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Author(s): Dana C. Munro

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THE POPES AND THE CRUSADES.

By DANA C. MUNRO, L.H.D.

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The First Crusade was the work of Pope Urban II., whose wonderful speech at the Council of Clermont led thousands to take the cross. From that time the Popes always felt that the crusades were peculiarly their task and under their inspiration, even if some of the expeditions, like the one against Constantinople, escaped from their direction. For they believed that the crusades were God's work and that they were His agents. According to Fulk of Chartres, Urban at Clermont used the following words:

"I speak to those who are present, I shall proclaim it to the absent, but it is Christ who commands. Moreover, if those who set out thither lose their lives on the journey, by land or sea, or in fighting against the heathen, their sins shall be remitted in that hour; this I grant through the power of God vested in me."

The Pope set the time of departure, ordered who should go and who should not go, offered privileges to the participants, and threatened with excommunication all who should not fulfill their vow. For two hundred years and more the Popes were always proclaiming that the crusades were on imperative duty and everyone recognized their preëminent concern in the holy wars.

Why did the Popes enter upon this undertaking? What did they hope to gain for the Church and for Christendom from these crusades? Many have attempted to answer these questions and their answers have been very contradictory, too often reflecting merely the prejudice of the writer. Thomas Fuller in his *History of the Holy War* said:

"Though the pretences were pious and plausible, yet no doubt the thoughts of his holiness began where other men's ended, and he had a privy project beyond the public design: First, to reduce the Grecians into subjection to himself, with their three patriarchs of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Constantinople; and to make the Eastern Church a chapel of ease to the mother church of Rome."

Without quoting farther from Fuller we may note that many scholars have agreed with him that the main purpose of the Popes' action was the desire to bring the Greek Church under the Roman curia. The most notable exponent of this idea in recent years is M. Köhler, the editor of the *Revue de l'Orient latin* and of the Armenian Documents in the *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades*, and one of the best informed scholars in this subject.

Others have thought that Urban was moved by the appeal for aid from the Emperor at Constantinople, and with the broad view of a statesman realized the necessity of protecting Europe most effectively by carrying the war into the enemy's country. It is possible that he foresaw the gain in authority that would accrue to the papacy from the leadership in a universal movement which would arouse religious enthusiasm and be conducted under the guidance of the Church. It is also possible that he was influenced mainly by the spirit of the age, with its kindred virtues of asceticism and valor. As most of his letters concerning the crusade have been destroyed, there is not enough material to make it possible to dissect and weigh his motives. It is easier to understand and explain why the succeeding Popes should have continued to interest themselves in a movement which they believed to be God's work and which was apparently bringing such important results to the Church.

In the first place the preaching of the crusades aroused great religious enthusiasm and led many sinners to reform, at least temporarily. Peter the Hermit preached right living as well as the Crusade; and, in particular we are told by one of those who had seen him that "he led the prostitutes back to their husbands and added to their dowries from his own resources." Some of the preachers had many qualities of the modern evangelist: a biting wit, a ready tongue, a keen sense of humor, a magnetic personality; some were accused of evil-living and greed. Fulk of Neuilly, who claimed that he had given out 200,000 crosses with his own hands, raised money to build a house for magdalens and for a church, as well as for the cause of the crusades. He bandied jests equally readily with Richard the Lion-Hearted and with the mob. When the crowd pressed too closely upon him he would lay about him vigorously with his staff and those who were hit felt honored by

the blows. On one occasion when some in his audience tried to secure as relics bits of his garments, he seized upon the most presumptuous and proclaimed that his own clothes were not sacred objects, but that he would and did sanctify the garments of the man he held, whose clothes were at once torn from his body, in bits to be preserved as relics. Such preachers naturally appealed to the common people, who seldom heard any sermons, and had a great influence in kindling religious zeal. The preaching of the crusades frequently led many to enter monasteries to expiate their sins, instead of taking the Cross. Cæsar of Heisterbach tells of the marvelous effect of Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons and states that Bernard sent all who were fit into monasteries; to the others he gave the Cross. After the fall of Jerusalem such a wave of piety spread over western Europe that wars were abandoned for a time and the cardinals took a vow to go afoot until the Holy City was rescued from the infidel. In the next century a most striking outburst of religious enthusiasm led to the Children's Crusade, which was to be a missionary movement, not a military campaign. Thus, undoubtedly, through the preaching of the crusades there was a great amount of religious fervor, some real piety and reformation in manners, and a greater interest in the Holy Land and all connected with it. This would redound to the credit of the head of the Church and increase his influence and power.

The Popes offered privileges, both spiritual and temporal, to all who took the Cross. Because of the intense enthusiasm for the crusades and also because of the weakness of most of the monarchs in Western Europe during the first half of the twelfth century, the Church, and especially the Pope, were allowed through these privileges to encroach upon the sphere of the temporal authorities. All crusaders were given the protection of the ecclesiastical courts; thus when a vassal took the cross he might escape to a considerable extent from the jurisdiction of his feudal lord. Moreover, his family and property were taken under the protection of the Church and in this way many cases were taken from the feudal courts. In his privilege for the Second Crusade Eugene III. gave vassals who took the Cross, the right, under certain circumstances, to mortgage their fiefs

without the consent of their suzerains; this was a direct encroachment on property rights, but amid the intense enthusiasm for a movement in which both the German emperor and the French king participated this usurpation passed without much comment. It is significant, however, that this privilege was not renewed in later grants. The Popes also gave permission for non-payment of interest on debts owed by crusaders and directed that the monarchs should take steps to enforce this. Philip Augustus actually followed the mandate, by an ordinance arranging the extent to which this non-payment of interest should be allowed. This encroachment upon property rights provoked less opposition because the creditors were frequently Jews. As each crusader was under the protection of the Church the Popes interfered in case of capture of individual crusaders by their enemies and also to prevent warfare which would hinder men from fulfilling their vows. They used the censures of the Church freely for this purpose and, on the whole, with general approval. They even interfered with the amusements of the nobility, repeatedly forbidding tournaments and threatening to excommunicate all participants. Other instances might be cited to show the manner in which the Popes added to their temporal power and control over those who were not members of the clergy, so that after a century of crusading activity the Pope's power had been enormously enhanced. Of course, the increase in their temporal authority was not wholly due to the crusades; other agencies were at work; but the religious wars preached by the Popes had a very important share in the growth of temporal power which had reached so great an extension by the time of Innocent III.

In the thirteenth century the influence of the crusading movement in adding to the Pope's power can be illustrated in many ways. Frederic II., in a burst of enthusiasm caused by his unexpected attainment of the imperial crown, took the Cross. From that time until he started on his expedition, twelve years later, he was continually hampered by his vow and had to make many concessions to the Pope, in order to obtain permission to delay its fulfillment. When an energetic pontiff, Gregory IX., was elected, Frederic was obliged to start on his expedition, although he had not completed his

diplomatic preparations. When he put back on the plea of illness he was excommunicated and his crown placed in jeopardy. He probably regretted frequently and very bitterly his youthful enthusiasm. The Pope preached a crusade against his Sicilian kingdom; and this illustrates another means by which the power of the popes was enhanced. They repeatedly preached crusades against their temporal foes and offered to the participants in these wars the same privileges, spiritual and temporal, which were given to those who went on expeditions against the Moslems. These holy wars were sometimes directed against monarchs and other rulers, sometimes against cities, at other times against heretics like the Albigenses, or against the heathen in the north and northeast of Europe. These armies played an important part in the history of the thirteenth century.

This century also saw the temporary union of almost all Christian lands under the authority of the Pope and this was directly due to the crusades. The capture of Constantinople led to the establishment of a Latin patriarchate there. Bishops of heretical churches in Syria acknowledged the supremacy of the Latin Church. The ruler of Armenia sought to have the title of king bestowed upon him by the Pope and promised in return to bring the Armenian Church under the Pope. For a time there seemed a possibility that there might be one all-inclusive Catholic Church, under the authority of the Pope.

The crusades also brought to the Church and to the Popes an enormous increase in wealth. Crusaders gave freely to the Church before starting for the East; they also mortgaged or sold their property to ecclesiastical foundations under conditions very advantageous to the latter. The Orders of the Temple and Hospital received great endowments and became very wealthy. Men who had taken the Cross and were unable to go, purchased exemption from their vow. Taxes for the crusades were frequently collected and handled by the Church. It is not possible to give any estimate of the total amount which the Church received through the crusades, but it was enormous. Consequently the Popes became much more powerful, especially through their control over the appointment of the officials who profited by this wealth.

While the Popes and the Church gained so much in so many different ways, their disappointments were severe and their losses heavy. There could be no disguising the fact that the crusades, on the whole, had been a failure. When the monarchs returned home ignominiously from the Second Crusade even Bernard of Clairvaux felt sick at heart over the failure of the movement which he had preached. The Crusade of Richard the Lion-Hearted and Philip Augustus had not rescued Jerusalem; the Fourth Crusade had been shamelessly diverted against a Christian Empire; the Fifth had secured a diplomatic triumph which the Pope did all in his power to thwart and belittle; the minor expeditions had achieved little or nothing; the heroic St. Louis had been obliged to ransom himself from captivity. These failures did not injure the papal power to any marked degree because the Popes and their legates had been responsible for the conduct of the military operations only to a very limited extent. For the First Crusade Urban II. had appointed a papal legate, Ademar of Puy, who proved of great assistance to the expedition; he died before the capture of Jerusalem and his loss was keenly felt by the crusaders. Although other legates were sent with the various expeditions, no one played a prominent part, except Cardinal Pelagius, whose lack of tact, to put it mildly, was principally responsible for the failure of the Crusade against Damietta. The leaders of the various crusades to the Orient were not designated by the Popes. With the exceptions of Urban II. and Innocent III., the Popes did not take an active part in laying the plans for Crusades against the Moslems; the expedition for which Urban made the plans was successful; Innocent's orders were not obeyed. The leaders in the Church, like St. Bernard, were able to throw the blame for failure upon the ignorance and sins of the crusaders.

Jerusalem was conquered and held for some scores of years but the Holy City did not become the head of a Church state as the Pope probably hoped that it would. When, before its capture in 1099, the leaders gathered to discuss the election of a ruler, the Church party in the army protested, saying that no earthly monarch ought to wear a crown of gold where our Saviour had worn a

crown of thorns. For the moment the nobles yielded; after the capture of the city they elected Godfrey, Defender of the Holy Sepulcher. This title probably marked a concession to the point of view held by the clerical party. When Dagobert was elected Patriarch of Jerusalem and demanded that Godfrey should give up the Holy City, the latter temporized, promising that he would hand over Jerusalem to the Patriarch when he had secured other conquests. But after his death his brother Baldwin was crowned king, and Jerusalem gradually became an hereditary monarchy, in which the Patriarch was clearly subordinate to the King, and the latter was wholly independent of the Pope. The Christian conquests in Syria, instead of being the home of garrisons ever ready to propagate the faith by the sword, soon became commercial centers whose inhabitants were intent mainly on living in peace and carrying on trade with the infidels. They viewed askance the bands of crusaders from the West who might interfere with their commerce by provoking hostilities. Even members of the military Orders, whose main purpose was supposed to be the defence of the Holy Land, formed friendships with the Moslems, whom they entertained in their castles and allowed to pray to Allah in their chapels. The direction of the great Crusades escaped from the Popes, and in spite of Innocent's commands and repeated excommunications the French and Venetians persisted in going to Zara and Constantinople and in sacking those Christian cities. Frederic II., excommunicated for not going on a crusade, went and was excommunicated again for going while excommunicate. Despite the efforts of the Pope and of the leading churchmen in the Holy Land he made peace with the Mohammedans and secured Jerusalem by diplomacy. The crusaders who settled in the Holy Land soon ceased to be as devout and narrow as their brethren in the West. They intermarried with the natives, both heretics and Moslems, adopted the customs of their wives, and some of their superstitions. Even the Templars were generally believed to be contaminated by the Mohammedan beliefs. The monastic chroniclers, especially those from the West, are very outspoken about the evil lives led by the Christians of all ranks, even the patriarchs, in the Kingdom of Jerusalem. From the East these

conditions spread to the West, to the great detriment of the Church. The merchants carried back not merely Oriental wares, but also Oriental heresies, which spread rapidly in the West along the commercial highways. Soon crusades had to be preached against the heresies which were mainly due to the crusades. All of these factors detracted from the power of the Popes.

It was easier for the heresies to spread because of a growing distrust of the Church, due to many causes, *e. g.*, all teaching in France, Germany and England had been done by the clerics and the crusaders found that many things which they had been taught were untrue. One chronicler of the First Crusade naïvely expressed his surprise at the bravery of the Turks who he had been taught to believe were cowards. Possibly this idea was due to Urban's speech at Clermont, for William of Malmesbury reports that the Pope said: the Turks are

"feeble men, who, not having courage to engage in close encounter, love a flying mode of warfare. For the Turk never ventures upon close fight; but, when driven from his station, bends his bow at a distance and trusts the wind with his meditated wound; and as he has poisoned arrows, venom, and not valor, inflicts death on the man he strikes. Whatever he effects, then, I attribute to fortune, not to courage, because he wars by flight, and by poison. It is apparent, too, that every race, born in that region, being scorched with the intense heat of the sun, abounds more in reflection, than in blood; and, therefore, they avoid coming to close quarters, because they are aware how little blood they possess."

Many another crusader learned that the information which he had received had been misinformation, and began to doubt. The political crusades brought discredit upon the Church and the Popes who ordered them. Many men realized that the Popes were using their power for worldly ends. In the thirteenth century it was ever more difficult to induce men to take the Cross. In 1233 the Pope offered an indulgence of 20 days to all who would listen to a sermon on the crusades; in 1249 the indulgence was increased to 40 days, and in 1265 to 100 days, in the hope that some might be led to take the Cross.

Many of the preachers were charged with misappropriation of the funds which they raised for the crusades. Walter von der Vogelweide voices this feeling in his verses:

“Little, methinks, of all this silver in God’s cause is spent :
To part with a great treasure priests are ill-content.”

As Walter was a partisan of the Hohenstaufens and opposed to the papacy he might be considered prejudiced. But the same idea was common; *e. g.*, Matthew Paris, the historiographer of the monastery of St. Albans writes:

“By divers wiles the Roman curia strove to take their property from the simple people of God, seeking nothing but their gold and silver.”

Thomas Fuller, later, put it bluntly, the pope “got a bag of money by it.” All reformers in the Church felt that this wealth had brought corruption in its train and while few realized the part that the crusades had played in bringing in this wealth, many denounced the corruption of the papal curia and its greed for gold.

Church unity was attained for only a short time. The Greek Empire, for whose aid the First Crusade had been preached, had been brought under the Latin Church, but had been so weakened by the attacks of the crusaders that it could not much longer be “the bulwark of Europe” against Islam. The fall of the Latin Empire of Constantinople led to the return of the Greek patriarch. Heresy and opposition to the Church spread in the West. There was a marked decline in religious fervor; interest in the next world dwindled as the zest in living the present life increased, because it seemed better worth living. There was a great growth in the use of indulgences and it would be especially interesting to trace out their connection with the privileges of the crusaders. It is not feasible here, however, to follow the whole course of events. The facts which have been given are sufficient to show how completely the hopes of the Popes had been frustrated. If we weigh all the evidence we see the manifold ways in which the crusades affected the power of the Popes and we may well conclude that some roots of the reformation are to be found in them and the Popes’ connection with them.

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