

The power of Popes – Church reform, c. 1040–95

■ Here are the main points for this section. Once again, as you work your way through this section, make short, precise notes for each one, so that you can support the point that it makes.

The Church reform movement increased piety.

The Church reform movement developed the theology and use of Holy War.

Urban II wanted to take Church reform even further.

The reform movement

It was around 1040 that leading clergymen first set about challenging violence in society and weakness in the Church in a systematic and sustained way. They wanted to **reform** and renew the Church. The reformers were ashamed of what had happened in past centuries. Not only was the Church caught up in the violence of society, many priests were sinful or corrupt: they kept wives or mistresses and engaged in simony, the buying of promotion from local lords who had gained an unhealthy control over the Church in their area. The reformers always spoke of regaining *Libertas* or liberty for the Church. They were determined to win back its freedom from any external power that might fail to provide for the people of God whether it be a local lord or a king.

The person most closely identified with the reform movement was Pope Gregory VII who led the Latin Church from 1073 to 1085. He believed God had called him to restore purity and justice amongst Christians. Gregory improved the education of the clergy and tightened discipline over their sexual behaviour and their leading of worship. He also promoted a wave of church building which over the next centuries ensured that western Europe was covered by a network of parish churches. Better priests and more churches gradually led to deeper piety amongst lay people. In the second half of the eleventh century there were regions where influential families were fully committed to the reform movement – and many crusaders were to come from these areas.

Pope Gregory took on anyone who challenged the power of the **papacy**. This included the German Emperor, Henry IV, who claimed that he alone had the power to appoint Popes and that other kings and lords should therefore control the appointment or investiture of new bishops and other Church leaders. In 1075 Gregory declared that this was wrong and that only the Pope could appoint Church leaders. This led to a prolonged war between the papacy and the German Emperor. This is often called the Investiture Contest. This reached a low point in 1080, when Henry appointed a separate Pope and attacked Rome with his armies.

If it had not been for the Investiture Contest, some believe that there may have been some sort of crusade as early as the mid 1070s. When Gregory VII learned of the Seljuk movement into Byzantine lands at that time he announced that he would lead an army of Christian volunteers from Europe to drive them back. His plan had to be abandoned, though, as his struggle against the German Emperor meant he was too weak to see it through.

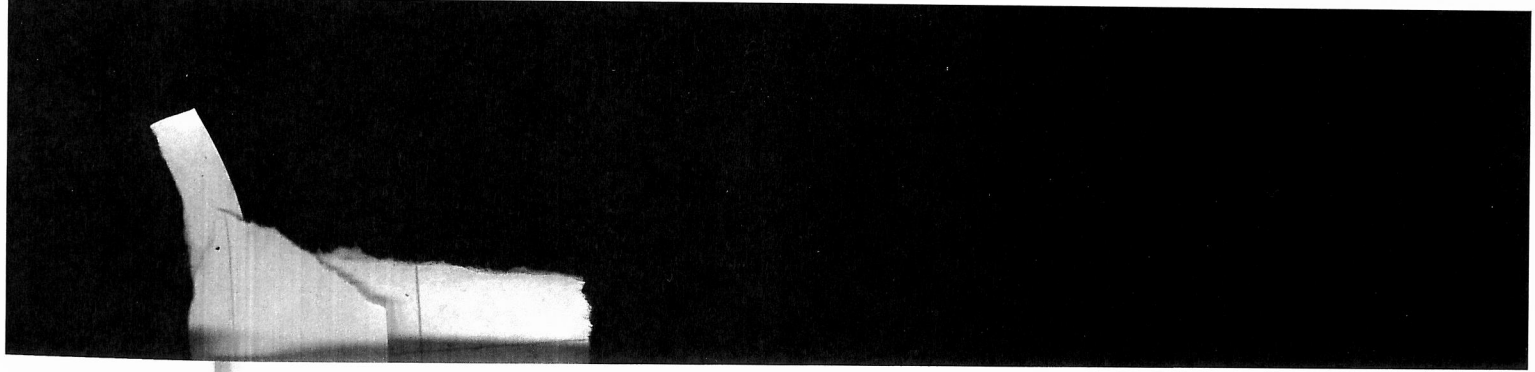
■ How would a war against the Seljuks fit the principle of *Libertas* mentioned earlier on this page?

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Why did the First Crusade erupt in 1095?

From Just War to Holy War

Pope Gregory faced a strange paradox: if the reform movement was to survive and restore order to western society, it needed armed support from kings and lords – the very people he was hoping to restrain from inflicting violence on each other. The Church was now not just allowing wars, it was directing them, as in its struggle with the German Emperor and in Gregory's vain attempt to raise an army against the Seljuks. Some priests argued that the Church should fight violence with prayer, not with more violence. Gregory VII and Urban II needed to answer this criticism. For this reason, they actively supported a remarkable woman, Matilda, Countess of Tuscany. Not only did she use her own armies to defend the papacy against attack from the German Emperor, she also gathered a cluster of great scholars such as Bishop Anselm of Lucca, who built on the understanding of Just War that St Augustine had developed over 500 years before. The scholars found Bible verses and arguments to say that it was not only acceptable for people to fight against the enemies of the Church, it was their Christian duty to do so. But they still agreed with Augustine that it was a sin to kill another man in war, even a holy one.

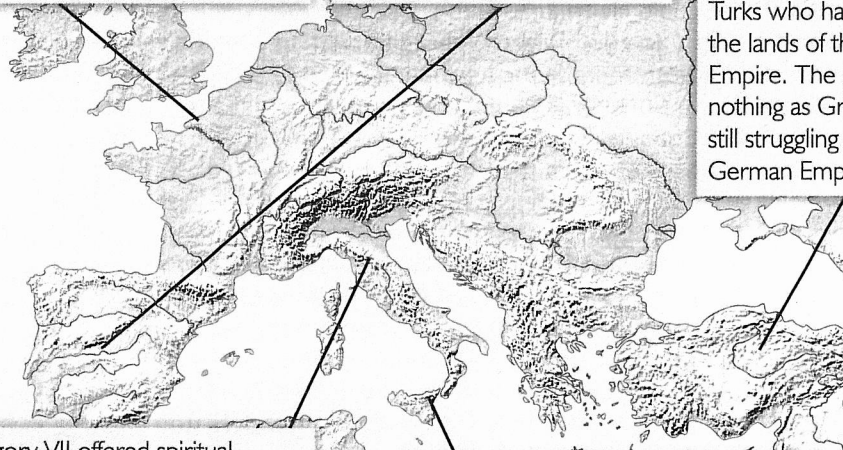
The Church reform movement also wanted to end the general lawlessness across western society. As long ago as 989 a movement that became known as the 'Peace and Truce of God' had attempted to restrain the widespread violence against vulnerable members of society in France. Lords and knights were called upon to swear that they would end their violent ways. In some cases this movement even tried to ban violence on specific days of the week, but with little success. Gregory VII and his predecessor tried instead to exploit the warlike culture of western lords by encouraging them to take up arms against the enemies of the Church. Some are shown in this map:

Pope Gregory VII's favourite Bible verse was from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, Chapter 48, verse 10. It reads 'Cursed is he who keeps back his sword from bloodshed'. He was sure that God wanted Christians to fight to achieve God's will.

1 In 1066 the Pope blessed the armies of Duke William of Normandy before they invaded England, as he believed William's enemy King Harold had broken a holy vow.

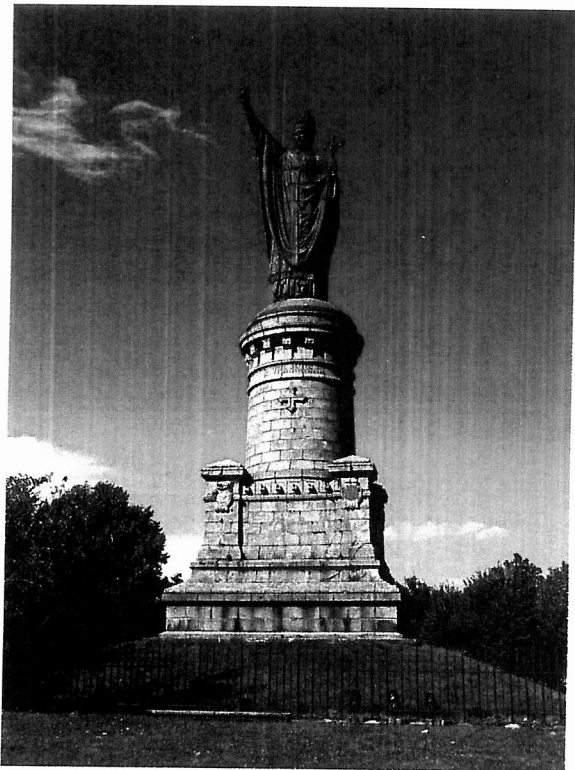
2 In 1073 Gregory VII encouraged a violent French lord to try to re-conquer Spain from the Muslims.

3 In 1074 (in a sign of things to come) Gregory VII offered to lead an army against the Muslim Seljuk Turks who had invaded the lands of the Byzantine Empire. The plan came to nothing as Gregory was still struggling against the German Emperor.



5 In 1081 Gregory VII offered spiritual rewards to armies such as those of Matilda of Tuscany who fought for him against the German Emperor.

4 In 1076 Gregory VII promised that the sins of another group of Normans would be forgiven for fighting to take Sicily from the Muslims who ruled the island.



△ This statue of Pope Urban II stands near his birthplace at Châtillon in northern France. It was put up in 1887 almost exactly 800 years after he became Pope. It shows him sending the crusaders east.

Urban II strengthens the papacy

Gregory VII was still fighting against the armies of the German Emperor, Henry IV, when he died in 1085. Another Pope ruled for just three years until 1088 when a former adviser and close friend of Gregory's took over as the head of the Latin Church. This was Pope Urban II.

Urban came from a noble family in northern France. He had seen at close hand the world of lords and knights. He had worked at the Abbey of Cluny, one of great reforming monasteries, where he had become more and more committed to restoring order to the Church and holiness to the lives of its people. As Pope he was convinced that he must find ways to help their souls to heaven. He was also eager to try to bring greater unity to the Church. He was well aware that since 1054 there had been significant divisions and quarrels between the Latin Church in the west and the **Greek Church** in the Byzantine Empire to the east. This is sometimes called the Great Schism. Despite the fact that the Byzantine Emperor, Alexios I, had recently paid the German Emperor to attack the Pope's lands

in Italy, Urban II sent messages of goodwill to Alexios. Together they eased the tensions between east and west, and weakened the German Emperor.

Meanwhile the papacy's war with the German Emperor continued. For several years Urban was exiled from Rome by the presence of German armies there. But he used his close knowledge of the noble classes and of Church leaders to build up a power base, particularly in France. Most importantly he continued the policy of Gregory VII and offered spiritual rewards to the Normans of southern Italy if they would drive the German Emperor's armies away from Rome. The plan worked and by 1094 he could claim to have the upper hand in the Investiture Contest.

In 1089 Urban once again tried to turn the warlike qualities of westerners to the advantage of the Church. He offered spiritual rewards to Christian knights if they would rebuild a city on the borders between Christian and Muslim lands in Spain. He assured them that this military work would count as much as a pilgrimage to Jerusalem as a penance for past sins. The Church and the military aristocracy of Europe were becoming regular partners in Just War. But none of these campaigns involved the mass involvement of Christian people. The opportunity for war on a far grander scale was to come in March 1095 when Pope Urban II received ambassadors from Alexios I at a Church council at Piacenza in Italy: with them they brought the Emperor's plea for help against the Seljuk Turks.

■ Check that the notes you have made support each of the main points shown on page 24. How might each main point help to explain why the First Crusade erupted in 1095?

The call of Alexios I

Alexios I to win western support.

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The call to action: Urban II and the Council of Clermont, 1095

Alexios I knew how to win western support.

Urban II had several reasons for offering support to Alexios I.

Urban II knew exactly how best to win mass support for the Crusade.

■ Here are the main points for this section. Once again, as you work your way through this section, make short, precise notes for each one, so that you can support the point that it makes.

The Emperor's plea and the Pope's plans

Through his ambassadors at Piacenza, Alexios I tried to make the most of the improved relations he had recently established with the Pope. He implored Urban II and all faithful Latin Christians to send armed men to defend 'the holy Church' by driving back 'the pagans' (meaning the Seljuks). According to Alexios, they were not only at the walls of Constantinople, but had been persecuting Christians who lived under Muslim control all over the Near East especially in Jerusalem, which made pilgrimages dangerous. He was almost certainly exaggerating all these claims in order to win western support. There is some evidence that Christians in the Near East did suffer after the Seljuks arrived but it was probably not as bad as Alexios claimed.

It is hard to know from the very few sources that remain exactly what Alexios really wanted by way of help. It is likely that he simply hoped for a large force of trained, armed soldiers to join him in driving the Seljuks out of Anatolia. It is just possible that he even wanted to reclaim Jerusalem for the Byzantine Empire for the first time since AD638, or he may have given that impression just to win recruits to his cause, knowing how precious Jerusalem was in the eyes of western Christians.

Whatever Alexios I intended, Pope Urban II certainly took the message seriously. Here was his chance to inspire the unruly lords and knights of western Europe to turn their weapons not on each other, but on the enemies of the Church. If he could achieve this, it would help pacify western society. Fighting against the Seljuks would also fit the Church reform movement's belief in *Libertas*, by freeing Christians from the rule of unbelievers. But there were political benefits too. If he could win the willing support of lords and knights for a Holy War in the east, he believed it might finally establish the papacy's superiority over the German Emperor.

The propaganda and the promise

On hearing this plea at Piacenza, Urban urged many to swear an oath that they would go to help Alexios and he started planning exactly how he would spread the message across the western Church. Over the next few months he prepared for another grand Church council to be held at Clermont in France in 1095. (This was the one that you read about at the start of this enquiry.) But well before he gave his sermon at Clermont, Urban had made every effort to ensure that his call to free Jerusalem would reach a wide audience among the people most likely to respond.

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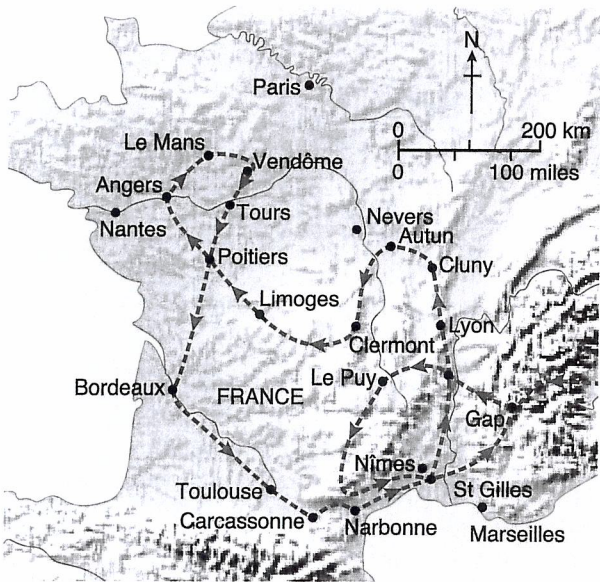
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△ Preaching tour of Pope Urban II 1095–96.

To help you understand how carefully Pope Urban II prepared the ground and how effectively he spread his message, we have prepared an 'Insight' section on pages 30 and 31.

■ Look at the notes you have made on each of the main points shown on page 27. How do they help to explain why the First Crusade erupted in 1095?

Before and after he gave his famous sermon at Clermont in November 1095, Urban travelled widely through France, preparing and following up his message. Urban's childhood as the son of a French nobleman helped him appeal to the powerful lords and bishops and the plentiful, aggressive knights of France. He also knew how to use the network of churches, abbeys and families closely committed to reform.

Quite apart from his carefully planned programme and his knowledge of his audience, it was what Urban actually said that created such a powerful response. His words went further than any previous Pope in promising spiritual rewards for those who fought for the Church. Although the only surviving accounts of his sermon were written after the capture of Jerusalem and must have been affected by hindsight and the joy of victory, letters and notes written by Urban in

1095 and 1096 make clear his central message. He brought several familiar Christian ideas together in a new context.

- 1 The idea of a long but spiritually rewarding pilgrimage.
- 2 The idea that war could be a Christian duty and an act of love for fellow Christians whose liberty had been taken away (in this case by Muslims, seen as unbelievers).
- 3 The idea of an indulgence that would remove the sinner's need for acts of penitence and ensure a swift passage of his soul to heaven.

It was the unprecedented union of these three ideas that was so powerful. For the first time, and on a grand scale, all Christians, rich and poor, were being promised by God's own representative on Earth, the Pope, that fighting in a war against the enemies of the Church would bring what so many deeply wanted: a full indulgence. It was effectively guaranteeing them the highest of prizes: a direct path to heaven and eternal salvation from the moment of death.

The message was carried quickly and powerfully across Europe, helped by the improved network of parish churches and by the religious enthusiasm that had been growing with the work of the reform movement. A sure sign of the effectiveness of the Pope's promise of indulgence was that Godfrey of Bouillon, who for years had served the German Emperor in wars against the papacy, switched sides. Within a few months he, along with many thousands more, had sewn a simple crusader cross onto his tunic and was part of a massive pilgrim army making its way to the Holy Land.

The First Crusade had erupted into life.

■ Conc

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