

Arnaud Amaury, Abbot of Cîteaux

James McDonald

(Latin: Arnaldus Amalricus, Arnald Amalric or Arnold Aimery).

As Abbot of Cîteaux, Arnaud was the chief Abbot of the Cistercian monastic order. Like Saint Dominic who followed him, he made it his business to convert the supposedly heretical Cathars of the Languedoc back to the One True Catholic Church. His preaching, like that of St Dominic, was recognised as a comprehensive and humiliating failure, an inevitable embarrassment for a golden mouthed prince of the Church claiming to be assisted by God himself.

As the Song of the Cathar Wars relates, the people of the Languedoc laughed at him and scorned him as a fool [laisse 3].



Arnaud, other Cistercian abbots and Saint Dominic (with a halo) crush helpless Cathars underfoot - a sanitised version of the persecution of the Cathars.

They paid no attention to him and despised everything he said [laisse 4]. When he preached they commented to each other "Ara roda l'abelha" - "That bee is buzzing around again" [laisse 46]. As Voltaire commented in his Account of the Crusade against the People of the Languedoc: "L'abbé de Cîteaux paraissait avec l'équipage d'un prince. Il voulut en vain parler en apôtre; le peuple lui criait: Quittez le luxe ou le sermon" - "The Abbot of Cîteaux appeared, with the entourage of a prince. In vain he spoke as an Apostle; the people shouted at him "Abandon either your luxury or your preaching".

As with Saint Dominic, Arnaud's reaction was to arrange death and destruction of those responsible for his humiliation. The murder of one of his monks, Pierre de Castelnaud, from the Abbey of Fontfroide, provided a pretext, and soon the crime was pinned on Raymond VI, Count of Toulouse, although there was no evidence against him, and no trial was ever held, despite Raymond's request for one. Pope Innocent III, after meeting with Arnaud, started preaching a formal Crusade against the people of the Languedoc, and also issued secret orders to his notary Milo to the effect that Raymond should be destroyed whatever he did.

Arnaud himself was appointed as military leader of the crusaders during the first stages of the war in 1209. This was a perfectly normal occurrence at this time, but Arnaud's love of terror and killing was perhaps above average, even for a senior churchman. It was he who was responsible for the mass burning alive of "many heretics and many fair women" at Casseneuil", for the massacre at Béziers, where some 20,000 men, women and children were killed in an "exercise of Christian charity", and for the immortal words "Kill them all. God will know his own". He was also responsible for the siege of Carcassonne, and for the seizure of Raymond-Roger Trencavel, Viscount of Carcassonne, Béziers, Albi and the Razès during a truce - leading to the fall of Carcassonne. He

arrived at Minerve just in time to engineer the deaths of 140 people whose lives would otherwise have been spared.



Carcassonne was taken by deceit, when Roger-Raymond came out to talk terms with Arnaud Amery during the siege. It is at this stage that Simon de Montfort was appointed to hold Raymond-Roger's territories. Soon afterwards, on the 10th November, Roger-Raymond died in his own prison, aged 24.

That the Crusade was really just a war against the people of Occitania rather than a punishment for a single murder is evident from the fact that it was directed against the lands of Raymond-Roger Trencavel and not those of Raymond VI (who himself joined the Crusade). As far as is known Raymond-Roger was given no warning and no opportunity to answer any charges against him. The first phase of the formal crusade over, Arnaud tried to find a senior French noble to hold the territory, but none would accept. Finally, Arnaud, speaking on behalf of the pope, ordered Simon de Montfort to take on the impossible job.

Arnaud later became Archbishop of Narbonne.

Today Arnaud is best remembered for his instruction before the massacre at Béziers. In Latin "Cædite eos. Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius"; in French "Tuez-les tous, Dieu reconnaîtra les siens"; in English "Kill them all. God will know his own".

In recent times some people have started to voice doubts about whether Arnaud Amaury ever spoke the words attributed to him and this has become a point of contention between Catholic apologists and others.

Below is a summary of the relevant arguments and sources:

Reasons to doubt that Arnaud Amoury spoke the words "Kill them all..."

- The words are too appalling to have been spoken by any senior churchman.
- Such a concept is fundamentally un-Christian.
- The Catholic Encyclopedia (under "Albigenses" states that these words were never spoken by Arnaud Amoury: 'The monstrous words: "Slay all; God will know His own," alleged to have been uttered at the capture of Béziers, by the papal legate, were never pronounced (Tamizey de Larroque, "Rev. des quest. hist." 1866, I, 168-91).'
- There is no reason to think Arnaud would plan a massacre like this - it could have been carried out by a rabble of crusaders.
- This sort of brutality is inconsistent with the commandment "Thou shalt not kill".
- The words were not recorded during the actual event, but some years later.
- It would be unusual, perhaps unique, for a Churchman to command a massacre of a whole town.
- There is only one record of this event.

“The redeeming majesty of His love was revealed only through wholesale slaughter honouring Him.”

Mark Pegg

- *“The words are too appalling to have been spoken by any senior churchman.”*

The words are consistent with the recorded statements of contemporary senior churchmen, many of whom also led armies. Such leaders often talked about extirpation or extermination, and were responsible for numerous mass slaughters. Like almost all of their statements justifying killing in general and genocide in particular, this one is grounded in scripture. The words are based on a citation from 2 Tim. 2:19.

To take another example, here is an extract from the *The Song of the Cathar Wars* [Canso, laisse 214] recording threats made by Bertrand, a Cardinal of Rome concerning the siege of Toulouse (1216-1218) less than a decade after the massacre at Béziers (this threat is based on Old Testament passages commending genocides):

*Que•l cardenal de Roma prezicans e ligans
Que la mortz e lo glazis an tot primeiramens,
Aissi que dins Tholoza ni•ls apertenemens
Negus hom no i remanga ni nulha res vivens
Ni dona ni donzela ni nulha femna prens
Ni outra creatura ni nulhs enfans laitens,
Que tuit prengan martiri en las flamas ardens.*

The Cardinal from Rome proclaiming
That death and slaughter must lead the way,
And that in and around Toulouse
No man shall remain alive,
Nor noble Lady, girl or pregnant woman,
Nor any created thing, no sucking infant,
But all must die in the burning flames.



The principal was not restricted to Crusade leaders, and was articulated by other Churchmen. The Bolognese legal scholar Johannes Teutonicus wrote in 1217 (around the same time as the above) in a commentary on Gratian: "If it can be shown that some heretics are in a city then all of the inhabitants can be burnt" [Johannes Teutonicus, *Glossa ordinaria to Gratian's Decretum*, edited by Augustin and Prosper Caravita (Venice, Apud iuntas, 1605), C 23, q 5, c32 - cited by Mark Pegg, *A Most Holy War*, OUP, 2008, p 77]

- *“Such a concept is fundamentally un-Christian.”*

The idea of "Killing them all" and leaving it to God to sort out the souls of the dead is a popular one among traditionalist Christians. Indeed it is characteristically Christian. It only makes sense to those who believe in heaven and an afterlife. The phrase would be meaningless to an atheist. It is not difficult to find Christians today who espouse such views. Devout believers in US military units including Marines, Army Rangers, and Special Forces favour a slightly different formulation "Kill 'em

all and let God sort 'em out." This phrase is found printed on T-shirts sold on military bases - The phrase even serves as an unofficial motto for some organizations in the US police and military. A Google search on 11 December 2006 for "Kill 'em all T shirt" returned 1,230,000 matches - many for the sale of these tee-shirts.



- *"The Catholic Encyclopedia (under "Albigenses" states that these words were never spoken by Arnaud Amoury: 'The monstrous words: "Slay all; God will know His own," alleged to have been uttered at the capture of Béziers, by the papal legate, were never pronounced (Tamizey de Larroque, "Rev. des quest. hist." 1866, I, 168-91)."*

The words were universally accepted as fact for many centuries.

No-one ever seems to have thought to deny that the words were spoken until the nineteenth century when the Catholic Church first started to recognise a need to justify its historical record. Tamizey de Larroque offers no substantive reason to doubt that the words were pronounced, and the Catholic Encyclopedia offers no reason why we should believe a man who lived half a millennium after the event, rather than sympathetic contemporary chroniclers.

- *"There is no reason to think Arnaud would plan a massacre like this - it could have been carried out by a rabble of crusaders."*

The massacre of consistent with contemporary and sympathetic records of the Crusaders' strategy. According to the Canso, [laisse 5] Innocent III, Arnaud, Milo and 12 cardinals planned their strategy in Rome in early 1208:

There it was that they made the decision that led to so much sorrow, that left so many men dead with their guts spilled out and so many great ladies and pretty girls naked and cold, stripped of gown and cloak. From beyond Montpellier as far as Bordeaux, any that rebelled were to be utterly destroyed.

Again, according to the Canso, laisse 21, the Crusader Army under Arnaud's command confirmed plans for mass slaughters, exactly like this one, immediately before the siege at Béziers.

"The lords from France and Paris, laymen and clergy, princes and marquises, all agreed that at every stronghold the crusader army attacked, any garrison that refused to surrender should be slaughtered wholesale, once the stronghold had been taken by force."

And the reasoning behind this is explicit:

"They would then meet with no resistance anywhere, as men would be so terrified at what had already happened. That is how they took Montreal and Fanjeaux and surrounding country. Otherwise I promise you they could never have taken them. That is why they massacred them at Béziers, killing them all."

Yet again, no fewer than three separate sources tell us that Renaud de Montpeyroux, the Bishop of Béziers, having consulted with the Crusaders, indicated to the citizens that their blood would be on their heads if they did not surrender the town and hand over their Cathar neighbours. (Canso 16-17, *Historia albigensis* §89, and a letter to Innocent III from Arnaud and Milo referred to below).

Here is the Canso's version: ... if they refused to follow this [the bishop's] counsel they risked losing everything and being put to the sword.

As WA and MD Sibly point out "These accounts suggest that at this stage the crusaders did not intend to spare those who resisted them, and the slaughter at Béziers was consistent with this" (WA and MD Sibly, *The History of the Albigensian Crusade*, Appendix B, p 292)

- *"This sort of brutality is inconsistent with the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill'."*

Arnaud promoted this crusade specifically to kill. The whole point of any Crusade was Holy War - in which the enemy are killed. Raymond-Roger Trencavel, Viscount Béziers had already offered his submission before the siege started - so the Crusaders could easily have avoided bloodshed if they had wanted to.

The words "Kill them all ..." are consistent with everything we know about the character and record of Arnaud Amaury, who seems to have taken every opportunity to maximise the death toll among those he regarded as his enemies. After the famously brutal Simon de Montfort was appointed to take over military command of the Crusaders, Arnaud Amaury as papal legate occasionally overruled him, demanding more punitive action than Simon favoured, as for example at Minerve.



As one historian explains "Extraordinary holiness and extraordinary cruelty were never incompatible during the crusade - indeed, more often than not, they went together by necessity. The redeeming majesty of His love was revealed only through wholesale slaughter honouring Him. (Mark Pegg, *a Most Holy War*, OUP, 2008, p 161).

It is also significant that in all of the contemporary records and commentaries, not a single Catholic writer records a hint of regret for the massacre. On the contrary it is lauded as just and divinely inspired. This is in itself evidence that such an atrocity was regarded as perfectly as a perfectly normal event for holy Crusaders.

- *“The words were not recorded during the actual event, but some years later.”*



(Some apologists claim a time lag of over 60 years)

The words "Caedite eos. Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius" are first recorded (with approval) by a fellow Cistercian chronicler, Caesarius of Heisterbach (c1180-1250) in his work on miracles (Caesarius Heisterbachensis monachi ordinis Cisterciensis, *Dialogus miraculorum*, ed. J. Strange, Cologne, 1851, J. M. Heberle, Vol 2 , 296-8). The time lag is not known for certain, and may have been a few weeks or months. In any case it cannot be more than 40 years since Caesarius died in 1250. So at the worst, the time lag would be comparable to that between Jesus' lifetime and the writing of the gospels. It not

obvious why different standards should be applied - so that the time lag is of no consequence in one case but fatal in the other.

Caesarius was an adult at the critical time, 1209, and would have had personal contact with Crusaders and especially with fellow Cistercians who had taken part in the Albigensian Crusade. Furthermore he seems to be well informed - he says nothing that contradicts the known facts from several different authoritative sources and supplies convincing additional detail as to how the besiegers managed to breach the city's defences.

At the beginning of Chapter XXI of his work, he says "In the time of pope Innocent, the predecessor of the present pope, Honorius, ...". For him to be able to write this Honorius III (the successor of Innocent III) must have still been alive. Honorius died on 18th March, 1227 which means that Caesarius could not be writing more than twenty years after the massacre at Béziers. If we discount the reliability of this account on the grounds of possible time delay, then we would need to discount most medieval chronicles on the same grounds.

The text gives other clues - for example that Raymond VI of Toulouse was still alive at the time of writing. (He died in 1223). Again, Cardinal Bishop Conrad was a papal legate against the Cathars at the time, which pins it down to 1220 - 1223, at most fifteen years after the massacre at Béziers.

- *“It would be unusual, perhaps unique, for a Churchman to command a massacre of a whole town.”*

It is not unusual, let alone unique, to find examples of Churchmen commanding massacres like this - and citing the Pope as the source of the command.

We have several other examples from the Cathar Wars - for example when Cardinal Bertrand exhorted the Crusaders outside Toulouse in 1217 he was very clear that "every one" of those living in the city should be massacred including, implicitly, Catholics, children and babies and, explicitly, women and the sick and injured.

... Recapture the town, seize every house! Let neither man nor woman escape alive, no church, no relics or hospice to protect them, for in holy Rome sentence has been given: the sharp sword of death shall touch them. As I am a good and holy man, worthy and loyal, as they are guilty, wicked and forsworn, let sharp steel strike down every one of them. (Canzo, Laisse 187)

As it happened, the crusaders failed to take the city, so this particular threat of massacre was not realised.

Massacres of God's enemies were seen as not merely necessary but somehow "merciful" and entirely in line with God's will. In November 1225 over a thousand senior churchmen attended a Church Council at Bourges. It was attended by 112 archbishops and bishops, more than 500 abbots, many deans and archdeacons, and over 100 representatives of cathedral chapters. This was well after the massacre of Beziers, and every one of those in attendance would have been aware of the massacre, yet there was no hint by the Council that Crusaders should ensure that no such atrocity should occur again. As the French poet Philip Mousket sang afterwards "One and all, the clergy unanimously decided that, for God's sake and for mercy, the Albigensians should be destroyed. (cited by Kay, Richard. The Council of Bourges, 1225: A documentary History. Aldershot, Ashgate, 2002, p311).

- *"There is only one record of this event."*

There is only one record of most events in Medieval history. We do not normally discount such records, unless there is good reason to do so (such as hostile witness, or impossibility).



Just a few months after the massacre at Béziers, Simon de Montfort encountered two heretics at Castres. One of them would not renounce his faith, but the other one would. The Crusaders disagreed as to whether he should be burned alive, or should be allowed to live. Simon took the initiative and reasoned as follows: if the heretic was telling the truth then the flames would expiate his sins and he would go the heaven; if he was lying then the flames would send him to hell [Historia 112-3]. This is exactly the reasoning attributed to Arnaud just a short time before. Certainly, the scale of the killing is different but the principle is identical. Similar reasoning is not recorded elsewhere (which is why Arnaud's words have such a terrible resonance). Can it really be a coincidence? Or is it more likely that Simon was applying a lesson learned from his mentor, Arnaud, at Béziers a short time previously?

The words are consistent with what did in fact happen at Béziers under Arnaud Amaury's command. Arnaud was in supreme command of the Crusader army at Béziers. According to the most sympathetic source (Historia Albigensis by Pierre Des Vaux-de-Cernay, a contemporary chronicler and another fellow Cistercian who had been in the crusader army) everyone in the town was massacred including new-born babies. It does not seem likely that the Supreme Commander of God's Holy Army could be unable to save a single child if he had wanted to.

The words are consistent with other contemporary records, including Arnaud's own letter to Pope Innocent III after the massacre at Béziers which portrays the massacre of part of divinely engineered event. He says that "Our men [nostri] spared no-one, irrespective of rank, sex, or age, and put to the sword almost 20,000 people.

After this great slaughter the whole city was despoiled and burnt, as Divine vengeance raged miraculously ..."

(Patrologia latinae cursus completus, series Latina, 221 vols., ed. J-P Migne (1844-64), Paris, Vol. 216:col 139)



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