

# The crusades: significance for christianity today assignment

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The name Crusade is derived from an old French word 'cross', meaning the cross'. The idea was to urge Christian warriors to go to Palestine and free Jerusalem and other holy places from Muslim domination (Internet Source 1). The first Crusade took place against the following historical backdrop. In the seventh century AD, the Arabs had waged Jihad on the Christian world, conquering and ruling two thirds of it for the next four centuries.

At the time of the first Crusade, Western Europe was a collection of competing tribal kingdoms with noble families fighting each other for political dominance. On the other side of the world, the city of Jerusalem was host to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. It commemorated the hill of crucifixion and the tomb of Christ's burial and was visited by Pilgrims. In 1065, Jerusalem was taken by the Turks and it is alleged that three thousand Christians were massacred. This seems to have started a chain of events which contributed to the cause of the Crusades (Internet Source 1).

And by 1071, the military action by Seljuk Turks on the frontiers of Eastern Christendom threatened the religious and political stability of the region, making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem impossible (Towse 2013: 284). It is against this background and following a direct appeal for military help from the Byzantine Emperor, that Pope Urban launched the first Crusade on 27 November 1095 at the Council of Clermont in France. McCullough (2009: 383) argues that there was no immediate great crisis to rally the West against the Muslim aggression. He however provides no reason for such an assertion.

According to Hag (2011 : 74), Pope Urban first Crusade had the following several aims: To provide the Byzantine Empire with the necessary reinforcements to drive he Selves Turks out of Asia Minor and to avenge wrongs committed by the Turks. He was probably hoping that in return, the Orthodox Church would acknowledge the supremacy of Rome and that the unity of Christendom would be restored; to stop the imminent danger to France posed by the infidel Moslems; to rescue the holy lands of Palestine from Moslems who had invaded, depopulated, pillaged and set on fire these lands.

It was reported that Christians had been nearly exterminated, with a few survivors taken as slaves after being mercilessly tortured. Churches had been either stored or appropriated after the aggressors destroyed or defiled the altars. McCullough (2009: 383) argues that Pope Urban gave a completely ' imaginary account of the atrocities, but again, McCullough fails to provide a basis for such bold refutation; the other aim was to gain wealth and this is implied from the Pope's statement that " your present land is too narrow for your large population, nor does it abound in wealth, scarcely furnishing food" (Internet Source 2).

It is possible that some of the Crusade warriors may have been motivated by personal greed for lath, desire for fame on their return, or hope of finding a better way of life away from famine and warfare that was occurring in France. On the other hand, this writer contends that other warriors must have genuinely felt it their Christian duty to come to the aid of their fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord in the spirit of solidarity. Hag (2011: 74)

further states that as an incentive, the Pope promised to reward the warriors with eternal life if they undertook the mission.

He inspired them by invoking the Gospel message “ he that take not his cross and follow me is not worthy of e” (Matt. 10: 38). Because there are significant differences in the four versions of the Pope’s reported speech, all of them written many years after the event, these reports may have been grossly skewed or colored by subsequent events. Therefore, the reports are probably only very approximate ideas of what the Pope actually said. The Pope’s impassioned speech in which he demotions the Moslems, appears to be a mastery in flattery, hyperbole, and misuse of Scripture.

On the other hand, Hag (2011: 75-78) strongly argues that the Pope would never have stooped to lurid rabble sousing, neither did he intend to whip up a mass movement of peasantry because his desirable instruments for the Crusade were the knights. Also, it looks to me that the Pope took it as his divine duty to forcibly remove from the holy places of Jerusalem those who had profaned them, similar to the way Jesus drove the money changers from the holy Temple.

The Pope promised the warriors immediate entry to heaven if they died on The Crusade, doing away with any necessity of penance after death (McCullough 2009: 384). These papal grants are unquestionably similar to the later papal indulgences that were a bone of contention by Martin Luther during the Reformation. However, it seems that the warriors believed The Crusades to be a spiritual war to purify their souls of sin. For why else would

a person risk everything by traveling to a distant land where they may never return?

Of course, the desire to better one's economic prospects in a land flowing with milk and honey was quite irresistible. The first Crusade was a major success and lasted from 1095-1099. It established the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Eight further Crusades followed. The second one failed in their attempt to take the city of Damascus. The third Crusade ended in 1192 with a compromise with the English king, Richard the Lion-Heart. The fourth crusade led to the sacking of Constantinople, where a Latin Kingdom of Byzantium was set up in 1204.

The Children's Crusade of 1212 ended with thousands of children being sold into slavery, lost, or killed (Hag 2011 : 185-188). Other less disastrous Crusades occurred until about the end of the thirteenth century. The last Latin outpost in the Muslim world fell in 1291 (Towed 2013: 284). These Crusades still have a significance for Christianity today. The Crusades demonstrated the role, wealth and the power of the Catholic Church in influencing and achieving great results at the world stage. The Pope was entrusted with the armies and other resources of Christendom to execute The Crusades.

The first Crusade had the effect of uniting the participating countries, binding them together in a single super army to defend their common heritage and religion against a common enemy. This paradigm of co-operation is much evident in the world-wide ecumenical work. The Christian Church can speak with one clear voice on issues of poverty, war and injustice. It also seems

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that part of the Roman Catholic Church's wealth today originally came from the activities of The Crusades. This wealth was responsible for building magnificent cathedrals and educational institutions that are still in existence today.

Church wealth also fostered missionary activities all over the world, resulting in substantial spiritual and social benefits that are evident in many nations today. In relation to politics and religion, it appears to me that the religious freedoms and diversity that the West and many parts of the world enjoy today are due to The Crusades. If Europe had not stood together, large swathes of the continent and the rest of the world would have been under Islamic political and religious rule, without any plurality of religion at all.

There would be no Christian America either. It is frightening to imagine what the political and religious landscape of the world would be today if The Crusades did not happen. And there are lessons that contemporary Christians can learn from The Crusades. An act of violence will beget another act of violence, no matter how Justified it may be. Christians should not undertake or support wars without Justification. And where this is Justified, regard should be had to the welfare of the vulnerable groups such as children, and the elderly.

There should also be no let up until the Job is properly done. The Crusades were a blight on the name of Christ because of the callous manner in which the war was executed. The Crusades defined for the first time the concept of a Christian soldier, even though the warriors were misled into believing that they could obtain holiness through an act of war. To safeguard against young

people in particular being misled by their Christian leaders into joining an unjustifiable war, Christian Churches should have a clear theology on war or conflict resolution.

When the Christian faith or heritage is under attack, Christians should not turn the other cheek or run but respond humanely and proportionately. The Crusades left Christians a perfect example of piety and zeal. The Crusades also offer a blueprint of Christian solidarity and co-operation in implementing a justifiable cause, such as fighting the evils of terrorism or a threat to the Christian faith or heritage. Christians should be on the lookout to ensure that the mistakes and abuses made in The Crusades are not repeated in an act of war or aggression.