *The Albigensian Crusades*, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1992) pg157

¹³ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity*, (London, Alleen Lane, 2009) pg368

¹⁴ Raphael Lemkin, *Lemkin on Genocide*, pg71

¹⁵ Hals, The Protestant Reformation, Slide 28 The Spread of Protestantism, <https://www.slideshare.net/bethhals/the-protestant-reformation-12027858> (2015) (see Map 1)

¹⁶ Musée Protestant, *The Edict of Nantes*, <https://www.museeprotestant.org/en/notice/the-edict-of-nantes-1598/>

¹⁷ Jacques Madaule, *The Albigensian Crusade*, (London, Burns & Oats, 1961) pg91

The Kings of France were more successful in their endeavours than the Popes. The aims of the Kings were to centralise control in France, by making all of the regions, nobles answerable to them, and to territorially expand France. The post-Carolingian French monarchy at the time, lacked any kind of central control, after the Capetian Family had been elected to the throne. As the monarchy had been elected by the nobility there was a view that the monarchy was beholden to the nobility instead of the traditional opposite. Post-Charlemagne de-centralisation had led to regional Lords being able to exercise a huge amount of political autonomy, whilst also having 'nominal allegiance' at best, nominal allegiance that was sworn to several monarchs.¹⁸ This led to a lack of accountability for the Nobility, who were essentially free to do as they pleased, leaving the monarchy being unable to assert their power.¹⁹²⁰ Furthermore, the French crown had very little power for creation as France was not the property of the French Crown; the old titles had been given via ancient custom, or ancient ownership of land.²¹ A perfect example of nominal allegiance, and ancient ownership of land is the aforementioned Rouergue family, who had been Counts of Toulouse since the 9th century after Charles the Bald, Holy Roman Emperor, had bestowed the title upon them, and therefore they owed little to the French Monarchy.²²²³ The aim of territorial expansion for the French Kings came about due to the lack of land that they held, and their secondary aim was not only to bring the nobility under their control, but also to own and control the land that they were God's anointed rulers of. Through the 1100s, and early 1200s the English Kings, through their large and powerful Angevin Empire, controlled more of France than the Kings of France. The Empire covered the Western region of France, with the major Duchies Normandy, Brittany, Gascony and Aquitaine falling under English control, and in comparison, this made the Kings' of France lands, the Île-de-France and Picardy, look small and insignificant, and also made the Kings of France look weak and ineffectual, considering they exercised very little control over their Kingdom.²⁴

The role of the French Monarchy was initially to support the Papacy, and the leader of the Crusade Simon de Montfort. The French Monarchy had little involvement with the First Albigensian Crusade as it was preoccupied with countering King John of England in his efforts to invade France, and supporting Prince Louis, the future Louis VIII of France, in his attempt to invade England. After the death of the Phillip II in 1223, Louis VIII started the 2nd Albigensian Crusade, or the French Crusade in 1226, he led this until his death later that year. Louis's aims were to bring the Southern Nobility under his control, and the excommunication of Raymond of Toulouse in 1226 by the Council of Bourges, gave him the perfect opportunity to do this. Excommunication of a secular leader in the medieval period was an invitation for other secular rivals to attack with the support of the Papacy, one such example of this is the excommunication of Harold Godwinson; his excommunicated by

¹⁸ Alexis Nunn, *The Albigensian Crusade: The Intersection of Religious and Political Authority in Languedoc (1209-1218)*, https://cedar.wvu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1056&context=wwu_honors

¹⁹ Medieval France, Medieval France and Feudalism, <http://www.medievalchronicles.com/medieval-europe/medieval-france/>

²⁰ Neil Murphy, The French Monarchy, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396584/obo-9780195396584-0258.xml>, 2018

²¹ François Velde, Nobility and Titles in France, <https://www.heraldica.org/topics/france/noblesse.htm> 2008

²² Wikipedia, *Fredelo*,

²³ Wikipedia, *Bernard II*

²⁴ Robert H. Lobberton, *New Historical Atlas and General History* (New York, NY: Townsend MacCoun, 1886) Plate XXXIV (See Appendix for Map 2)

Alexander II for breaking his oath to Duke William of Normandy, allowed William to invade England, becoming King by conquest.²⁵ Louis VIII had twice attempted to take advantage the support that excommunications gave attackers, firstly with King John, up until 1213 after the rescinding of John's excommunication, and then secondly with Raymond of Toulouse in 1226. Louis VIII was successful in his moves to start the French political crusade as he; successfully capturing Avignon in September 1226, and secured the successful 'surrender of the bulk of the south' afterwards, leaving his crusading successor, Humbert de Beaujeu in a solid position.²⁶ From the solid position that Louis VIII left Beaujeu, he was able to 'systematically' lay to waste much of Raymond of Toulouse's land in 1228. This scorched earth tactic was important, as it accelerated the process of bringing the Southern Nobility under Royal control, as the destroying of Toulouse's provisions, pushed him into a position where reconciliation with the Church and peace with the Crown was the best option.²⁷ Louis's premature death from illness also left him to be unsuccessful, as he personally wasn't able to build upon his initial success, and stamp royal authority on the area in person, and furthermore, he left France with a minority government, which historical had left a country in poor political position.²⁸ France operated under the regency of Blanche of Castile from 1226 to 1234, and this was a strong regency that overcame the traditional difficulties that were associated with minority governments, with the 1229 Treaty of Paris being the highpoint of Blanche's regency, therefore showing Louis unsuccessful move of leaving a minor on the throne had been overcome by his successful marriage.

The 1229 Treaty of Paris was a key proponent in allowing the French Monarchy to achieve its aims of expansion, and centralisation in the South of France. Blanche of Castile as regent negotiated that Raymond's daughter and heir married the King's Brother in Clause 10 of the Treaty of Paris, and if they, or their possible children died childless 'Toulouse and its diocese' would belong to 'the King and his successors'.²⁹ This Treaty was successful in achieving the aims of bringing the southern nobility under control, as it gave Raymond of Toulouse no reason to remarry and have more children, as the inheritance of his territory would not pass on to any son he possibly had, as it had been confirmed that his daughter would inherit his lands. Furthermore, with the lack of incentive for Raymond of Toulouse to remarry and to have a son, the Treaty of Paris had removed the threat of a potentially longer conflict, as there would be no new leading member of the Rouergue family to carry the torch for Toulouse, and the Languedoc region in a reignited southern rebellion.³⁰ The Treaty was also successful as it gave feudal over-lordship of the region to the Monarchy, and Raymond of Toulouse officially became a vassal of the King of France after swearing fealty to the King.³¹ Furthermore, the heavy penalties within the Treaty of Paris made it near impossible for Raymond of Toulouse to reignite his fight as he had to dismantle his fortification within his territories; this shows success as it left the Cathars, and Raymond of Toulouse nowhere to seek shelter from the Kings' or the Crusade's forces. The Treaty of

²⁵ Barry Shaw, *Thomas Norton's "Devices" for a Godly Realm: An Elizabethan Vision for the Future*, (London, Sixteenth Century Journal, Autumn 1991) pg 503 (Shaw, 1991)

²⁶ Jacques Madaule, *The Albigensian Crusade* pg 88

²⁷ Bernard Hamilton, *The Albigensian Crusade*, (London, The Historical Association, 1974) Pg 23

²⁸ Jacques Madaule, *The Albigensian Crusade*, pg 88-89

²⁹ Ibid pg 91

³⁰ Ibid pg 92

³¹ Claude Lebedel. *Understanding the tragedy of the Cathars*, (Rennes, Ouest France, 2011). Pg 96

Paris also allowed the Monarchy's aims for territorial expansion to be successful; Raymond's heir, Joan, and the King's brother, Alphonso, died without an heir in 1271, therefore, per the Treaty, Toulouse, and its diocese were absorbed by the Monarchy, and the French Monarchy's aims became a reality.³² None of this would have been possible without the fall of Avignon, which fell after a three-month siege in 1226, leaving the rest of the South to fall quickly. The rest of the South fell quickly as it had grown weary of 17 years of War, and resistance, and after the success of Louis, to resist an anointed King also would have constituted as treason; therefore any kind of resistance would have been equally as dangerous as restarting the conflict.³³

To conclude, both the Kings of France, and the Popes were successful in the Albigensian Crusade, but this was definitely to varying degrees. The aforementioned definition of success was that 'success can only be defined by its lasting effects; such as precedents that were established, and implications of their success', and their success is measured against this. The Popes were successful in their aims to eliminate the Cathars, but they were not successful in several ways. The Popes were unsuccessful as their initial vehicle for the destruction of the Cathars, the Crusade, did not eliminate the heretical population, instead it forced them into hiding, and it was hijacked, in 1226, by the Kings of France in their war against the Languedoc nobility. Furthermore, it was not until over 100 years later, in 1321 that the Cathar movement in France was ended by the Inquisition, taking over 100 years to end a movement hardly constitutes as a success for the Papacy, and the Cathars had to moved underground, and into areas of Italy, so therefore, the movement was not eliminated entirely. The area in which the Cathars later became a Protestant area during the Reformation, and therefore the orthodoxy that was enforced was unsuccessful.³⁴ The Papacy also alluded to an intention to establish a Papal State in the Languedoc region, however this intention was ultimately unsuccessful as it was curtailed by the Treaty of Paris in 1229, which brought the area under royal control, whilst there was small success as Avignon was granted to the Church it was far from the grandeur of the original intention. However, the Papacy successfully restored the power of the bishops in the region. Whilst the Papacy was successful it was not highly successful in their aims. Its attempts to eradicate the Cathars took far too long to be considered entirely successful from any perspective, its attempts to establish a Papal State in the Languedoc region, were poor with the Papacy having to rely upon the Treaty of Paris 1229 to even gain some land. Furthermore, its attempts to re-establish orthodoxy in the region were also not entirely successful as the grasps of Catholicism were loosened during the Reformation, and the area's reputation as an area of religious dissent did not allude it during this period. The kings of France had two main aims, which were to territorially expand France, whilst also centralising control. Central control was an umbrella term for bringing the southern nobility and the southern regions under their control by having them become vassals of the king. In these aims, the Kings of France were highly successful, this was due to the Treaty of Paris in 1229. After the Treaty Toulouse officially became a province of France, this meant that the kings' aim of territorial expansion had been successful, as the border had been extended and another monarch's influence over the area had been removed, this success was also at the expense of the Papacy who had ideas about establishing a Papal State in the Languedoc region.

³² Jacques Madaule, *The Albigensian Crusade* pg 92

³³ *Ibid* pg 88

³⁴ See Map 1

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Furthermore, the kings' aims of achieving centralisation was also achieved through the Treaty of Paris in 1229, as Raymond of Toulouse had sworn fealty to Louis IX, and as the lands reverted to the Crown, after the deaths of Jean and Alphonso per the treaty in 1271. The French kings were highly successful, and whilst their tactics were brutal, they managed to achieve their aims within the relatively short period of the three years of the French political crusade between 1226-1229. The Albigensian Crusade was a far more successful endeavour for the kings of France than the Popes, as French aims were fully achieved in a relatively short period, whilst the Papacy struggled to achieve their aims over several Papacies.

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Appendix

Map 1:

