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3. The Church's Bid for Worldwide Leadership

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3. The Church's Bid for Worldwide Leadership

Abstract

The Church in the West had made the claim that it could and would bring all men into subjection to godliness, and that in so doing it would create a universal Christian society. Because of the great influence wielded in medieval society by the feudal nobles, the Church was particularly interested in directing their activities to what it considered to be useful ends. Accordingly, as we have already seen, it gave a religious coloration to knighthood and preached that knights should fight only in such just causes as defending the helpless and protecting the innocent. About the year 1000, synods in different parts of France began to proclaim what they called the Peace of God, which was an attempt to put such things as churches, peasants, and cattle beyond the range of feudal warfare. They also tried to establish the Truce of God, by which certain days of the week and seasons of the year (such as Advent and Lent) were to be free of fighting. These efforts met with indifferent success. [excerpt]

Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, Middle Ages, Christianity, Church

Disciplines

History of Christianity | History of Religion | Religion

Comments

This is a part of [Section III: The Medieval Church](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

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3. The Church's Bid for Worldwide Leadership

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Crusade's were a sign of revival instead of a ~~result~~ result of revival

beyond the range of feudal warfare. They also tried to establish the Truce of God, by which certain days of the week and seasons of the year (such as Advent and Lent) were to be free of fighting. These efforts met with indifferent success.

During the course of the eleventh century, a much expanded opportunity to implement its ambitious claims presented itself to the Church. The invasions of the Dark Ages were now a thing of the past. Feudalism and manorialism had begun to provide Europe with enough order and security to make possible a measure of political and economic revival. [As a result of the Cluniac reform there was a marked increase in papal power, and for the first time in the history of the Church it seemed possible for the pope to function as the effective leader of Western Christendom.]

[One evidence of the recovery of Europe from the weakness of the Dark Ages was the counterattack which it launched against an old enemy: Islam.] The first wave of Moslem expansion, beginning in the seventh and eighth centuries had carried the followers of Mohammed into Spain and the central Mediterranean area. Also, it had threatened the very existence of the Byzantine Empire with its capital at Constantinople. For several centuries Europe could do little more than contain this powerful foe. Then, in the eleventh century, Christians in Spain, with the help of Frenchmen and others, launched what may well be described as the first crusade: the reconquest of the Iberian peninsula. It was a long process, not finally completed until the end of the fifteenth century. As one Spaniard put it: "We are always on crusade." About the same time Sardinia was reclaimed from the Moslems, while somewhat later a band of Normans seized Sicily. To each of these endeavors the pope gave his approval and, where possible, his active support. Before the eleventh century was over, an occasion arose for the pope to seize the leadership of an expanded phase of this counterattack. After a long period of relative quiescence in the East, Islam, this time under the leadership of the Seljuk Turks, was again on the march and threatening Byzantium. In 1071 the imperial army was defeated, most of Asia Minor was lost, and the city of Constantinople was exposed to attack. In the same year the Turks captured Jerusalem from the Egyptians.

Two years later, the Byzantine emperor addressed a call for help to Pope Gregory VII, who was eager to accede to such a request. For one thing, the empire had long stood guard at the southeastern gateway to Europe. Thus, anything which weakened Byzantium was of immediate concern to the West. Then too, the request presented the possibility of improving relations between the Eastern and Western churches, which had deteriorated to the point at which the leaders of each had excommunicated the other in 1054. [Actually, the two churches had been growing apart for centuries. Their divergence can best be explained as resulting from the split between the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire, from which two distinct civilizations eventually developed, each with its own religious beliefs and

practices. An example of this divergence is the so-called filioque controversy, which had its origins in the Arian dispute. The West insisted on inserting the word "filioque" (and from the Son) in the Nicene Creed to emphasize its belief that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son and not simply from the Father, as the East preferred to say. An even more fundamental illustration of the divergence between Rome and Constantinople is the persistent refusal of the Byzantine Church to accept the idea of papal supremacy. The Church at Constantinople was organized as a virtual part of the state and rejected papal claims as haughtily as Byzantium in general rejected Western claims to cultural equality with the East. None of this deterred Gregory VII, the incumbent of an office whose champions were certain of its Scriptural foundation and of the ultimate success of its mission. Gregory laid plans for sending a relief expedition to the East, with himself as its leader, but other very pressing matters at home prevented him from ever carrying out such an undertaking.

One of the later appeals for help which reached Western Europe claimed the attention of Pope Urban II (1088-1099). For him, as for Gregory, there was much that was attractive in the prospect of responding favorably to the request. First, Urban must have had a sincere desire to free the Christians living in the East from Turkish oppression or from the threat of such oppression. Second, he must have realized that a successful crusade might make possible the reunion of the Eastern and Western branches of the Church. Third, he was aware that a successful crusade would guarantee the holy places, and especially Jerusalem, as safe goals for pilgrims. This was important, since the Seljuk Turks had added to the already existing difficulties in the way of these travelers in Palestine, at a time when pilgrimages as a form of penance were on the rapid increase in the Western Church. Fourth, Urban knew that a crusade could turn the still strong warlike propensities of the feudal nobles, which the Church had not been able to eliminate, to a good cause: fighting the infidel. A crusade could become religiously sanctioned chivalric behavior. Fifth and finally, the pope could not help but speculate on what this venture might do for the growing power and prestige of his office. If he could unite and lead European Christendom to deliver the Byzantine Church and Jerusalem from the Moslem, it might be an important step in making possible a truly Christian society in Europe -- and perhaps even in areas beyond Europe.]

The response of the pope to these and other considerations was an appeal to the faithful to take the offensive. He chose the autumn of 1095 as the time and the Council of Clermont, in southern France, as the place to give eloquent expression to his decision. The selection which follows is one of the several reconstructions of what the pope said, made by one who claimed to have been present:

Oh, race of Franks, race from across the mountains, race beloved and chosen by God, -- as is clear from many of your works, -- set apart from all other nations by the situation of your country as well as by your Catholic faith and the honor which you render to the holy Church: to you our discourse is addressed, and for you our exhortations are intended. We wish you to know what a grievous cause has led us to your country, for it is the imminent peril threatening you and all the faithful which has brought us hither.

From the confines of Jerusalem and from the city of Constantinople a grievous report has gone forth and has repeatedly been brought to our ears; namely, that a race from the kingdom of the Persians, an accursed race, a race wholly alienated from God, "a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God," has violently invaded the lands of those Christians and has depopulated them by pillage and fire. They have led away a part of the captives into their own country, and a part they have killed by cruel tortures. They have either destroyed the churches of God or appropriated them for the rites of their own religion. They destroy the altars, after having defiled them with their uncleanness.... The kingdom of the Greeks is now dismembered by them and has been deprived of territory so vast in extent that it could not be traversed in two months' time.

On whom, therefore, is the labor of avenging these wrongs and of recovering this territory incumbent, if not upon you, -- you, upon whom, above all other nations, God has conferred remarkable glory in arms, great courage, bodily activity, and strength to humble the heads of those who resist you? Let the deeds of your ancestors encourage you and incite your minds to manly achievements: -- the glory and greatness of King Charlemagne, and of his son Louis, and of your other monarchs, who have destroyed the kingdoms of the Turks and have extended the sway of the holy Church over lands previously pagan. Let the holy sepulcher of our Lord and Saviour, which is possessed by the unclean nations, especially arouse you, and the holy places which are now treated with ignominy and irreverently polluted with the filth of the unclean. Oh, most valiant soldiers and descendants of invincible ancestors, do not degenerate, but recall the valor of your progenitors.

But if you are hindered by love of children, parents, or wife, remember what the Lord says in the Gospel, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." Let none of your possessions retain you, nor solicitude for your family affairs. For this land which you inhabit,

God will it, Appeals to pride, appeals to those that want adventure. Land flowing with milk & honey. Protect fellow Christians

shut in on all sides by the seas and surrounded by the mountain peaks, is too marrow for your large population; nor does it abound in wealth; and it furnishes scarcely food enough for its cultivators. Hence it is that you murder and devour one another, that you wage war, and that very many among you perish in intestine strife.

Let hatred therefore depart from among you, let your quarrels end, let wars cease, and let all dissensions and controversies slumber. Enter upon the road to the Holy Sepulcher; wrest that land from the wicked race, and subject it to yourselves. That land which, as the Scripture says, "floweth with milk and honey" was given by God into the power of the children of Israel. Jerusalem is the center of the earth; the land is fruitful above all others, like another paradise of delights. This spot the Redeemer of mankind has made illustrious by his advent, has beautified by his sojourn, has consecrated by his passion, has redeemed by his death, has glorified by his burial.

This royal city, however, situated at the center of the earth, is now held captive by the enemies of Christ and is subjected, by those who do not know God, to the worship of the heathen. She seeks, therefore, and desires to be liberated and ceases not to implore you to come to her aid. From you especially she asks succor, because, as we have already said, God has conferred upon you above all other nations great glory in arms. Accordingly, undertake this journey eagerly for the remission of your sins, with the assurance of the reward of imperishable glory in the kingdom of heaven....

Most beloved brethren, to-day is manifest in you what the Lord says in the Gospel, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"; for unless God had been present in your spirits, all of you would not have uttered the same cry; since, although the cry issued from numerous mouths, yet the origin of the cry was one. Therefore I say to you that God, who implanted this in your breasts, has drawn it forth from you. Let that then be your war cry in combats, because it is given to you by God. When an armed attack is made upon the enemy, let this one cry be raised by all the soldiers of God: "It is the will of God! It is the will of God!"

And we neither command nor advise that the old or feeble, or those incapable of bearing arms, undertake this journey. Nor ought women to set out at all without their husbands, or brothers, or legal guardians. For such are more of a hindrance than aid, more of a burden than an advantage. Let the rich aid the needy; and according to their wealth let them take with them experienced soldiers. The priests and other clerks, whether secular or regular, are not to go without the consent of their bishop; for this journey would profit them nothing if they went without permission. Also, it is not fitting that laymen should enter upon the pilgrimage without the blessing of their priests.

Whoever, therefore, shall determine upon this holy pilgrimage, and shall make his vow to God to that effect, and shall offer himself to him for sacrifice, as a living victim, holy and acceptable to God, shall wear the sign of the cross of the Lord on his forehead or on his breast. When, indeed, he shall return from his journey, having fulfilled his vow, let him place the cross on his back between his shoulders. Thus shall ye, indeed, by this twofold action, fulfill the precept of the Lord, as he commands in the Gospel, "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." *

The papal plea, reechoed by preachers in many places, struck a responsive chord, especially in France. It appealed to the love of adventure and fighting which characterized the feudal nobility. It bade fair to satisfy the land hunger which gnawed particularly at younger sons whose opportunities appeared severely limited in western Europe. It appealed too because it offered a chance to combine warfare and piety in a new way, since Urban declared that "taking the cross" was an especially meritorious form of doing penance. These were some of the reasons for the loud echo to the response which greeted Urban's original address: Deus vult (It is the will of God).]

There were in all eight major and many minor crusades, extending over almost two centuries, from 1096 to 1271. Because Moslem control of the area was weak, the First Crusade succeeded rather easily in freeing the major cities of Palestine. Jerusalem was captured in 1099. Four feudal kingdoms were established, thus satisfying the ambitions of many of the crusaders, who settled down, began trading with the Moslems, and absorbed parts of their civilization. Less than half a century after the First Crusade, a revived Turkish power resumed the offensive and once again there came the cry to take the cross. Later crusades became less and less religious in tone and, in the end, proved unable to maintain the position which the First Crusade had gained.

The increasing prominence of secular motives can be seen most clearly in the case of the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204). This undertaking was conceived by the man often considered to have been the greatest of medieval popes, Innocent III (1198-1216), who wanted to capture for the benefit of the papacy an enthusiasm similar to that generated by Urban II a century earlier. The destination of this crusade was Egypt, the first step in recovering Jerusalem, which had fallen into Moslem hands again in 1187. [After contracting with the city of Venice for the necessary provisions and transportation, the crusaders found that they were unable to pay in full the amount upon which they had agreed. Whereupon the Venetians suggested that

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*Crusades sign of awakening of Europe, not a result
Doubt some lords were taken out of circulation! (weakened the feudal class)
Crusades preached by the popes. Popes strong enough to start them, but not to accomplish it*

(commenced III p. 27
middle of the Crusading)

they could discharge the debt by attacking Zara, a Christian city on the Adriatic which the Hungarians had seized from the Venetians. After some hesitation the crusaders agreed to this, and Zara was captured (1202). The pope excommunicated the entire army, but later granted absolution to all those who asked for it, a request not forthcoming from the Venetians.]

The next diversion of the crusade led to nothing less than the capture of Constantinople. [From the very beginning of the crusading movement there had been mistrust between the crusaders and the Byzantines. The latter had wanted reinforcements for their armies rather than an independent military force which would regard recapture of lost Byzantine territory as only incidental to the seizure of territories for itself. This mistrust deepened as succeeding crusades occurred. Westerners felt the Byzantines were grabbing and treacherous. The Byzantines, in turn, resented Italian (and especially Venetian) economic penetration of their empire and Norman hostility directed against their interests in southern Italy and the Balkans. While at Zara, the crusaders were presented with a plan to attack Constantinople on behalf of a deposed emperor whose son had only recently appeared in the West seeking assistance in regaining the throne. Again after some hesitation the crusaders agreed to this plan. They seized Constantinople in 1203 and restored the deposed imperial line. But the new emperor could not fulfill the promises of support which he had made to the crusaders, who themselves took over the city in 1204 and set up a short-lived empire of their own. They never reached Egypt.]

By the end of the thirteenth century the Turks had succeeded in eliminating the four feudal states in the East. With the papacy about to enter upon a period of decline and with Western monarchs absorbed in their own domestic problems, there was no longer much serious disposition to take the cross. The Crusades had ended.]

[There are many points of view from which to attempt an evaluation of the Crusades. They multiplied the contacts of Western Europeans with a civilization in many ways unlike their own. They increased the volume of trade between East and West. They provided a place for the younger sons of many feudal families. They introduced new methods of warfare. They opened an opportunity for Christian missionaries to penetrate central Asia and, if only briefly, entertain the possibility of opening a whole new field for Christendom. On the other hand, the Crusades were unsuccessful in keeping the holy places in Christian hands or in healing the breach between the Eastern and Western branches of the Church. In the long run, they weakened Byzantium rather than strengthened it. Constantinople was captured finally by the Ottoman Turks in 1453, by which time Moslem power was already firmly entrenched far into the Balkans.]

The perspective of this chapter has viewed the Crusades as the Church's bid to unite Europe under papal leadership. This

Realized that there was a wider world.

Jerusalem most natural feudal system.

Establishment of gov. in West caused by Crusades

was another objective which ultimately failed of attainment. The crusade proved to be an instrument which the papacy could not control. From the very start the actual employment of this instrument had to be entrusted to secular hands. There was not sufficient restraint to prevent those secular hands from using the crusade for their own purposes, nor to prevent the pope himself on occasion from turning it against his political enemies. By the end of the thirteenth century there was a growing body of opinion which had concluded that crusading was not the sort of activity in which Holy Church should engage, no matter how good the reasons or how universal the claims.