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I

THE BEGINNING OF THE CRUSADES

It was on 27 November 1095, at the end of the council he had convened at Clermont in Auvergne, before a large audience of both laity and clergy, that Pope Urban II launched an appeal that was to have far-reaching repercussions. Fortunately, we can be fairly clear about the content of his address, but the response to the pope's appeal is more problematic. It set off shock waves that put tens of thousands of people on the roads to the East and resulted in the birth of a new 'nation' on eastern soil. Its impact was felt for two centuries and more; the initial objective was transformed, though without really changing its nature. It was to continue, in the form of a defence of Europe, even after the Latin possessions in the Holy Land had been abandoned.

THE BIRTH OF THE IDEA OF CRUSADE

The question of the origins of the crusade has long been debated among historians, and the debate will no doubt continue, especially since other perspectives than the strictly historical are involved.

The crusade poses a problem that is still present in the human consciousness, that of the legitimacy of war. It is easy to contrast Urban II's appeal with the image of a primitive Christianity that was fundamentally opposed to all use of force. But the inclusion in the Ten Commandments of a precept forbidding the killing of a human being did not prevent the people of Israel from waging wars which seemed to them wholly justified. And, from the earliest times, the Church included in its ranks soldiers who refused to sacrifice to the gods but did not refuse to fight in accordance with their profession. After it had become Christian,

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the Roman Empire continued to use war as a means of achieving its political ends and, most of all, for its defence. Theologians laboured to reconcile the demands of divine law and the imperatives of the government of men. Both the Byzantine Church and the Latin Church continued to regard the killing of any man as a reprehensible act. The former required a penance from the soldier who had killed an enemy, but the *Penitential* of Alan of Lille, at the end of the twelfth century, effectively said the same: 'He who has killed a pagan or a Jew', he wrote, in substance, 'ought to submit to a penance of forty days, because the person he killed is one of God's creatures and might have been led to salvation'.

This did not prevent necessities of state from making war inevitable. The Church accepted that the sovereign had the right to resort to it and to summon his subjects to participate, when their defence was at stake; we owe to St Augustine the definition of a just war, namely a war waged for the defence of Christians and the 'homeland of the Christians' against an unjust aggressor.

It was not for the Church to intervene in what was the province of a sovereign power, that of the emperor. At the very most, it might obtain for the clergy and the bishops freedom from the obligation to take up arms, which obliged them to shed blood. But exceptions were made even to this principle. The emperors often devolved some of their obligations to the bishops, and they, performing the role of fathers of their people, were sometimes obliged to organise the defence of their city, for example against the Huns and the Vandals. They more often sought, however, to protect their flock by negotiating with the enemy; during the first Muslim invasions, many prelates were in this way the agents of the submission of their city.

It is generally accepted that when the barbarian monarchies settled in the old Roman Empire, warlike societies replaced a civil society, and this led to an exaltation of war previously unknown to the Christian peoples. I have no wish to dispute this, only to note that many historians see this as the starting point for the concept of a 'holy war', that is, of the recourse to war as a means of extending the reign of Christ by the physical elimination or forced conversion of the infidel. Charlemagne, conducting a war against the Saxons that only ended, in the words of Eginhard, in the destruction of idols and the baptism of pagans, is quoted as an example. We should also note that, according to the same author, the Saxons were highly inconvenient neighbours for the Frankish people, and that the emperor may have been obeying other imperatives than simply the desire to impose the faith.

The image of a 'missionary and warlike' Charlemagne, as Robert Folz

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has said, owes much to later developments. These provided material for the Charlemagne cycle of *chansons de geste*, which took as their principal theme his battles against the Saracens of Spain and Italy. The *Chanson de Roland* shows the emperor offering the vanquished the choice between death and baptism. But Charlemagne refused to impose this choice on Queen Bramimonda, who converted only 'for love'. The song, a literary genre, hence a work of the imagination, here comes up against the principle firmly proclaimed by the Church. Adhesion to the faith could not be obtained either by force or by threats and only example and persuasion could lead an infidel to it. The 'holy war' as an operation culminating in forced conversion was rejected by all the theologians and canonists. The crusaders, by and large, respected this dictate.

The 'just war', on the other hand, grew in importance after the great emperor's death, because the Christian West was then genuinely in a state of siege. From the north came the murderous and devastating raids of the Scandinavians, who attacked churches and the clergy in particular, because of their wealth and from a hatred of Christianity. From the east, Hungarian cavalry made raids into Germany, Italy and Burgundy. And the Saracens, driven back at the end of the ninth century, after a hundred years of struggle, as far as Llobregat, reappeared in Provence, the Mediterranean and southern Italy, pillaging as far north as St Peter's in Rome.

Western Christendom had not mobilised against the Muslims when they had conquered North Africa and Spain, and only the Visigothic princelings, the dukes of Aquitaine and the kingdom of the Franks had put up a serious resistance. The Carolingians had been satisfied when they had eliminated the march established by the Arabs at Narbonne and covered their frontier by a Spanish march that extended no further than Barcelona. The persecutions endured by the martyrs of Cordova made little impact.

The new Saracen incursions, which began with the conquest of Sicily by the African emirs, transformed the situation. For the papacy, the defence of the 'patrimony of St Peter' was an imperative. It caused the popes, when the iconoclastic emperors left them to their own devices, to appeal to the Franks against the Lombards. In the ninth century, it was to defend itself against the Saracens that the papacy summoned Charles the Bald into Italy. After his death, Pope John VIII asked all Christian warriors to come to the defence of the possessions of the apostles against the Saracens in a bull of 878 in which Etienne Delaruelle saw the first clear grant of an indulgence to these combatants, and the first attempt at a collective organisation of a Christian defence disregarding a faltering imperial protection.

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The initiative of 878 was not followed up. German and Byzantine emperors reappeared in Italy; the Saracens were contained in Italy and driven out of Provence. But in the eleventh century, a new danger threatened the 'patrimony', this time from the Normans, who were carving out for themselves in southern Italy dominions that caused great anxiety to their neighbours. In 1053 Pope Leo IX had to make a new appeal for warriors to fight these disruptive elements by promising them spiritual rewards. His army was nevertheless soundly defeated, and the pope was taken prisoner by the Normans, for whom this success was a considerable embarrassment.

Thus, in the name of his responsibility as temporal sovereign, the pope, to assure his defence, in the absence of assistance from the emperors who were in principle responsible for it, had to resort to warriors to whom he presented this defence as a pious work, in the service of the Church, and in particular of the apostles Peter and Paul, a work that deserved to be rewarded. It was not necessarily against the infidel that they fought: Christians who had put themselves beyond the law by their usurpations and their pillage, like the Normans, were also targeted.

Another step was taken with the reform called Gregorian (Leo IX was already a reforming pope). The popes of the second half of the eleventh century increasingly intervened in temporal matters. To combat the 'simoniac heresy', Alexander II encouraged the Milanese to take up arms against those he regarded as their oppressors. He gave his protection to William the Conqueror when he denounced Harold for reneging on his oath to recognise him as Edward the Confessor's heir. Similarly, he and his successors encouraged the Christians of Spain in their *reconquista*.

Above all, faced with the inadequacy of the secular authorities, the Church invested heavily in the 'movement of peace' that characterised the eleventh century, which had the effect of increasing the responsibility assumed by the papacy for the government of Christendom.

WESTERN SOCIETY ON THE EVE OF THE CRUSADE

It was at the end of the Carolingian period that the West and western society took shape in a way that, two centuries later, would enable it to sustain the crusading venture. As we know, the peoples of the East, when they became aware of what differentiated the crusaders from the Byzantine Christians they already knew, called them the 'Franks'. This name expresses a reality, since the majority of the crusaders came from the lands that had been ruled by the kings of the Franks or those incorporated into them.

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'King of the Franks' was still, in the eleventh century, part of the title of the sovereigns of the two parts of the old Carolingian empire that were separated by the frontier of the 'four rivers' defined at the time of the treaty of Verdun: western France and eastern France. The sovereigns of the east wore a triple crown, that of the kingdoms of Germany, Burgundy and Italy, but their power in Italy was confined to the old Lombard kingdom, while the Byzantines retained the coastal parts of southern Italy into the eleventh century. The kingdom of the kings of France stretched from Flanders to Catalonia, but their own demesne was confined to the lands lying between Orleans and the valley of the Oise. The rest of the kingdom consisted of principalities whose rulers, usually bearing the title of duke or count, while they remained bound to the sovereign by ties of fealty, enjoyed considerable autonomy. In the Empire, the structure was similar, though the emperors retained under their direct control a number of cities whose bishops, endowed with comital powers, were more closely dependent on them.

In the kingdoms that resulted from the dismemberment of the Carolingian monarchy, what may be called the 'Frankish model', that is, the collection of structures which define feudal society, prevailed. With the end of the Norman and Hungarian invasions, this model spread beyond the boundaries of the old Carolingian domain. Its spread was accompanied by the advance of a Christianisation which reached the Scandinavian, Slav and Hungarian countries. National duchies emerged, and the emperor granted the royal title to their principal rulers, as in Denmark, Poland and Bohemia. Sweden and Norway were unified and became, in their turn, kingdoms; the pope granted a royal crown to the Hungarian and Croatian dynasties. These new kingdoms, in spite of the reservations of the German clergy, who had hoped to keep them dependent on their metropolitans, obtained from the papacy autonomous episcopal hierarchies. In this way, a whole collection of new states enlarged western Christendom, even though a pagan mass persisted, between Germany and Poland, among the Slavs of the region between the Elbe and the Oder.

The Frankish model was also dominant, though in different forms, in the old Visigothic territories which escaped Muslim domination, in the lands captured by the Normans in southern Italy and Sicily from the Byzantines, the Lombards and the Muslims; the conquest of Anglo-Saxon England by other Normans brought that country more fully into Frankish society, whilst the Celtic countries of Scotland and Ireland began to feel its influence.

A new Europe was thus added to that of Carolingian times. Its culture was entirely Latin, and Latin was the common language of all literate

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persons. The liturgy and the ecclesiastical institutions were its prop. Admittedly, particularisms persisted. Spain, and in particular Castile, still retained a writing, a liturgy and a calendar that were peculiar to it, but which would disappear before the common ecclesiastical culture. The Celts, too, resisted this penetration, as did the Hellenised populations of southern Italy, who alone escaped the domination of Latin civilisation.

Integration into the Frankish model took the form of the adoption of a political and social structure which entrusted government to a warrior nobility. This nobility performed the judicial as well as the military function. It adapted itself to the structures of a vassalic system which gave it cohesion and assured its predominance through technical superiority; it constituted a heavy cavalry, wielding the sword and the lance (the latter no longer employed as a javelin), and protected by the coat of mail and long shield; sweeping into battle in serried ranks, it was supplemented by an infantry which employed missile weapons.

Its leaders belonged to an aristocracy of Frankish origin, or allied to the great Frankish families, who were bound by ties of lineage. They enjoyed a privilege based on blood; the possession of power was legitimised by a dynastic tradition which did not prevent successional disputes, but confined them to those who could claim rights based on membership of a lineage. These dynasties could count on the obedience of their subordinates, in particular of those who were bound to them by the tie of vassalage, which men able to fight on horseback and in a coat of mail rarely escaped. The prime duty of the vassal was to assist his lord to defend his body and his honour; he followed him on his expeditions and, when the lord responded to a summons from the count, duke or king, it was his vassals who made up his contingent. This solidarity was to play a major role in recruitment for the crusades.

Vassalage was accompanied by a feudal system based on the grant to the vassal of a piece of land which supported him, his horse and his equipment. But grants as fiefs went much further; kings and great men enfeoffed their followers with public responsibilities, and the income deriving from them. And lords endeavoured to extend their authority to the owners of estates situated in their neighbourhood by obliging them to become their vassals and by granting them as fiefs lands taken from the latter's own lands. But entry into vassalage was far from complete; the allod, that is, land free of ties of dependence, coexisted with the fief and the allod-holder was able to acknowledge many lords if he received many fiefs. This produced conflicting loyalties, which together with the requirements of family solidarity – which, in particular, obliged the members of a lineage to seek vengeance (the *faide*, or feud) in the case of murder – introduced all sorts of contradictions into feudal society. The

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vassalic structure, so effective in the military sphere, proved less coherent in other areas; power relations caused conflicts that were something long lasting.

The lords and their vassals, the simple knights dependent on a small fief, sometimes maintained by their master, and the allod-holders of equivalent rank, formed a stratum situated above the peasants who comprised the vast majority of a society that was essentially rural. Slavery had almost disappeared; serfdom, which was the condition most widespread apart from a few regions (in particular those adjoining the North Sea), carried the obligation to perform very heavy services for the master, that is, the landlord whose tenant the serf was. But the serf held his land by hereditary title and *mainmorte* was tending to replace serfdom; the peasants were beginning to negotiate a reduction in their services.

This beginning of an evolution in serfdom is linked to a problem that historians have not entirely resolved. The eleventh century seems to have experienced a real demographic growth, except during serious subsistence crises, one of which ravaged Germany shortly before the crusade. *Hospites* settled on lands previously forest or waste; the wave of new town creation which characterised the twelfth century had already begun. Should we conclude that there was a shortage of land to receive an excessive manpower? The fact that so much land was available in the following century on which to establish new villages gives cause for doubt. But it is possible that the structures of the lordship, which required a large area to be set aside for pasture and for the hunt, did not favour the expansion of cultivated areas. Some historians believe that the existence of a mass of landless peasants encouraged the exodus towards new lands.

The income derived by the lords from the rents of their tenants, and from other sources such as the taxes levied for the protection of the merchants who passed through their lands, or on transactions taking place in markets, put them in possession of a certain capital, which meant they could maintain their knights. It is hardly surprising that they were able to finance their expeditions, nor that this financing had its limits.

Seigneurial power was linked to the possession of a castle: a motte and bailey, consisting of an artificial mound on which a tower was erected and which was surrounded by a large fenced and ditched enclosure, like so many built by the Normans in England; or a large, rectangular stone-built donjon, whose main room was the very heart of the lordship. But fortification was developing fast; the art of flanking was still rudimentary, and towers were beginning simply to complete the *enceinte*, on the model of the old walls of Roman forts.

Below these castles there developed *bourgs* which attracted to the

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protection of the castle walls the marketplace, merchants and craftsmen previously dispersed in the villages. This process had started long ago round the oldest towns, usually surrounded by monasteries and priories. There was a revival of towns in western France, in Germany and in northern Italy, and it was in them that the markets in which agricultural produce and manufactured goods were exchanged were to be found. With the market came the need for credit, which allowed the buyer to defer the moment of payment. This led to a transformation in the activities of the Jews, who specialised in loans against security or at interest; they were attracted into the towns by their lay and ecclesiastical lords both to facilitate their economic development and so that the lords themselves could take advantage of a credit they found useful. The towns of the Rhineland in particular acquired prosperous 'Jewries'. The burgesses also benefited from this revival of trade; they began to stand up to their lords, in Le Mans in 1066 and in Cologne in 1074. In Italy, this trend was more precocious and Milan had already experienced its first urban troubles. This revival of trade, which led to an increase in the circulation of money, is one of the factors which made the crusades possible. Nor should we forget that the churches, and also great men, had long hoarded precious metals in the form of objects of gold and silver, which could, when the time was right, be mobilised.

We should remember, too, the circulation of people. There were many merchants on the roads, as the disputes arising from the imposition of tolls by lords of castles, on the pretext of providing protection, testify. Pilgrims, too, were numerous, and they visited distant sanctuaries, such as Compostella, Rome and even Jerusalem. Society was not immobile. And, like people, news circulated and ideas were spread. The wanderings of itinerant preachers are one proof of this.

This society was faced with a religious ferment that was without doubt one of the major facts of the eleventh century. In the West, admittedly, there was only one faith, that taught by the Church of Rome. Only the Jewish communities escaped this unity of faith, but this exception had long been familiar to theologians, who accepted that the resistance of the Jews to the teaching of Christ would last to the end of time. Heretical tendencies were denounced, here and there, but they were not yet on any appreciable scale, and were, in any case, harshly suppressed.

The religious ferment arose from the aspiration of Christians for a 'reform' which was, to begin with, the desire to liberate the Church from the compromises with the world which it had been obliged to make at the time of the first Carolingians. The reform had at first been aimed at monks and canons, to steer them all to observance of a rule – for the former, that of St Benedict of Aniane, for the latter, that of

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Chrodegang. The monastic order was led to conform to a religious life which had as one of its models Cluny, then at the height of its fame under St Hugh (1049–1109). Reform then reached the secular clergy, and first the upper clergy, beginning with the papacy, which was reformed by the Lorrainer popes with the support of the emperor Henry III. Through the intermediary of their legates, the popes attacked simony, that is, the acquisition of ecclesiastical office through the favour of the secular powers. The new emperor Henry IV, deprived of his right to intervene in the choice of popes by Nicholas II's decree of 1059, and reluctant to renounce his authority over bishops exercising governmental functions in their cities in his name, came into conflict with Pope Gregory VII, who was determined to get him to renounce the symbolic investiture of bishops with their bishopric. The conflict worsened to the point where the pope deposed the emperor and the emperor had an anti-pope, Gilbert of Ravenna, elected. The latter was still in possession of Rome when Urban II, elected by the cardinals of the opposing party, went to France. Henry IV had expelled Gregory VII from Rome, and among the emperor's auxiliaries was the duke of Lower Lorraine, Godfrey of Bouillon.

The Church was thus torn between two opposing parties; numerous bishops had been deposed, and many German dukes had rallied to an anti-emperor, while others recognised the authority of the anti-pope. But Gregorian ideas were gaining ground and, with them, the desire for a clearer separation between the spiritual and the temporal. This separation meant that great men and even knights must renounce much property they had received in the form of fiefs: abbatial office, churches and tithes. The cartularies of the period are full of such renunciations, testimony to the crisis of conscience among a noble class that possession of these ecclesiastical properties placed in a state of sin.

The desire to cut oneself off from the temptations of the world went further. Monastic vocations were increasingly frequent in noble society. The monkish life in itself seemed too easy to the most demanding spirits. Abbots left their monasteries to found others that were subject to a more demanding asceticism. Many sought a more absolute solitude and a total absence of possessions. This gave rise to an eremitical movement which culminated in the foundation of new orders, from the Camaldoli to the Cistercians and Carthusians. It was difficult for those who did not enter the cloister to shut their ears to the voice of the preachers calling for moral reform and a more Christian life. The people of the late eleventh century were aware of being sinners and knew that the road to eternal salvation lay in the Christianisation of their life.

This affected the noble world in particular. Since the end of the tenth

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century, bishops and abbots had been anxious to find a remedy for the exactions and violence perpetrated by those who disposed of force of arms. Quite apart from the greed and brutality often inherent in the condition of these men, society encouraged such violence by failing to provide men with the normal means of maintaining their rights and obtaining justice. The judicial institutions inherited from the Roman and Carolingian past had lost their efficacy by the fact of the absorption of public functions into the feudal order. The vassal might recognise the authority of his lord's court in matters touching his fief, but it was a different matter when his allod was at issue. The two parties might fail to agree on the choice of a judge, and the one that had been condemned might feel justified in rejecting the judgement. There was a resort to private war, which amounted to making one's own justice, by inflicting such losses on an adversary that he was forced to make terms. This led to exactions of every sort: pillage, destruction, abduction of people and cattle, arson.

To remedy this situation, the Church had the idea of proposing limits to the exercise of the right of war, either temporal – the truce of God – or in the nature of the acts of war from which they wished to exclude the clergy, the peasantry and travellers – the peace of God. 'Assemblies of peace', on the pattern of councils, were held, in particular between 1020 and 1030, provoking an enthusiasm comparable to that which was to be ignited by the announcement of the crusade in 1095. Barons and knights swore, on the relics that had been amassed from all around, to respect the peace, and promised to repress infringements of it, the guilty being punished with excommunication. Leagues, the 'institutions of peace', or 'sworn communes of the dioceses', were formed, whose members, at the bishop's summons, would take action against those who broke the peace. The great lords soon took over these operations. The emperor Henry III, Duke Hugh of Burgundy and Duke William of Normandy threw the weight of their might behind them. But it was a long time before private war and its excesses disappeared. And it seemed normal to the men of the eleventh century for responsibility for the establishment of peace, which was the order God wished to reign on earth, to lie with the Church. This vocation of the Church was fundamental to Urban II's appeal.

Thus the pope found a West whose structures already favoured expansion. New forces were ready to be used, the aspiration to salvation encouraged an undeniable fervour, and the Church enjoyed an exceptional authority which extended beyond the strictly spiritual sphere. It was not only the economic structures that were capable of supporting the effort that the pope was to demand of the Franks.

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