

Crosses, Cathedrals and Crusades

Our Catholic Heritage

Thousands Are Called to the 'Rescue of Jerusalem'

By FATHER THOMAS McMANUS
'Hasten, as you love your souls, under your captain Christ to the rescue of Jerusalem. All you who are guilty of such sins as exclude you from the Kingdom of God, ransom yourselves at this price, for such is the will of God.' (Pope Urban II, 1096)

These were the words which impelled thousands of soldiers and knights to 'take the cross,' and become Crusaders. One of the most remarkable events in Western history, the Crusades, still boggles the mind in the incredible daring of their triumphs and the criminal folly of their final tragedy.

For almost five centuries, the Christian world had reeled under the hammer blows of Moslem conquest. The Moslem empire stretched in a huge crescent from Turkey, across

North Africa, to the Pyrenees in Northern Spain. They had sacked Rome and ravaged the Tomb of Peter. Charlemagne himself wept at the sight of Moslem ships on the horizon.

The only ray of light was the Battle of Tours in 732 when the Franks finally beat 'the champions of Allah.' Beginning in 1096, the West was able to mount a series of counterattacks which we call the Crusades.

The only crusade to achieve any measure of success was the first. After a march of appalling difficulty across Europe, over the mountains of Turkey, and through the deserts of Syria, the Christian army captured Jerusalem. They celebrated their victory with a frightful massacre followed by Benediction.

The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem was founded which lasted for two centuries. It was a strange mixture of

Scripture and Feudalism, including the principalities of Antioch and Galilee, the Lords of Sidon and Caesarea, under the leadership of the King of Jerusalem. It embraced and fascinated courageous scoundrels like Walter the Penniless and Richard the Lion Hearted, mystics like Peter the Hermit and Francis of Assisi, fighting bishops like Odo of Bayeux and Pope Gregory X, and the truly holy 'parfait gentil knights' like Godfrey of Bouillon, Baldwin the Leper, and St. Louis IX, who gained heaven but not Jerusalem.

New orders of fighting monks were founded to provide standing armies for the Holy Places. The most famous of them were the Knights of the Temple (1118) and the Knights of the Hospital of St. John (1120). The latter are still active in hospital work as the Knights of Malta.

The latter Crusades marched from disaster to disaster. In 1204, the Fourth Crusade never got to the Holy Land. They sacked Constantinople instead. A horrified Pope Innocent III excommunicated the whole army. In 1228, the near-atheist emperor Frederick II negotiated a brilliant peace with the Moslems, only to have his efforts repudiated since he himself was under excommunication! In 1270, the last serious Crusade died with St. Louis IX of France in the deserts of Tunisia.

The triumphs of the Crusades were the triumphs of faith, but faith without wisdom is a dangerous thing. There was so much courage, and so little honor; so much devotion, and so little understanding. The Crusades remain a philosophy, unthinkable today, yet compelling for all time as an ideal that might-have-been.

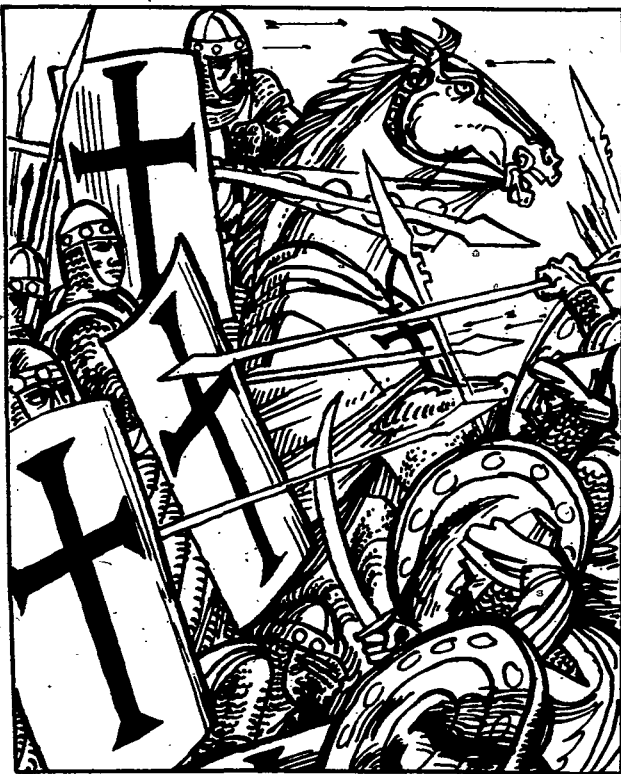
Pope Innocent III — Triumph and Tragedy

By FATHER THOMAS McMANUS
'Just as the moon derives its light from the sun . . . so too the royal power derives the splendor of its dignity from the pontifical authority.' (Innocent III, To the Nobles of Tuscany)

In 1198, the cardinals assembled in conclave and elected the youngest of their colleagues, Lothair of Segni, as Pope. He chose the name Innocent III. He was a man of wide culture, a student of both Paris and Bologna. He ranks as one of the great canon lawyers of history. His spirituality was deep and sincere, nourished on the works of St. Bernard.

With good reason Innocent was the Augustus of the Popes. His reign marks the high point of Church triumph in the struggle for power with the Empire. Innocent was feudal lord of the Papal States, Sicily, Hungary, Castile, Aragon and England. Never again would a pope enjoy such a plenitude of political power.

The triumphs of his reign were marred by a series of tragedies. In 1204 the armies of the Fourth Crusade, summoned by Innocent, sacked the city of Constantinople. Innocent had to excommunicate the army. In 1208, a Christian army, summoned by Innocent, massacred its way through



(Art by Robert F. McGovern)

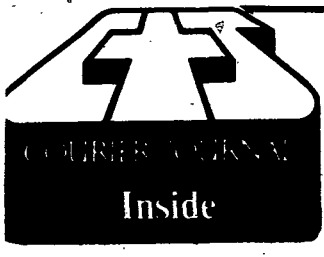
The Crusades

Southern France, a crime known as the Albigensian Crusade. Once again Innocent hurled anathema, but to no avail.

The high point of Innocent's reign came in the year 1215 when that most absolute of popes summoned the most representative of medieval assemblies — the Fourth Lateran Council. Known for generations afterward as the "Great Council," the Fourth Lateran was truly a "parliament of Christendom." Bishops and clergy rubbed elbows with nobles and kings. The new orders of mendicant friars were present for the first time.

The Council made major pronouncements on the Eucharist. It approved the use of the word "Transubstantiation" for the change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. It legislated the Easter Duty, still binding on Catholics. It instituted a massive program of reform for clergy and bishops.

It is ironic that all of Innocent's glories have passed away, and his most lasting monument is his support of the poor men Francis and Dominic. It was Innocent who gave protection and support to the Friars Minor and the Order of Preachers as they were struggling to be born. This is the true and lasting legacy of the pope who could say: "We are less than God, but greater than men!"



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