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The Crusades

1. What were the Crusades?

The Crusades were a series of military expeditions to the Middle East by Western Catholics, inspired and blessed by the Catholic Church, with the aim of recapturing the Holy Land (especially Jerusalem) from the Muslims. There were four main Crusades:

First Crusade:	1096-99
Second Crusade:	1147-49
Third Crusade:	1189-92
Fourth Crusade:	1202-4

There had, of course, been a long tradition of warfare between Christians and Muslims before the Crusades. The Byzantine Empire and the Islamic Empire had been fighting each other in and around Asia Minor ever since the Muslim armies first came streaming out of Arabia in the 7th century. However, the wars of the Byzantines against the Muslims were *not* Crusades. This is because they were not wars led by the Church for a religious purpose (as the Crusades were); the Byzantine-Muslim wars were “ordinary” wars, led by the Byzantine state for reasons of national self-defence, or the reconquest of Byzantine territory which the Muslims had seized. The Eastern Church resolutely refused to award the crown of martyrdom to Byzantine soldiers who had fallen in battle against Muslims – a stark contrast to the Western attitude, where the Church saw fighting and dying in a Crusade as a spiritual act that washed away the warrior’s sins. So when the First Crusade was preached in 1095, a new and specifically

Western Catholic phenomenon was born, which had profound effects on Western society and the Western Church.

2. *The causes of the Crusades*

It was the great Byzantine Emperor *Alexius I Comnenus* (1081-1118) who triggered off the Crusades. In 1094, Alexius appealed to Pope *Urban II* (1088-99) for help in fighting the Seljuk Turks. The Turks, the new rulers of the Muslim world in the East, had decisively beaten the Byzantines at the battle of Manzikert in 1071, and conquered the bulk of Asia Minor.¹ Alexius asked for Western troops to increase the strength of his own Byzantine army, so that he could reconquer Asia Minor. What he got instead was the First Crusade.

Before Alexius made his appeal to Urban II for Western troops, Western Europe was already full of people who had gone on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, to visit the scenes of Jesus's life and death, especially His tomb (which was, according to tradition, located in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem). Any physical object which was associated with Christ or the saints, e.g. part of their body or clothing, was highly valued; believers viewed these "relics" as channels through which God would bestow grace and favour on those who venerated them.²

Because the Son of God had trodden and sanctified its very soil, the Holy Land gained a unique status in the eyes of Western Christians (not to the same degree for Easterners, who never felt any need to "liberate" Jerusalem from the Muslims).³ People therefore felt that pilgrimages to the Holy Land were a special way of acquiring God's blessing.

1. See Chapter 3, section 1.

2. For relics, see Volume One, Chapter 7, section 3, under the heading *Church worship*.

3. This difference of attitude between East and West may perhaps reflect the greater degree to which Western piety was focused on material "things" and "places". The East of course had its *icons*; but it resolutely refused to imitate the West in having *statues*, on the grounds that statues were too grossly materialistic to be genuine windows into spiritual realities (as we saw in Chapter 3, section 3).

Until the Seljuk Turks took control in 1055, the Muslim rulers of the Holy Land had always treated Christian pilgrims well. The Turks, by contrast, treated them badly. Western pilgrims came back from Palestine and filled Europe with terrible stories of Turkish hostility and persecution. Catholic Europe was outraged. In addition, there was a growing feeling in the West at this time that the forces of Christianity could defeat and expel the Muslims from Christian lands they had conquered. Under King Ferdinand I of Castile (1035-65), the Christian reconquest of Muslim Spain had begun, which Spanish Catholics regarded as a Crusade in their own land. Between 1060 and 1090, the Catholic Normans of southern Italy destroyed Muslim power in Sicily. Perhaps it seemed natural to continue this successful drive against Islam into the East.

Pope Urban II had reasons of his own for supporting the Byzantine appeal for help. As we saw in the last Chapter (section 6), Urban was a disciple of Hildebrand, and was in exile from Rome where the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV had set up a rival pope, Clement III. Urban thought that the way to defeat Henry and his rival pope, and so secure the victory of the Hildebrandine reform movement, was to make himself the leader of a great popular cause. So from the outset, Pope Urban intended to answer the Byzantine appeal for troops by launching a great religious Crusade to liberate the Holy Land. He correctly calculated that this would unite Catholic Europe behind him. In November 1095, Urban called together a council of clergy and nobles at Clermont in southern France to consider the situation in the East. On the ninth day of this council, he preached one of the most epoch-making sermons in Christian history. Urban called on the kings and nobles of Catholic Europe, especially the French, to stop fighting each other, unite, and rescue the Holy Land from the Turks. The assembled crowds responded with an outburst of wild enthusiasm, crying out, "God wills it! God wills it!" (in Latin, "Deus vult!") This became the motto of the First Crusade.

We must always remember that the Crusades were genuine expressions of popular religious enthusiasm. Hundreds of

thousands of Western European men sincerely wanted to free the tomb of Christ from the Muslims, as an act of devotion to their Saviour. The Crusades, in fact, were simply pilgrimages carried out in the form of warfare. The very name the Crusaders took for themselves suggests this religious motive, because the word “crusade” comes from the Latin *crux*, meaning “cross”. A Crusading knight would have the sign of the cross sewn into his outer clothing as a token of his allegiance to Christ; the more zealous would brand it into their flesh. “To take the cross” meant to become a Crusader. Urban II encouraged this spirit by using the words of Christ in Mark 8:34 as a Crusade text – “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” Different national groups were soon wearing distinctive crosses; in the Third Crusade, for instance, the English wore white crosses, the French red, and the Flemish green.

The military power behind the Crusades was the nobility (or aristocracy) of Western Europe, a warrior class for whom fighting was a way of life. They fought on horseback and were called “knights”; they were the backbone of Europe’s ruling class.⁴ The Cluniac revival in the 10th and 11th centuries tried to bring the violence of this warrior class under control by creating a moral and spiritual code to govern their behaviour.⁵ This was called the code of “chivalry” (from the French *chevalerie*, “cavalry” – warriors on horses). We can see the code of chivalry best summed up in the *Book of the Christian Life* by Bishop **Bonizo of Sutri** (died 1098), a friend of Hildebrand. The *Book*, published in about 1090, offered a complete set of chivalric values for the Christian knight, including courage, justice, chastity, sobriety, loyalty, and prudence. The code of chivalry often took Charlemagne as the supreme example of a true Christian knight.⁶ In practice, it meant that when a young noble reached his maturity, the Church blessed his sword in a special ceremony, and he promised

4. For the origin of the knights and their place in the medieval social system, see Chapter 4, section 3.

5. For the Cluniac revival, see Chapter 4, section 3.

6. For Charlemagne, see Chapter 2, section 2.

to use it to defend churches, women, orphans, the poor, and servants of God, and to fight against injustice and the enemies of Christianity. Western Catholics therefore came to see the knight as a kind of spiritual figure, like a priest or a monk.

In these ways, then, the Catholic Church tried to Christianise the knights of Western Europe. The Crusades provided a great outlet for the energies of these Christian warriors: by attacking the Muslims and freeing the Holy Land, they were doing the thing they enjoyed most (fighting), and also fulfilling the spiritual ideals of chivalry by acting as champions of the Christian faith. Abbot **Guibert of Nogent** (1053/65?-1125) in north-eastern France said:

In our times God has instituted holy wars, so that knights may find a new way of gaining salvation. They do not have to abandon secular affairs completely by choosing the monastic life or any religious profession, as was once the custom, but they can in some degree attain to God's grace by pursuing their own knightly careers, in the freedom and the armour which is their habit.

(Guibert was an interesting figure. He was a disciple of the "father of scholastic theology", Anselm of Canterbury – see Chapter 7, section 3 – and wrote notable treatises on the incarnation, the veneration of Mary, and the eucharist, opposing Berengar of Tours – see Chapter 4, section 7. He also produced a history of the First Crusade, and a remarkable attack on the abuse of relics, in which he condemned such absurdities as the claim of certain monks of Saint-Médard to possess a tooth of Jesus! Guibert's autobiography is a mine of information about the history and customs of his times.)

The spiritual nature of Crusade warfare was underlined by the fact that before every battle, a Crusader had to confess his sins to a priest and take holy communion. The papacy also offered heavenly rewards to the Crusading knights, promising them complete pardon from all the "temporal penalties" of their sins. This pardon was called an "indulgence". In the Second Crusade, Pope Eugenius III (1145-53) actually promised eternal life to all who fought the Turks in the Holy Land. By the time of the Third

Crusade, someone could get an indulgence for all his sins merely by hiring a knight to crusade on his behalf.⁷

The chief inspiration behind the Crusades, then, was religious: they were armed pilgrimages which expressed the ideals of chivalry and offered a pathway to God's grace and even eternal life. Historians of a previous generation, unable to understand religious motives, used to emphasise that the Crusades had other, less spiritual attractions for the Western nobility. For example, a Crusade offered some nobles an opportunity to win land for themselves. The Western custom of inheritance, "primogeniture", meant that the oldest son inherited all his father's property; so there were many younger sons of the nobility who had no land. The Middle East opened up for them a huge field for conquest. The Crusades were also attractive because they offered the noble warrior a chance to prove how good a fighter he was and achieve military glory for himself. These secular motives must have played a part in the Crusades, but we have to recognise that a deeply religious concern lay at the bottom of it all, however misguided the modern student may feel it was.

3. The history of the Crusades

Although we divide up the Crusades into a number of separate expeditions, we must remember that after the First Crusade there was a constant trickle of Catholic soldiers going to the Holy Land to join the Crusaders who were already there, to defend and extend the territory they had already won from the Turks. Fighting was going on all the time. What we call "the Second Crusade", "the Third Crusade", etc., were the times when the West made specific and concentrated attempts at destroying Turkish power.

The First Crusade, 1096-99

Before the official Crusade called for by Pope Urban II took place, there was a tragic episode known as the "peoples' Crusade". A French monk named *Peter the Hermit* (1050-1115), claiming

7. For a detailed account of the theology of "temporal penalties" and "indulgences", see Chapter 7, section 3, under the heading *Thomas Aquinas*.

to be guided by visions, went about preaching the Crusade with an almost evangelistic passion. Judged by his popularity, Peter was probably the most successful preacher of the entire Middle Ages. Wherever he preached the Crusade, people wept for their sins, reformed their lives, forgave their enemies, mended their broken or failing marriages, and freely gave money to the Church. Peter gathered an army of some 20,000 ordinary people, mostly peasants (not knights). Inspired by his wondrous visions of victory over the Muslims in the Holy Land, they marched to Palestine through southern Germany, massacring Jews on the way. This was the first serious outbreak of violent anti-Judaism (religious hostility to Jews) in medieval Europe.⁸ However, when the peoples' army arrived in Asia Minor, they were themselves massacred by the Turks – it was a case of an unruly mob of poorly armed peasants fighting professional Turkish soldiers. Peter the Hermit escaped the slaughter and was present with the triumphant Crusading army of knights when it captured Jerusalem in 1099.

By contrast with Peter the Hermit's mob of peasants, the knights of the First official Crusade were an impressive assembly of Western Europe's greatest French nobles: Hugh of Vermandois, brother of King Philip I of France; **Godfrey of Bouillon** (1060-1100), a descendant of Charlemagne; Godfrey's brothers Eustace and Baldwin; Raymond of Toulouse, a veteran campaigner against the Muslims in Spain; and several great Norman nobles – Bohemund (a Norman warrior of southern Italy), his nephew Tancred, Robert of Normandy (oldest son of King William the Conqueror of England⁹), and his brother-in-law, Stephen of Blois. Unfortunately the Crusaders appointed no single commander, and the expedition was cursed by constant quarrelling among the various leaders. Some of them were men of integrity, such as Raymond of Toulouse, Tancred (who was

8. For more about anti-Judaism, see Chapter 8, section 2.

9. William the Conqueror, who died in 1087, had divided his Norman empire by giving England to his younger son William Rufus (1087-1100), and the French duchy of Normandy to his older son Robert. For William the Conqueror, see Chapter 4, section 1.

praised by his own generation as the perfect model of a chivalrous Christian knight), and especially Godfrey of Bouillon, whom his contemporaries called “a holy monk in armour”. However, many of the others were far from being men of pure Christian lives.

The Crusading armies gathered at Constantinople in the winter and spring of 1096-97. It was a huge force – as many as 300,000, according to some high estimates. They arrived at just the right time: the empire of the Seljuk Turks had broken up into warring factions. The disunity of the Turks enabled the Crusaders to defeat the separate Turkish forces one by one. The Crusaders began by recapturing Nicaea from the Turks in 1097. They defeated a Turkish army at Dorylaeum in July. Then followed the siege of Antioch, which was long and bitter; it fell to the Crusaders after eight months in June 1098. Three days later, they were themselves under siege in Antioch from a Turkish army, but managed to inflict a crushing defeat on their Muslim besiegers. It then took the Crusaders another year to reach Jerusalem, by which time their forces had been reduced by battle, famine, and pestilence to a mere 20,000 men. But it was enough: they captured Jerusalem in June 1099 after a siege of six weeks. Once inside the Holy City, the Crusaders spared no-one; they carried out a merciless massacre of its entire Muslim and Jewish population, including women and children.¹⁰

The military results of the First Crusade were the restoration of western Asia Minor to Byzantine rule, and the setting up of four independent “Crusader states” in Syria and Palestine: the County of Edessa, the Principality of Antioch, the County of Tripolis, and the Kingdom of Jerusalem. These are often called the “Latin” kingdoms because their rulers belonged to the Latin-speaking Catholic Church. The jewel of the Latin kingdoms was Jerusalem. Godfrey of Bouillon was offered the title “king” of

10. We should not feel too morally superior to the Crusaders. Ours is the age in which, during the Second World War, Britain carried out “obliteration bombing” of German cities, and America dropped atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, thereby massacring in the name of democracy far greater numbers of women and children than the Crusaders ever managed.

Jerusalem, but refused to wear a crown of gold in the city where his Lord had worn a crown of thorns. Instead he took the more lowly title “Defender of the Holy Tomb”. Godfrey died a year later in 1100, and was succeeded by his brother, Baldwin, who did take the title “king of Jerusalem” and reigned until 1118, enlarging his kingdom by capturing cities like Caesarea in 1101 and Beirut in 1110.

The creation of these Latin Crusader states did far more than the schism of 1054 to breed real practical division between Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic Christians. Wherever the Crusaders conquered, they forcibly took over the churches of Easterners and set up their own Western Latin bishops, to whom they expected Eastern believers to submit. Indeed, the sometimes brutal way the Crusaders trod down the native Orthodox peoples of the Middle East became so hateful to the Orthodox, that they were soon fighting alongside the more tolerant Muslims to throw out the oppressive Crusaders!

Bernard of Clairvaux and the Second Crusade, 1147-49

The fall of the Latin kingdom of Edessa to a Turkish army in 1144 gave rise to the Second Crusade. Pope Eugenius III proclaimed it, but the real force behind the Second Crusade was ***Bernard of Clairvaux*** (1090-1153).¹¹

Bernard was one of the brightest spiritual stars of the entire Middle Ages. Born in Fontaines (eastern-central France), he was the third son of Tescelin Sorrel, a Crusading knight who had taken part in the capture of Jerusalem in 1099. Tescelin’s six sons were trained to follow in his military footsteps as knights – all, that is, except Bernard. We are told that his mother Alice had a dream about Bernard being destined for higher things. So he was sent to a theological college in Chatillon, where priests instructed students in grammar, logic, rhetoric, and the Scriptures. It seems that Bernard was a very imaginative boy who loved solitude, and often had vivid and sometimes overpowering dreams.

11. Clairvaux is pronounced “Clair-voh”.

He was particularly affected by a childhood dream in which he saw the Virgin Mary and the Christ-child; the deep impression made by this dream on Bernard's mind and emotions stayed with him throughout his life.



Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

Bernard had an unusually close relationship as a child with his devout mother Alice. When she died in Bernard's late teens, the

bereavement seems to have shaken him to the depths of his being. There followed a period of intense inner conflict, in which he felt himself torn violently between the call of the monastery and the worldly life of a carefree, irresponsible young noble who had the means to indulge his appetites quite liberally. His ultimate decision in the year 1112 at the age of 22 to become a monk took the form of a tumultuous self-surrender to Christ, which Bernard always referred to as his conversion. The monastery he joined was the Cistercian community in Cîteaux, near Fontaines (in Latin, Cîteaux is *Cistercium* – hence “Cistercian”).¹² The Cistercian order of monks was a reformed branch of the Benedictines. Their headquarters was at the Cîteaux monastery, founded in 1098; they were distinguished as a monastic order by the extreme plainness and simplicity of their liturgy, vestments, and church interiors (partly because of their commitment to a simple lifestyle – vast amounts of money were not to be spent on fabulous church adornments).

In 1115, Bernard and 12 other monks from Cîteaux set up a new Cistercian community in the county of Champagne. The monastery was established in a place called “the valley of Wormwood”, a desolate and forbidding wasteland; but Bernard, the abbot of the new community, changed its name to “the valley of Light” – which in French is “Clairvaux”. And so the famous monastery of Clairvaux was founded, which soon outshone the mother community in Cîteaux, simply because Bernard was in Clairvaux. The man lent his lustre to the monastery. Clairvaux flourished under Bernard’s rule, becoming the parent to 68 new Cistercian communities. By the time Bernard died there were 338 in total, scattered over the face of Europe and the Middle East, as far north as Sweden, and as far east as Palestine.

Bernard soon became one of the greatest preachers of the Middle Ages, and probably one of the great preachers of all time. His nickname was “The Honey-flowing Teacher”, because his sermons seemed to drip with the love of Christ. Bernard expressed his own ideal of preaching in the following pithy epigram: “Not

12. Cîteaux is pronounced “see-toh”. As with Clairvaux, the “x” is silent.

so much to explain the words as to reach people's hearts." The controlling theme of his preaching was always Love: God's love for man as revealed in Christ, man's responsive love for God and for his neighbour. Martin Luther¹³ said of Bernard's written sermons, "In his sermons Bernard is superior to all the teachers, even to Augustine himself, because he preaches Christ so excellently."¹⁴ The other distinguishing feature of Bernard's sermons was their pervading sense of eternal realities. To listen to Bernard was to feel the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of God's glory and grace. Bernard preached outside as well as inside the abbey at Clairvaux, and people of all sorts found his sermons gripping. It was said that if Bernard was due to preach in a particular locality, mothers hid their sons and wives hid their husbands, in case they were so captivated by Bernard's eloquence that they ran away from home to become monks!

In doctrinal matters, Bernard was a disciple of Augustine of Hippo, setting out the chief features of Augustinian doctrine in his treatise *On Grace and Free-will*. Bernard wrote several books which many have regarded as spiritual masterpieces on the Christian life – *On Loving God*, *Steps of Humility and Pride*, and *Sermons on the Song of Solomon*. His interpretation of the *Song* as an allegory of the spiritual love-union between Christ the Bridegroom, and the faithful soul as His Bride, is largely responsible for Bernard's reputation as a "mystic".

A number of popular hymns are said to have been written by Bernard: "Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts", "Jesus, the very thought of Thee", "O Jesus, King most wonderful", and "O sacred head, sore wounded". The attribution is doubtful in some cases; but even if Bernard did not actually write any of these hymns, they faithfully reflect his spiritual outlook, with their warm emotional focus on the sweetness and beauty of Jesus in His human nature, His tenderness and sufferings. In fact, Bernard pioneered a revolutionary new trend in Western piety towards a greater emphasis on the human Jesus, and the centrality of

13. For Luther, see Volume Three, Chapters 2 and 3.

14. For Augustine, see Volume One, Chapter 9, section 3.

companionship with Jesus the Man of Sorrows in the believer's life. Jesus the suffering Son of Man, hanging on a cross, tended to replace Christ the risen Son of God, enthroned in heaven, as the main focus of Western Catholic spirituality.

Bernard did more than any other man of his time to popularise the adoration of the Virgin Mary, for whom he felt a special veneration – “the violet of humility, the lily of chastity, the rose of purity, and the splendour of heaven”, as Bernard called her. If Christ was the Mediator between God the Father and human-kind, Mary was the intercessor with Christ. “If you are terrified by the thunders of the Father,” said Bernard, “go to Jesus. If you are afraid to go to Jesus, then run to Mary.” However, despite Bernard's devotion to Mary, he very strongly opposed the view that Mary was conceived without sin – the doctrine of the immaculate conception (which at that time was not an official Catholic doctrine, but only a theological opinion).¹⁵

Bernard had a prolonged and famous controversy with Peter Abelard.¹⁶ Abelard was the great intellectual and the great sinner of his day. Thousands flocked to his theology lectures in Paris until the scandal of his love affair with his young pupil Heloise became public. Bernard could not stand the man and spent most of his life trying to curb his influence. He thought Abelard was an arrogant free-thinker: “The only thing Abelard does not know,” fulminated Bernard, “are the words, ‘I do not know!’” He accused Abelard of joining with Arius in his views of the Trinity, with Nestorius in his views of Christ, and with Pelagius in his views of grace and free-will. The two protagonists had a healthy respect for each other. Abelard respected Bernard's position in the Church, and said he felt like an ant in the presence of a lion; Bernard respected Abelard's intellectual powers, and said he felt like David taking on Goliath. The real difference between them was ultimately one of spirit and attitude. Bernard wanted the mind of the Christian to receive and adore

15. See the quotation at the end of the Chapter, and the account of Thomas Aquinas's theology in Chapter 7, section 3.

16. See the account of Peter Abelard's theology in Chapter 7, section 3.

in humility the mysteries of the faith; Abelard wanted the intellectual freedom to argue about everything and discover truth through unfettered discussion and disputation. In this battle of giants, Bernard triumphed, and Pope Innocent II condemned Abelard to perpetual silence and confinement. Abelard died a year later, under the protection of Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, who tells us that Abelard passed into eternity meek and penitent, a true philosopher of Christ. Depending on one's point of view, Bernard appears in this controversy either as a narrow-minded persecutor of a more brilliant man, or as the undaunted champion of orthodoxy against a dangerous speculator.

Bernard's reputation as a preacher, a writer, and a founder of monasteries was so far-flung that he was in constant demand for advice. It has been said of Bernard that "in his solitude he governed all the churches of the West." Bernard's counsel was sought on the appointment of bishops and other high dignitaries in the Church. His influence scaled new heights in the 1130s when the cardinals elected two rival popes, Innocent II and Anacletus II. Bernard supported Innocent and toured Western Europe campaigning on his behalf. Bernard's offensive swung the Catholic nations decisively behind Innocent, and in 1134 Bernard and Innocent entered Rome together, where Innocent was enthroned as the true pope. Bernard took back with him from Italy to Clairvaux a young man also named Bernard, who became the older Bernard's favourite disciple. In 1145 this younger Bernard became Pope Eugenius III. Bernard of Clairvaux's sway reached its pinnacle, since Eugenius retained all his affection for his old master and consulted him frequently. Bernard wrote a spiritual handbook for Eugenius in which he warned him against becoming so involved in a thousand and one tasks and affairs that he forgot himself and drifted into hardness of heart.¹⁷

Bernard's dominating position in the life of the Western Church in the 1100s was quite remarkable. He was never

17. The great Protestant Reformer John Calvin had a high opinion of this handbook; in its pages, he says, "Bernard speaks as though the very truth itself were speaking" (Calvin's *Institutes*, Book 4, chapter 2, section 11).

anything more than abbot of Clairvaux, yet kings, Emperors, and popes sat at his feet. All attempts to elevate him to a higher office in the Church he resisted fiercely and successfully. One thing that contributed to Bernard's influence was his reputation as a miracle-worker. Spectacular healings and exorcisms occurred when Bernard prayed for people. Bernard himself referred to these marvels in a rather diffident sort of way:

Signs and wonders have been wrought by holy men and by de-ceivers. I am not conscious of being either. I know that I do not have those holy merits to which miracles testify. The miracles are not meant to honour me but to admonish others.

The fall of the Latin kingdom of Edessa to a Turkish army in 1144 gave rise to the Second Crusade of 1147-49. Bernard's involvement in the Second Crusade came about because Pope Eugenius III was (as we saw) a former monk of Bernard's, and Eugenius asked him to act as a sort of publicity agent for the Crusade. Bernard agreed and preached passionately all over Western Europe, exhorting people to go to the rescue of the kingdom of Jerusalem. Here is a typical example of Bernard's Crusade preaching:

The earth trembles and shakes, because the King of heaven has lost His country, the country where once He appeared to men, where He walked among them for more than 30 years, the country made glorious by His miracles and holy by His blood, the country where the flowers of the resurrection first bloomed. And now, because of our sins, the enemy of the cross has begun to lift his blasphemous head there, and to devastate with his sword that blessed land of promise. The great eye of providence surveys these acts in silence; it wishes to see if there is anyone who seeks God, anyone who suffers with Him in His sorrow, anyone who will restore His heritage to Him. I say to you, the Lord is testing you!

Bernard's appeals were successful. The Second Crusade was led by King Louis VII of France (1137-80) and the Holy Roman Emperor, Conrad III (1138-52). However, once the Crusaders

arrived in the East, they met with total disaster. The Eastern Byzantine Christians, who had not asked the Crusaders to come, received them badly. Most of the Crusaders perished in Asia Minor through famine, fever, and Turkish attacks. Their one serious military operation, the siege of Damascus, was a failure. Catholic Europe was shaken to the core. Many blamed the collapse of the Crusade on the ill-will and treachery of the Byzantines. Bernard of Clairvaux, however, blamed it on the sins of Western Catholics; God was judging and punishing them for their ungodly lives:

It seems that our sins have provoked the Lord, and He has forgotten His pity and has come to judge the world before the appointed time. He has not spared His own people; He has not spared even His own name. The Pagans say, 'Where is their God?' We promised victory; behold – desolation!

Bernard's involvement in the Second Crusade contrasts strangely with his moderate and gentle attitude to heretics and Jews within Catholic Europe. He advocated tolerance towards the Jews, and maintained that the only weapons the Church should use against heretics were argument and persuasion. However, these were the days before the founding of the inquisition. Once the inquisition was established, the Church buried Bernard's tolerant opinions in silence.¹⁸

Bernard was swiftly canonised (officially proclaimed a saint) in 1174, only 21 years after his death. His fame lived on through his writings, although obviously he was held in higher regard among the Cistercians than anywhere else. As a popular saint he was eclipsed by Francis of Assisi in the 1200s.¹⁹ Also, as the doctrine of Mary's immaculate conception became ever more fashionable, Bernard suffered for his staunch denial of it. The more fervent worshippers of Mary declared that in heaven Bernard bore a blemish on his glorified breast to atone for what

18. For the inquisition, see Chapter 8, section 3.

19. For Francis of Assisi, see Chapter 8, section 4.

he had said against the Virgin. However, his reputation endured and even survived the storms of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. When the Reformers broke with the papacy, they made severe criticisms of many medieval saints and theologians; but they could never bring themselves to speak very harshly of Bernard. Martin Luther, in his commentary on Galatians, extolled Bernard as a shining example of a man who lived by genuine heartfelt faith in Jesus Christ: "Bernard, a man so godly, so holy, so pure, that we should commend and prefer him before all the theologians of the Church."

At about the same time as the Second Crusade, a band of knights from England and Flanders (modern Belgium), who were sailing to the Holy Land, stopped on the way in 1139 to attack the Muslim city of Lisbon, on the western coast of Islamic Spain. They captured it, slaughtered the Muslim population, settled there, and founded the new Catholic nation of Portugal. No-one at the time could foresee it, but in the 15th century the Portuguese would create a vast overseas empire based on naval power, opening up America to European colonisation and conquest.

The Third Crusade, 1189-92

After the failure of the Second Crusade, the disunited Muslims of the Middle East began to find their unity again. A brilliant Kurdish general called **Saladin** (1137-93) took control of Egypt, and by 1186 his empire surrounded the kingdom of Jerusalem. He crushed the Latin army at the battle of Hattin in July 1187 and captured Jerusalem. The West had controlled the city from 1099 to 1187. Fortunately Saladin was more merciful than the Crusaders had been when they took Jerusalem, and he allowed its conquered Christian inhabitants to leave peacefully. Saladin was a just and wise ruler whose standards of conduct often put the Crusaders to shame.

The whole West was shocked by the fall of Jerusalem. It is said that Pope Gregory VIII (October-December 1187) died of grief, but not before proclaiming the Third Crusade. The three greatest kings of Catholic Europe led the Crusade: King Philip Augustus