

Mayer H, Origins of the Crusades 1465

THE ORIGINS OF THE CRUSADES

POPE URBAN II opened the Council of Clermont on 18 November 1095—the moment that has gone down in history as the starting point of the crusades. Since the summer of that year he had been travelling through south and south-east France; at Le Puy on 15 August he issued the summons to the council. Although Urban had made careful preparations for a discussion of the question of a crusade by the Church assembly, there was at first nothing which gave any hint of the extraordinary events which were to follow. The council was attended mostly by French bishops and it dealt mostly with internal Church affairs which particularly concerned the French clergy; with general questions of reform, lay investiture, and simony; as well as with the adultery of the king of France. Also on the agenda was the peace of God, i.e. the prohibition of feuding on certain days and the immunity of certain people, places, and things. The pope's presence meant that the Peace of God movement which had hitherto been organized on a purely regional basis, was now recognized by the papacy and its application was extended to cover the whole Church. Only one of the decrees of the Council dealt with the crusade. It laid down the conditions under which a crusader qualified for a spiritual reward.

The moment which gave the council its special place in history came right at the end on 27 November. On this day the pope was due to make an important speech. So many clerks and laymen gathered to listen to him that the meeting had to be held in a field outside the town. We have four reports of Urban's speech. None of them is unquestionably authentic. Some were written after the turn of the century; and they all differ considerably from one another. None the less it is possible to reconstruct his speech in rough outline, though naturally the actual words are irrecoverable. With Gallic eloquence Urban painted a vivid picture of the supposed oppression of the Christian Churches in the east. The Seljuks had occupied Asia Minor; the churches and Holy Places had been destroyed and defiled by heathens. Now even Antioch, the city of St. Peter, had been taken. Here then was a noble task for the knights of Christendom whose other activities had been restricted by the Peace of God. In moving words the pope called upon both rich and poor to help their Christian brothers in the east. In this way peace might be restored to Christendom; there would be an end to the fratricidal wars in Europe, to the oppression of widows and orphans, and to the threats made against

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churches and abbey by a rapacious nobility. In denouncing what was, in effect, a state of civil war, the pope (according to Robert the Monk's version of his speech) explained it in terms of the widespread poverty and malnutrition which resulted from inadequate cultivation of the soil.

The success of this appeal was extraordinary. *Deus lo volit*—God wills it—was the cry which went up from the listening crowd. Bishop Adhemar of Le Puy, who had undoubtedly known of the pope's plans for some time, was the first to take the cross. Many of those present followed his example. Garments were cut up into the shape of crosses which each of them attached to his shoulder in imitation of Christ (Matthew 10:38). On 1 December messengers came from the powerful count of Toulouse, Raymond IV of St. Gilles, announcing their lord's readiness to take part in the crusade. Since Raymond must have sent his messengers before he could have heard any news of Urban's speech, it is clear that he had advance knowledge of the pope's intentions. The enthusiasm spread far beyond Clermont. Urban remained in France for several months longer and continued to preach the crusade, at Limoges for example. He also sent out written appeals. Three of these, to the Flemings, the Bolognese, and the monks of Vallombrosa, are still extant today. The bishops played their part in the crusading movement and sent preachers out among the people. The response was enormous, especially in south France but also in the Mâconnais, in Lorraine, in the western parts of the Empire, in Champagne, Normandy, and Flanders. Everywhere warriors and men of peace alike were ready to go on the journey to Jerusalem, certainly in far greater numbers than Urban could possibly have foreseen.

The success of the Clermont appeal has still not been fully explained and probably never can be. Nor will any definitive interpretation be offered here; after all, the reasons for taking the cross varied considerably from one individual to another. All one can do is to examine a whole range of spiritual and worldly motives of different kinds which coalesced not only to produce the spark of that unique and spontaneous success at Clermont but also to light a fire which burned for two hundred years. Originally the object of the crusade was to help the Christian Churches in the East. However unnecessary such help may, in fact, have been, it was in these terms that Urban is supposed to have spoken at Clermont. But very soon men had a more definite object in mind: to free the Holy Land and, above all, Jerusalem, the Sepulchre of Christ, from the yoke of heathen dominion. It seems that Urban himself had not used the word Jerusalem at Clermont. At any rate it is not mentioned by Fulcher of Chartres whose report of the speech is the one closest to the event. Only in the later versions does Urban make an impassioned appeal for the liberation of Jerusalem. But there is still better evidence of this in the letters which Urban himself wrote. The accounts of the Clermont speech in the chronicles are too much coloured by the tendency of the authors to

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show off their own rhetorical skills. In the letter sent to the Flemings late in 1095 the pope still speaks mainly of the liberation of the Eastern Churches; Jerusalem is mentioned only in passing. In the letter sent to Bologna in September 1096, however, Jerusalem has quite explicitly become the goal. On the other hand both the second canon of the Council of Clermont and the letter to Valombrosa of October 1096 refer, in very similar terms, to the 'march to Jerusalem to free the Church of God'. Erdmann hoped to resolve the difficulty by making a distinction between the object of the war, the liberation of the Eastern Churches, and the goal of the march, Jerusalem. It is, perhaps, an oversubtle interpretation. Jerusalem cannot have been used merely as a lure; the name was too potent and would inevitably have pulled the whole enterprise in this one direction. It is rather more likely in view of the evident lack of over-all planning that Urban had not in fact made much of Jerusalem while at Clermont but that during the course of the next year he gave in to public opinion which needed and created a concrete goal.

In contrast to the opinion expressed here, H. E. J. Cowdrey, in a very impressive study, saw things differently and argued on the basis of various previously unnoticed sources, especially the *Fragmentum historiae Andegavensis* of February 1096 and some charters, that Jerusalem had a central role in Urban's crusading ideas. He believes that for the pope Jerusalem was the centre of the Eastern Church he wished to liberate and that therefore its conquest was a necessity. While admitting that Cowdrey might be correct, I would observe that one should not lose sight of the danger that the pope, in pushing for a conquest of Jerusalem, might create a new rival for Rome (Jerusalem) instead of eliminating an old one (Constantinople). I should also point out that there is no evidence that immediately after the Council of Clermont men talked exclusively of Jerusalem rather than of Jerusalem in the context of the Eastern Churches. Both the second canon of the Council of Clermont and Urban's letter to the Flemings—and these are the only two sources which date from 1095—refer to Jerusalem only in a wider context. So also does the *Fragmentum* when it urges people to go there to subdue the race of the heathen 'who had seized that city and all the land of the Christians up as far as Constantinople'. It should also be remembered that the same pope, who, according to Cowdrey, placed Jerusalem at the heart of his notion of the crusade, spoke not one word about Jerusalem in a letter written in May 1098, when the crusade had come to a halt outside Antioch. Instead he declared that it was the task of the moment to fight the Turks in Asia and the Moors in Europe (*in Asia Turcos, in Europa Mauros*). Cowdrey's charter evidence is impressive and as a rule these charters speak of the march to Jerusalem. But that public opinion in 1096 saw things in these terms is not in dispute. And even in the charters there is no uniform terminology. From the Auvergne, where the Council of Clermont took

place, a charter for the abbey of Sauxillanges refers unmistakably to the First Crusade but speaks an entirely different language: 'When the persecution of the barbarians rose up to destroy the liberty of the Eastern Church, it came about that the entire strength and faith of the western peoples hastened to assist the destroyed religion at the exhortation of the pope'. But though I still hold to the view that it was the people and not the pope who brought about the concentration on Jerusalem itself, it is evident that this is an obscure area where different interpretations, like Cowdrey's, are perfectly possible.⁶

Even the mere sound of the name Jerusalem must have had a glittering and magical splendour for the men of the eleventh century which we are no longer capable of feeling.⁷ It was a keyword which produced particular psychological reactions and conjured up particular eschatological notions. Men thought, of course, of the town in Palestine where Jesus Christ had suffered, died, been buried, and then had risen again. But, more than this, they saw in their minds 'eye the heavenly city of Jerusalem with its gates of sapphire, its walls and squares bright with precious stones—as it had been described in the Book of Revelation (21: 10ff.) and Tobias (13: 21ff.). It was the centre of a spiritual world just as the earthly Jerusalem was, in the words of Ezekiel (5: 5) 'in the midst of the nations and countries'. It was a meeting place for those who had been scattered, the goal of the great pilgrimage of peoples (Tobias 13: 14; Isaiah 2: 2), where God resides among his people; the place at the end of time to which the elect ascend; the resting place of the righteous; city of paradise and of the tree of life which heals all men.

Since a good proportion of the crusaders would not have been capable of distinguishing between the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem such images must have had a powerful effect upon them. They believed that they were marching directly to the city of eternal bliss. Above all it was the *paupers*, the landless poor, whose apocalyptic and eschatological piety was crystallized in the vision of Jerusalem. The increasingly millenarian outlook of the masses was studied by Alphantery who, in the course of his investigations, contributed many original and noteworthy ideas to the problem of the origins of the crusades, though he was probably inclined to exaggerate the importance of such eschatological influences. These influences, discernible chiefly in the form of visions, were not equally present throughout the crusade. They appear both before and during the departure but not again in any significant number until after the capture of Antioch in 1098. Between 1096 and 1098 there are few traces of this kind of thing. This suggests that the masses came under the spell of eschatological ideas only in certain situations and not while the crusade was advancing smoothly. Some visions were clearly induced and exploited by the leaders in order to raise morale at critical moments. The most remarkable example of this is the discovery of the Holy Lance (see below, p. 52). But there are

also clear signs of an eschatological outlook right at the start, especially when the poor were beginning their march without waiting for the official crusade. The 'signs'—a plague of locusts, a rain of stars from heaven—are apocalyptic in character (cf. Revelation 9: 3; 6: 13). Baudri of Dol tells us that this apocalyptic atmosphere was not created by the official preaching organized by the bishops. Instead it was spontaneously disseminated through a process of mutual, sermon-like exhortations to which the *paupers* responded all the more readily since the bad harvests of the years before 1096 made it easy to leave home and fields in order to follow the path to salvation, the road to a better future—a future which the theologically uneducated masses, filled with dim, vague, and incoherent eschatological dreams, probably pictured in an entirely material fashion. Some of the *paupers* certainly believed that they were of the elect, believed that the words of Psalm 147 referred to them: 'The lord doth build up Jerusalem; he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.' Believing this they had no hesitation about occasionally bringing pressure to bear on the commanders of the crusade; on the other hand leaders like Raymond of Toulouse reckoned with such feelings and turned them to their own purposes. It would be wrong to impute apocalyptic and eschatological motives only to the *paupers* and deny them to the knights who, according to Alphandery, were more strongly driven by the idea of a holy war in the service of the Church.⁸ But the effectiveness of eschatological ideas should, in any event, not be overestimated. The evidence comes from chroniclers who were themselves actively creating a doctrine of the crusade and who were writing after the event, some of them a long time after. There is a good deal more to the crusade than this. After all, a great many pilgrimages to Jerusalem were made in the year 1093, the millennium of Christ's passion. According to Ralph Glaber's account they too were preceded by supernatural signs and were entirely eschatological in spirit, seeming to proclaim the coming of Antichrist which itself precedes the Parousia, the second coming of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2: 3–12). Yet these pilgrimages did not become a crusade. Above all there was nothing like the all-embracing mass movement of 1095–6. In the final analysis what was decisive was not millenarian thought but the arming of the pilgrimage and the idea of a reward which was latent in the crusading indulgence.

Counting for just as much as the images conjured up by a child-like, mystical faith was the long tradition of pilgrimage to Jerusalem.⁹ As early as 333 a pilgrim from Bordeaux reached Palestine; and not much later a Gallic noblewoman named Egeria visited the Holy Places leaving to posterity a report which is as important a monument of a Latin changing from ancient to medieval as it is for the topography of the *loca sancta*. In 386 Saint Jerome settled in Bethlehem; half a century later the Empress Eudocia went into retreat at Jerusalem. Monasteries and hospices were built to receive the travellers who, following the new fashion—as it can

fairly be called—came to Palestine. The stream of pilgrims never dried up, not even after the Arab conquest of the Holy Land in the seventh century. The growing east–west trade in relics played some part in awakening and sustaining interest in the Holy Places, but more important was the gradual development of the penitential pilgrimage. This was imposed as a canonical punishment and for capital crimes like fratricide it could be for a period of up to seven years and to all the great centres: Rome, San Michele at Monte Gargano, Santiago di Compostella and, above all, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. With the belief that they were effective ways to salvation the popularity of pilgrimages grew rapidly from the tenth century onwards. Saint John of Parma journeyed no less than six times to the Holy Land—given the conditions of travel at the time an astonishing achievement. Men of violent passions like Fulk Nerra, Count of Anjou, or Robert the Devil, Count of Normandy, went on pilgrimages to Jerusalem when their consciences plagued them on account of the crimes they had committed against church and monastery, so sometimes they had to go more than once. Returning from one of these pilgrimages Fulk founded the abbey of Beaulieu near Loches and gave it as its chief relic a piece of stone which he was said to have bitten off the Holy Sepulchre while kneeling before it in ecstatic prayer. The new Cluniac order, gaining all the time in prestige and influence, used its far-flung net of contacts and its genius for organization both to urge men to go on pilgrimages and to improve facilities for those who did. For many pilgrims in the eleventh century the journey to Jerusalem took on a still deeper religious meaning; according to Ralph Glaber, himself a Cluniac monk, it was looked upon as the climax of a man's religious life, as his final journey. Once he had reached the Holy Places he would remain there until he died.

It is clear that in the middle of the eleventh century the difficulties facing pilgrims began to increase. In part this was a result of the Seljuk invasions which made things harder for travellers on the road through Anatolia—a popular route because it permitted a visit to Constantinople. But it was also a consequence of the growing number of pilgrims, for this worried the Muslim authorities in Asia Minor and Palestine, just as the Greeks in south Italy looked sceptically upon the groups of Norman pilgrims who were all too easily persuaded to settle there for good. It has been suggested that the Muslims may have had a commercial interest in promoting pilgrimages but, except perhaps in Jerusalem itself, the income from this source cannot have been very significant—poverty was, after all, one of the ideals of the pilgrim. So there was little or no incentive for them to make the journey any easier. Conditions were, of course, nothing like as bad as they had been during the persecution of the Christians under the mad caliph, Hakim, who, in 1009, had had the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem destroyed; but neither were they as favourable as they had been during the great days of the Byzantine Empire or in the time

of Charlemagne who had himself taken a keen interest in the pilgrimage to Palestine. Yet despite the occasional trouble the number of pilgrims grew steadily. In 1064–5 Bishop Gunther of Bamberg led a party over 7,000 strong into the Holy Land. Near Ramleh in Palestine they were suddenly attacked by Muslims and for several days they had to fight a defensive battle. It is not easy to explain how they managed this since pilgrims were always unarmed.

Here we have reached the critical point of difference between crusader and pilgrim. The crusader carried weapons. A crusade was a pilgrimage, but an armed pilgrimage which was granted special privileges by the Church and which was held to be specially meritorious. The crusade was a logical extension of the pilgrimage. It would never have occurred to anyone to march out to conquer the Holy Land if men had not made pilgrimages there for century after century. The constant stream of pilgrims inevitably nourished the idea that the Sepulchre of Christ ought to be in Christian hands, not in order to solve the practical difficulties which faced pilgrims, but because gradually the knowledge that the Holy Places, the patrimony of Christ, were possessed by heathens became more and more unbearable. If the link between pilgrimage and crusade is obvious, the credit for bringing it about belongs to Urban II. Although historians today are less inclined to argue that the crusades were caused by increasing difficulties in the way of pilgrims, it still remains true that pilgrimages were of decisive importance in the rise of the crusading movement. In Erdmann's words, Urban 'took the popular but, in practical terms, unfruitful idea of pilgrimage and used it to fertilize the war upon the heathen'. It is significant that contemporaries were at first unable to distinguish clearly between the two things. Not until the mid-thirteenth century was there a Latin word for 'crusade' and even then it was seldom used. (The English word crusade, like the German word *Kreuzzug*, was only invented in the eighteenth century.) In the Middle Ages men almost always used circumlocutions like *expeditio, iter in terram sanctam* (journey into the Holy Land) and—especially early in the crusading period—*peregrinatio*, the technical term for pilgrimage. The line between crusade and pilgrimage was obviously a blurred one.

Naturally the idea of an armed pilgrimage appealed above all to the knightly classes. As Erdmann has shown, thanks to the influence of the Church reformers they had gradually been drawn to the idea of a holy war, the battle for the Church against the heathen. Faced by the problem of harmonizing an inevitable evil with the peaceful and non-violent teaching of Christ, the attitude of the Church to war was understandably a delicate one. In the Byzantine world theologians had unambiguously condemned war but in practice their condemnation had little effect. In the Latin West, men were not ready for so radical and ineffective a point of view. Throughout the Middle Ages, St. Augustine's doctrine of the just war,

bellum iustum, remained authoritative.¹⁰ Only in a just cause was war permissible; only when fought to defend or to recover a rightful possession. Clearly the second of these justifications left plenty of room for a generous interpretation of political circumstances.

The unceasing onslaughts of the pagans on the whole of Christian Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries gave obvious importance to the concept of a defensive war. Armies and raiding parties of Vikings, Magyars, and Arabs swept into Christian territory and under this pressure the population had to endure the hardest time of the Middle Ages in the years following the collapse of the Carolingian Empire. Since the wealth of churches and monasteries made them obvious targets for plunder-hungry invaders, it was only natural that the Church should support what was undoubtedly a clear-cut case of a war of defence. As all these invaders were heathens—for not until after 911 when they settled in Normandy and became a little less aggressive did the Vikings become Christians—this was to be an important stage in the development of crusading thought. The idea of the *bellum iustum* became closely associated with war against the heathen. In the ninth century Popes Leo IV and John VIII promised eternal life to all those who fell in battle against either the Arabs or the Vikings. Later on, crusaders received the same assurance. None the less it would be a mistake to see these promises as early symptoms of the crusading idea. The two popes had been influenced by a dictum of the famous sixth-century Spanish bishop, Isidore of Seville: 'men whose wisdom and courage make them worthy of heaven are called heroes'. The importance of these papal promises lies in their emphatic support of the war against the heathen. This war itself was a royal and, in particular, an imperial duty. It had always been the emperor's special task to preserve peace within the Church and to further the spread of Christianity abroad. In time men went over from defence to attack but nearly always they continued to look upon it as a just war in St. Augustine's sense, a war fought to recover what was rightfully theirs. It was always possible to throw the blame for war on the other side and build up a plausible *casus belli* for oneself. It is from this point of view that medieval chroniclers, popes, and preachers must be judged when, and especially after the third crusade, they time and again refer to the Holy Land as the 'patrimony' of the Lord, which belongs to Christendom and which must be defended or reconquered. For this phrase alone was enough to justify the crusades.

The Church's attitude to war was further influenced by the Peace of God movement. In its beginnings this movement had been essentially a self-defence mechanism on the part of the Church. The disintegration of the Carolingian Empire had brought with it a decline in the authority of the state and a general decline of public morals. Everywhere in the tenth century the warrior class, composed of men who were gradually coming to be called knights, was patently brutalized. Private property, especially

Church property, was attacked just as greedily as it ever had been by Vikings or Magyars. The state could do very little about this unhappy state of affairs and it became increasingly difficult to see any sign whatsoever of public order or security. Though it was primarily concern for its own property which persuaded the Church to step in at this point, it is none the less impossible to overlook the beneficial consequences for the whole fabric of society. In the early regional peace agreements, for which there is a good deal of evidence from the end of the tenth century onwards, it was usual for the local nobility to swear to observe the immunity of the clergy, unarmed persons, and ecclesiastical property. Then, from about 1040, it became increasingly the practice to issue decrees prohibiting feuding on certain days; the final stage was to try to abolish the feud altogether and replace it with arbitration. Credit for promoting this movement belongs chiefly to men associated with Clunian reform. At Cluny, not far from Mâcon in Burgundy, a monastery was founded in 910 which under some vigorous abbots rose to be one of the most important monastic communities in the West. From this centre radiated a reform movement with the primary purpose of achieving a stricter and more profound observance of the Benedictine Rule as well as a liberation of the monastery from external aristocratic influence. But at the same time the outside world was by no means ignored. Efforts were made to bring about a certain spiritualization, a deepening of the layman's religious life so that he was more closely bound to those forces in the Church which, as the reformers saw it, regulated the moral order. In particular these efforts were aimed at the much brutalized knightly classes, and the Peace of God was just one of the means used to get at this group. Yet all this meant that the Church had made a decisive move towards war, indeed towards active participation in war, because it was simply not enough to persuade the nobility to swear peace-oaths; some way of forcing men to keep the peace had to be devised and, if necessary, put into practice. So, in order to punish disturbers of the peace, the Church became involved in organizing and directing military campaigns.

Ecclesiastical wars of this kind—and later, in another context, they were to become more common—were considered to be 'holy wars' fought in the service of an approving Church. But on this question Augustine's teaching presented difficulties of interpretation and so the views of individual clerics differed considerably; by the end of the tenth century the whole doctrine was in a state of flux. In the eleventh century support for this concept of holy war came from the reformers, both those who were chiefly concerned for the monasteries and those who, under papal leadership, were trying to improve the condition of the whole Church. In part doubtless the reformers recognized that in the 'holy war' the Church possessed a valuable political weapon. The same men that played such a decisive part in the transformation of the warrior class into a knightly

order were also involved in taking the responsibility for holy war out of the hands of the king who previously had been held to be alone responsible for war, and transferring it on to the shoulders of the knightly class as a whole. This development was an essential pre-condition for the growth of the crusading idea.

But it has been suggested that not only the reform papacy looked favourably upon the idea of a holy war. Two popes from the days before the period of Church reform have even been credited with plans for real crusades.¹¹ Among the letters of Gerbert of Aurillac, later Pope Sylvester II (993-1003), there is one he wrote before he became pope. Although there has been much argument about the genuineness of this document, it is difficult to reject it altogether. In it some historians believed they could see Gerbert calling for armed help for the Church of Jerusalem. But Erdmann has shown that in fact Gerbert was only concerned to raise alms. It is true that the thought of military intervention did cross his mind but only to be dismissed at once as impracticable. An encyclical published by Sergius IV (1009-12), however, seemed to be more significant. In this the pope really did appear to be calling for some kind of crusade. He had heard the news of the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem by Caliph Hakim (1009) and he declared his intention of commanding a fleet which would sail to Syria and there defeat the Muslims and rebuild the Sepulchre. At the beginning of this encyclical he referred clearly to the tradition of pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It would have been hard to overestimate the importance of this document for the growth of the crusading idea, had it not, some twenty-five years ago, been proved to be a forgery. In a fine piece of research Gieysztor demonstrated that it had been written in 1096, not long after the Council of Clermont, at the monastery of St. Pierre de Moissac near Toulouse. In other words this 'encyclical' belongs to the class of documents known as *Excitatoria* of which several others, in letter form, are still extant today. They were written simply as propaganda to drum up support for the crusade.

In fact it was not until the period of reform in the second half of the eleventh century that the papacy was anything like powerful enough to think seriously of a military expedition to the East. The more active policies of the popes of this period also involved them in a new attitude to war. In 1053 Leo IX (1048-54) one of the first reforming popes, took personal command of a campaign in south Italy against the Normans who behaved in much the same way as the heathens and were therefore treated in a similar fashion. To the Germans who took part in the campaign the pope offered exemption from punishment for their crimes and remission of penance. This came nearer the promise of 1095 than those made by Leo IV and John VIII. Then Pope Nicholas II (1058-61) tried to solve the Norman problem by allying with their leaders, Richard of Capua and Robert Guiscard, at Melfi in 1059. The two Norman princes agreed to be

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