

Two qualifying observations are in order. First, it is important to avoid anachronistic and unduly romantic associations when considering the stage of evolution which knighthood had reached by the closing years of the eleventh century. Medieval knighthood tends to evoke alluring images of chivalric prowess and courtly manners, the behaviour and colourful style of an international cadre of knights whose interests and group consciousness were a major cultural force transcending barriers of language, wealth, and status. But full-blown chivalry was a development of the twelfth and subsequent centuries. In 1095 it was still in its infancy. There was as yet no heraldic system: a significant consideration, given the role of images in imparting information to a society which was largely illiterate. The vernacular expression of chivalric values through song was no more than nascent. And there were no clearly established rites of dubbing to cement a communal ethos for all knights. Significantly, lords and princes were generally wary of having themselves described as *milites* without added grandiose adjectives, which suggests that they felt themselves part of the militarization of society but did not consider it fitting to identify themselves wholeheartedly with their brothers-in-arms of lesser status, many of whom were third- or fourth-generation peasants made good. Great lords and humble *milites* were together immersed in a shared culture of warrior toughness, honour, and skilled horsemanship. Therein lay a potent force for cohesion which was to help the crusaders when they found themselves exposed to enormous physical and mental pressures. But the First Crusade was not a chivalric exercise in the way that later generations would have understood it.

Second, the mounted warriors' domination of society did not wholly negate the potential contribution of other types of personnel in times of war. Because the West's military organization, like that of most pre-industrial societies, was intricately bound up with wider economic and administrative structures, it was impossible to extract a sizeable cavalry force from its cultural and social milieu and expect it to function in isolation. Armies needed support services from grooms, servants, smiths, armourers, and cooks, all of whom could turn their hand to fighting if needed. There were footsoldiers with more specialist skills in the use of bows and close-quarter weapons. Few medieval armies operated without women who met the soldiers' various needs. And clerics would also be involved to minister to the army and pray for success. This is significant for an understanding of the broad response to the First Crusade appeal. When Urban II called for forces to liberate Jerusalem it proved impossible to exclude all non-knightly participants, even though, as his surviving pronouncements make plain, the *milites* were foremost in his mind and he was anxious that the crusade forces should not be burdened by too many non-combatants. The significance of targeting the *milites* in particular was that they were both the best soldiers the West had to offer and also the indispensable core around which effective armies were able to coalesce.

The launching of the First Crusade was made possible by a revolution which had overtaken the western Church since the middle of the eleventh century. From the 1040s a group of reformers, first with the support of the German emperor Henry III and then in opposition to his son Henry IV, had taken control of the papacy. This institution they shrewdly

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identified as the best means to pursue their programme of eliminating abuses within the Church. To seize power at the top might seem an obvious step to have taken, but the reformers' methods in fact ran counter to the usual pattern of ecclesiastical self-renewal. Historically the Church's hierarchy has seen its role as acting as a brake on forces for change, which are typically seen as coming up from below. This attitude has often been rather unfairly caricatured as dogmatic and unresponsive traditionalism, but its roots lie deep within the Church's understanding of itself. Catholics believe that theirs is not a 'gathered' body, an institution which has been created by human initiative or is simply the result of haphazard historical evolution. The Church is rather 'apostolic', meaning that it exists as the direct and inevitable consequence of God's intentions for mankind, as communicated by Christ to the



ST PETER casts down Simon Magus, who had asked to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit, in a relief expanding upon an episode in Acts 8:18–24. Eleventh-century reformers attacked the practice of simony—the purchase or sale of ecclesiastical office—in order to limit lay influence in the Church. From this emphasis on detachment, however, there developed renewed interest in those roles lay people could legitimately play in Christian society.

apostles and thence to the clergy of later generations. Given this belief, a reluctance to change too much too fast can be justified as sound stewardship of divine dispensation. When, however, the forces for change include elements within the Church's hierarchy itself, the impact is potentially enormous. This is what happened in the second half of the eleventh century.

The reformers' programme is often known as the Gregorian Reform after one of its most energetic and vociferous proponents, Pope Gregory VII (1073–85). It operated on two complementary levels. The Gregorians addressed themselves to aspects of the Church's conduct: the morality, especially the sexual behaviour, of the clergy; clerics' educational attainments and their competence to discharge their sacramental, liturgical, and pastoral duties; and lay interference in the running of churches and the making of appointments to ecclesiastical office. To this extent the reformers' aims were principally cultic, to purify the Church so that it could operate satisfactorily as the medium of religious ritual. On a further level, however, the Gregorians' ambitions were also organizational. As with secular governments, the perennial problem was to harmonize activity at central, regional, and local levels. To this end, papal legates armed with supervisory and disciplinary powers, councils which routinely brought senior churchmen together, an expanding and better organized corpus of canon (ecclesiastical) law, and an emphasis upon the pope's judicial authority, all served to introduce greater consistency into the Church's operations. The full fruits of the administrative reforms were not to be realized until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But by the 1090s an important and lasting start had been made. A consequence was that when Pope Urban launched the First Crusade he was able to mobilize the resources, enthusiasm, and communication skills of many individual clerics and religious communities, a body of collective support which had already grown sensitive to papal initiatives.

**THE SINFULNESS OF THE LAITY.** In this period very few lay people, other than some kings and queens, were recognized as saints. One of the exceptions was Gerald of Aurillac (d. 909), a count from central France. It is significant that he was believed to have led a life substantially influenced by monastic role models.



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THE WAR ON SIN: the monastic church of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire (Fleury). Monasteries such as Fleury grew rich on the donations of lay people, in particular members of the military classes, who wished to be associated with the monks' reputation for holiness and their acts of intercession.

The preachers of the crusade would have been wasting their breath, of course, had not many Europeans been eager to respond to what was held out as a voluntary undertaking. The crusade was proposed as a devotional act of pilgrimage, and therein lay its attraction. The religious culture of medieval Europe can seem strange to modern observers: it should be borne in mind that much of what is nowadays regarded as distinctively Catholic is the product of the Counter-Reformation. The subject is, moreover, vast. Nevertheless it is possible to isolate some of the elements which help to explain the attraction of crusading. One fundamental feature of people's religious drives was that they were conditioned by reactions to sin and an appreciation of its consequences. No aspect of human conduct and social interaction was immune from the taint of sinfulness, and only those whose lives were deliberately conducted in strictly regulated and socially atypical environments—celibate clergy, hermits, monks, and nuns—could hope to avoid some of the innumerable pitfalls of everyday existence. The laity respected and supported monastic communities because moral worth was regarded as a function of outward conduct. In the years either side of 1100 there was beginning to develop a greater sensitivity to the idea that internal disposition was the most important part of pious expression. But actions, spiritually speaking, continued to speak at least as loud as thoughts and words.

Such an emphasis upon deeds—expressed both in terms of how sins were defined and how they could be remedied through penances—can seem mechanistic until one considers the constraints acting upon people's lives. An acute attentiveness to conduct was perfectly natural in social environments where virtually everyone lived in closely-knit and introspective groups which afforded little or no privacy. Thrown intimately together, communities needed to regulate themselves by exploiting the power of convention to fix norms, an approach rein-



forced by the belief that aberrant behaviour compromised the solidarity of the group. Sins were considered to be among the ways in which the equilibrium of small-world communities could be upset. Social cohesion was therefore maintained by a dual process: wrongdoers were shamed by means of isolation, public disapproval, and ritualized correction; and they were encouraged to feel guilt, a reaction which was particularly fostered by the monks who set the pace of eleventh-century piety. The First Crusade was therefore preached at a time when many lay people were sensitive to communal pressure, used to dwelling on their behavioural shortcomings, and convinced that their spiritual welfare depended on taking positive action.

A further noteworthy feature of medieval religious culture is its profound attachment to a sense of place. In much the same way that scholars were able to allegorize and moralize from a biblical passage while remaining convinced of its factual accuracy, so people of all classes instinctively conflated religious abstraction and physical sensation. This cast of mind was particularly evident at the thousands of saints' shrines which were dotted across western Christendom: there Christianity, made anthropomorphic and accessible, could be seen, smelt, heard, and touched. Saints were a central element in eleventh-century devotion and performed many useful functions. They enabled the Church to walk the tightrope of holding out the possibility of salvation to the sinful populace while asserting Heaven's rigorous entry

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*Far left:* THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN: an angel locks the damned, including kings and clerics, in Hell. The nakedness of the damned is an indication that sexual behaviour, which the Church tried to limit, was seen as one of the principal routes to sin. By way of contrast, it was believed that Heaven after the Day of Judgement would be populated by people free from sexual drive.

*Left:* THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN: the tortures of the damned. The expectation of eternal punishment, comprising pain far greater than any sensation felt during this life, was widespread and potent. Belief in the physical reality of the agonies of Hell reinforced the idea that penitential acts, such as pilgrimage or crusading, should likewise require endurance and suffering.

*This page:* DIVINE JUDGEMENT: the awakening of the dead on the Last Day. It was believed that mankind would be judged in two stages: a preliminary decision was made after death; and everyone would be bodily resurrected and definitively judged on the Day of Judgement. The idea that one's actions in this life affected one's eternal fate was the central plank of crusade ideology.



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requirements. Because saints had once been mortals themselves and so had an insight into human limitations, they were also able to act as intercessors in the heavenly hall of justice. On earth their physical remains and the objects associated with their lives emanated *virtus*, a beneficent spiritual power upon which devotees could draw. In theory saints were not constrained by geography, but the belief was nevertheless deeply rooted that their *virtus* was spatially concentrated around the sites where their relics were preserved and their memory ritually perpetuated. By extension, the close relationship between idea and location was applied to Christ. Pilgrimage to the places where he had lived, died, and been buried was considered an exceptionally meritorious religious experience. In the eleventh century improved communications through central Europe and an increase in Italian maritime traffic in the Mediterranean meant that more westerners than ever before were able to satisfy the pilgrimage urge by journeying to the Holy Land. It is therefore unsurprising that accounts of Urban II's sermon which launched the First Crusade at Clermont in November 1095 report that he averted to the pilgrimage tradition. Many, he said, had been to the East or knew those who had. Urban, we are told, also used scare stories about Turkish defilement of the Holy Places. Whatever their accuracy, they were potent stimulants because they tapped into contemporaries' habitual identification of pious expression and geographical space.