

Albigensians

Albigensians, more popularly termed Cathars, were a medieval Christian sect who gained widespread influence in Southern France in the 12th and 13th centuries. The sect itself originated in the Eastern regions, most probably in parts of the Byzantine Empire.

The Cathars significantly differed from the Catholic Church in their beliefs which consequently pitted the sect against the Church and Papacy. Pope Innocent III tried to diminish the influence of the sect in Southern France, first by diplomacy and then by declaring a Crusade against them. While the diplomacy failed, the Albigensian Crusade decisively ended the movement's influence all over southern France.

Albigensians Beliefs

The Albigensians believed in a dualist philosophy. In this philosophy, the universe was clearly divided into two Gods or forces. One of these was the force of evil, namely Satan, who represented all that was chaotic and material in the world. Consequently, the world and the humans were also believed to have been created by Satan.

In contrast, the good God was free from the taints of material and carnal manifestations. More simply, the Albigensians held the God of the Old Testament as the Satan and that of the New Testament as the good God. They also opposed all violence and warfare, and believed that inside the essentially evil human bodies, the spirits of the angels dwelled who were trapped in their flesh cages.

Albigensian Disagreements with Catholic Church

The Albigensians disagreed with the Catholic Church on many vital points. Among these was their belief that the eucharist was not the body of the Christ. They also did not believe in the practice of baptism by water. This latter was apparently because they believed that water, as material, was essentially a manifestation of the power of evil.

The Albigensians criticised the Church's officials for selling forgiveness for sins, earth for burials and other such things related to faith, in return building their fortunes. They saw this as the corruption of the Church and Christ's message.

Crusade Against the Albigensians

In the early 13th century, Pope Innocent III attempted to diminish the influence of the Albigensians, also called Cathars, in the regions of southern France. His diplomatic efforts met with little success and one of his papal legates participating in them was murdered. He then took up the cause of a Crusade against the Albigensians and was successful in persuading the leading French nobles to support it.

The Crusade began in 1209 and continued all the way until 1229. It pitted the northern French barons against the southern French barons, the latter being active supporters of the Albigensians. The Pope promised the northern French barons that they could seize the lands of the heretics. Consequently, the Crusade continued for 20 years, with intermittent breaks and brief setbacks. But by the end of 1229, all Albigensian support in southern France had ended and the influence of the sect had effectively been crushed.

Role in Establishment of Dominican Order

When Church initially attempted to convince the Cathars to give up their beliefs, it met people of firm resolve and genuine piety in Christian terms. This led the Church to believe that only pious preachers could genuinely affect such people. Consequently, the Dominican Order was established which became a vital part of the Church, although it played little role in influencing the Cathars.

<http://www.medievalchronicles.com/medieval-life/medieval-religion/albigensians/>

Cathars grew in influence in the Languedoc throughout the twelfth century. Catholic chroniclers record that Cathars had become the majority religion in many places, and that Catholic churches were abandoned and in ruin. Of the Catholic clergy that remained some, perhaps most, were themselves Cathar believers. The Papacy responded initially by intigating preaching campaigns and engaging in public debates, both of which proved humiliating failures for the crack teams of theologians sent by the Pope.


The next response, in 1208, was a war, or more accurately a series of wars. Modern writers refer to them as the Cathar Wars, but traditionally the series was referred to as the [Albigensian Crusade](#). It was a formal crusade in the full sense of the word - preached and directed by the papacy, and offering participants the remission of sins and an assured place in heaven. The Crusaders regarded themselves as being "on God's business" and referred to themselves as "pilgrims".

From the first major siege (at [Béziers](#)) in 1209 the War became one of French (+ their allies) against the independent people of the Languedoc (+ their allies). Instead of Catholics against Cathars it was, up until 1242 at least, consistently Catholics on one side against Cathars and Catholics on the other.

The Albigensian Crusade was a Crusade against the people of the Languedoc which began in 1208. It is also known as the Cathar Crusade. Like all crusades it was a war, declared by the Pope, ([Innocent III](#)) backed by the Roman Church with promises of remission of sins and a guaranteed place in heaven. Why is it called the *Albigensian Crusade* rather than the *Cathar Crusade*? In order to answer this, it is important to remember that *Cathar* is only of [many names](#) the Roman Church invented for members of this particular brand of Gnostic Dualism. Among many other names, they were called Albigensians, from the (erroneous) belief that they were concentrated in the town of [Albi](#). The term *Cathar* has become the standard term for them only in recent times.

The term *Albigensian Crusade* (or *Cathar Crusade*, or *Cathar Wars*) is used loosely to describe a series of formal Crusades, interspersed with continual warfare against the people of the Languedoc which lasted for some forty years. The (unspecified) target of the Crusade was [Raymond V of Toulouse](#) and his vassals, but Raymond joined the Crusade himself. This meant that he and his vassals came under the protection of the Church. That is why the first stages of the Crusade were directed against [Béziers](#) and [Carcassonne](#), which did not belong to Raymond of Toulouse, but to a close relative [Ramon-Roger Trencavel](#). The trick did not work for long, and soon Raymond was excommunicated and his castles were under attack. After the initial sieges of [Béziers](#) and [Carcassonne](#), the (mainly French) Crusader forces were led by [Simon de Montfort](#) and later his son [Amaury de Montfort](#), who were responsible for series of bloody [battles, sieges and massacres](#). Voltaire wrote about this crusade against the people of the Languedoc.

We now think of the Languedoc as part of France, but the reality was very different in the thirteenth century. Local chronicles invariably refer to the foreign crusaders as *The French*, for the very good reason that the chroniclers did not consider themselves or their countrymen as French and neither did anyone else.

The Crusades are conventionally held to have ended in 1244 with the fall of the Château of [Montségur](#) ( [Montsegur](#)), though Cathars were still being burned alive into the fourteenth century. An [Inquisition](#) was founded to extirpate the last vestiges of Cathar belief.

http://www.cathar.info/cathar_wars.htm

In the early 13th century, heresies were becoming increasingly popular. Groups like the Cathars and Gnostics were becoming increasingly more influential within the Christian lands. The beliefs of the Cathars, in particular, were extremely radical and its teachings were in no way synonymous to the teachings of the Church. These heretics who found their way to southern France were called on to be Crusaded against by Pope Innocent the III, and rightfully so. In the context of the teachings of the Church during this time period, it was vital for the Church to rid themselves of the disease of these heretics known as the Cathars. In this essay, I will argue that the Albigensian Crusade was justified based on the heretical beliefs of the Cathars and the potential ramifications of what could happen if the Cathars continued to gain influence in the social sphere.

Politically, it made sense for Pope Innocent to wage war on these individuals because one of the basic tenets of the Cathars, namely that the “Church is a part of the material world”, and thus inherently evil (40). It rejected everything to do with the Church. “They were highly organized to counterchurch the Church, with their own clergy, ascetics, theology, and rituals” (Lynch 222). They were becoming so influential and deceptive to the point that people saw them as a sort of Apostolic practice of the Christian faith, so much so that non-Cathars were giving their alms and toleration to this group. The same money that should go to the Church was going to these people who were actively fighting the ideals of the Church, wanting to take them down. With Austere Cisterian abbots being sent to preach against their heretical ways, the Christians tried to combat this movement, but were unsuccessful in doing so (224). Clergy members were afraid to actively oppose these people because they were afraid to lose support its members. Accommodation, persuasion, and repression were unsuccessful, so the Church had no choice but to wage war, a choice that was justified since they already tried peacefully to subdue the Cathars.

Theologically, it made sense to go on a Crusade against the Cathars because of how far away the Cathars were from basic Christian ideals. It wasn’t like the Jews and Muslims, because members of the Church weren’t influenced by these two religions. With the Cathars, however, members of the Church were. This is bad considering their beliefs that “there are two Gods, a good God and an evil God (59).” Other heretical beliefs included rejecting the Baptism of children and that Mary was not of this world except in a spiritual sense (59). With their increased influence and the fact they were growing in numbers and gaining support, the Cathars were causing people to follow beliefs that could, from the Church’s point of view, have people end up in Hell. Therefore, the Albigensian Crusade had to occur in order to save the people from following these beliefs that could lead them to eternal damnation.

All in all, the Crusades against the Cathars was a necessary event. The Cathars were becoming increasingly influential and the Church needed to find a way to stop them. It wasn’t as though the Church didn’t give the Cathars a chance. The Church preached and tried to educate people, but to no avail. Thus the Crusades were justified and people were offered the opportunity to salvation rather than be tempted by the heretical views of the Cathars after the Cathars had been finally wiped out by 1229.