

# *The Cross or the Sword*

Jason Haché

“Absolute power corrupts absolutely.” This statement has proven to be true time and time again. Whether in politics, families, or even the church we have witnessed the result of men who have assumed complete power over a given situation, and it is disturbing to say the least. The world bore witness to one such event as the Church unleashed all her fury on those who dared to stand in her way.

“Deus Volt! Deus Volt!”<sup>1</sup> The men and women cried as they marched the road to the Holy City. Armed with whatever was at hand, people by the thousands joined together for one common purpose, under one common leader. The leader was the Pope of the Holy Catholic Church, the purpose may not be quite as clear. Some may say that they felt a sense of duty to God, others that they longed for a day where the Holy City of Jerusalem would be in the hands of God’s people, but for most it was the promises of riches that tore them away from their families and homes - riches of heavenly and earthly desire.

At the beginning of the second post-Christ millennium the Church had reached a pinnacle in power and control that was unlike any other time in history. The political and cultural influence that it wielded was enough to make princes submit and kings bow down. Of course, all this majesty and power lay within the grasp of one man, the supreme Pontiff, the Pope. Innocent III himself encapsulated an adequate reflection of this era as once in discourse he was quoted as saying “the papacy was like the sun, while kings were like the moon. As the moon received its light from the sun, so kings derive their power from the Pope.”<sup>2</sup> How could a man dare utter such things against the leaders of nations and armies? The same way that one man could incite a mob of people to leave the comforts of their homes and travel to war against a non-immediate threat over land that wasn’t their concern. The answer is simple really, spiritual rewards and penalties.

Over the years and through various circumstances one man was afforded the ability to grant men heaven or hell. Not only men, but also whole nations could be eternally damned by a single word uttered from his lips. With the threat of interdict and

---

<sup>1</sup> “God wills it! God wills it!”

<sup>2</sup> Shelley pp. 185

excommunication, and the promise of indulgences and the forgiveness of debt, the church was ready to unleash what they considered to be the “righteous judgment of God” upon the blasphemous heathens that perverted His land.

During the eleventh century, Seljuk Turks<sup>3</sup> swept across the Near East and seized control of Jerusalem. The Holy City had been under Islamic rule for some time, what is the significance of this event? Persecution rose to a new elevation, as at this point the Christians were no longer able to pilgrimage to the City where Jesus had walked amongst men. In response, the first of seven bloody crusades was launched. This initial attack ended up being the most successful crusade as a band of German, French, and Italian nobles was able to overcome the armies of the Turks and capture the Holy City. Unfortunately, the six that were to follow merely ended in an immense waste of human life and destruction of societal values and morals.

As we look at the events we’ve labeled the Crusades, one must wonder what was the point? What could have possibly necessitated such carnage and destruction? Was it to win the Holy Land? Was it to push back the ever-advancing forefronts of Islam? Was it to heal the breach between Eastern and Western Churches? If any of these were in fact the real reason for the Crusades then we can safely say that they failed miserably. Whatever reason one might propose for the actions of these people we must conclude that the Crusades were a failure nonetheless. Whenever sinful man uses God’s name under false pretenses everyone ends up losing. The reason that such atrocities were unleashed upon the pages of history was simply “the papacy reaching for universal sovereignty, one united church, West and East.”<sup>4</sup>

The “men of God” tasted the power that this earth has to offer; a power that is neither of God nor of His kingdom. How dangerous we become as we ascend the ladder of success in this earthly realm, how easy it is to grasp the reins and assume control. Our pride may be the most often target used by the enemy of our souls. Yet, as messy as it may be the sins of our past must never be forgotten, or swept away by time. We must look back and face the evil that we produced and learn from our Fathers. For through their mistakes we may learn to lay down our swords . . . and pick up His cross.

---

<sup>3</sup> New and fanatical converts to Islam.

<sup>4</sup> Shelley pp. 192