

1 Of Wars and Witches

- Module: History
- Lesson 39

2 Some Recommended Sources

- Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity, and How the West Won*
- David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions*
- Rodney Stark, *God's Battalions*
- Salem Trials Documentary Archives, Salem Witch Trials, <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/people?group.num=all&mbio.num=mb16>
- Christian History website , Fasting and Repentance for the Salem Witch Trials, http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1601-1700/fasting-and-repentance-for-salem-witch-trials-11630180.html?utm_source=This%20Week%20in%20Christian%20History%20-%20Christianity.com&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=01/12/2015

3 Christianity and War: Some Things to Consider

- Why does a person raise the issue of war, witch trials, etc?
 - To make the point Christians have often failed? (We can readily acknowledge that in many cases Christians have failed to live up to Christian teaching.)
 - Westboro Baptists
 - Abortion clinic bombers
 - Christians' support for slavery and racism in the Jim Crow south.
 - To assert that therefore Christianity is not true?
 - If a person implies that Christianity is therefore not true, then two important points to consider.
 - Was/is the evil actually systemic or endemic to the Christian message? (Was/is it in accordance with the actual teachings of Jesus and the New Testament?)
 - On what basis can a person claim that evil is evil? Are they a relativist?
- Was a specific war (or other evil) primarily religiously motivated, or was religion being exploited for primarily other motivations?
- In today's lesson we will not address questions of various Christian positions regarding the justification of war in general (e. g. pacifism and Just War Theory).

4 Two Approaches to Talk About the Crusades

- Simply dismiss (or attempt to) the subject by saying it was a Catholic problem. But—

- Regardless of what one as a Protestant thinks about Catholicism, Catholicism holds to an essentially Christian worldview which is what skeptics find objectionable, and upon which they blame the Crusades.
- Is it reasonable to assert that no true Christians participated in the Crusades, or that all of Western Christendom that participated in the Crusades was not Christian?
- Most non-believers are likely to find this line of argument unconvincing. Additionally, it introduces into the conversation another point of difficulty for non-believers—the disagreements between Protestants and Catholics.
- Address the subject with accurate historical information of what actually happened and why, and with Christian humility and discernment.

5 **The Crusades: The History**

- The history of the Crusades is complex. Oversimplification and exaggeration distorts our understanding of what happened and why.
 - Over four centuries of conflict of Islamic Empires with Christendom.
 - Intra-Christian squabbles, betrayals, etc. (The Crusades followed the Great Schism [1054] by only a few decades.)
 - The standards and methods of Medieval warfare. (e. g. It is inappropriate to judge the actions of Medieval soldiers by the standards of the Geneva Convention.)
 - Much of what you hear in the popular culture about the Crusades is misleading, completely false, or wildly exaggerated.
 - The New York Times compared the Crusades to Hitler's atrocities and ethnic cleansing.
 - Bill Clinton characterized the Crusades as a crime against Islam.
 - 9/11 is often attributed to a millennium of Islamic resentment for the injustice of the Crusades against Islam.

6 **The Context of the Islamic Conquest**

- For 450 years Christendom fought a mostly losing defensive battle against the Islamic conquest that subjugated vast regions stretching from Saudi Arabia across the Middle East into Byzantium and Armenia, the Holy Land, all across North Africa, and up into southwest Europe (Spain and France). All these areas that had been Christian for centuries.)
- The Holy Land fell to the Islamic conquest in 638 A. D. and then to the Seljuk Turks (also Islamic) in the mid eleventh century. (Jerusalem fell to the Turks in 1077)
- No attempt was made to reclaim the Holy Land for four centuries until its conquest by the Seljuk Turks. (Why?)
- Thousands of Christian Pilgrims to the Holy Land were being killed, raped, tortured, etc. by the Turks. (This is not hard to believe given current events in the Middle East.)

7 **What Precipitated the Crusades?**

- The conquest of the Holy Land and parts of Byzantium by the Seljuk Turks.
- Persecutions and atrocities committed against Christians living in, and pilgrims to, the Holy Land.

- The Seljuk Turks were within 100 miles of conquering Constantinople
- A specific plea to the West (to Pope Urban II, specifically) from Alexus Comnenus, Emperor of Byzantium, for relief from the threat of Islamic conquest. Two issues Comnenus raised in particular:
 - The Turks were within 100 miles of Constantinople.
 - The injustices and atrocities being carried out on Christian residents and pilgrims in the Holy Land. Desecrations of altars, churches, and baptismal fonts, etc.
- On November 27, 1095, Pope Urban II in a meadow outside Clermont, France, called the First Crusade.

8 **Some Important Details to Know**

- The Crusades were a series of several military attempts by Christendom (the Christian European nations) over a period of nearly 200 years (1095-1291) to secure Byzantium and the Holy Land from despotic Islamic rule.
- How the Crusades were fought:
 - They were fought according to Medieval rules of warfare, not according to 21st century rules (e. g. the Geneva Convention)
 - In spite of certain Medieval standards for warfare (including what was to be done in cases of siege), there were numerous barbarisms (even by Medieval standards) and brutalities committed by both sides.

9 **Some Important Details to Know**

- On July 15, 1099, after a six week siege, the badly outnumbered Crusaders took the city of Jerusalem.
- Following the success of the first Crusade, the West established four Crusader Kingdoms.
 - Edessa (1098-1149)
 - Antioch (1098-1289)
 - Tripoli (1102-1289)
 - Jerusalem (1098-1291)

10 **Some Important Details to Know**

- Two important monastic military orders were established to assist in the defense and support of the Crusader Kingdoms. These orders eventually became very wealthy, and were influential in European financial and political affairs:
 - The Knights Templar
 - The Knights Hospitallers
- Failure and withdrawal:
 - The ultimate failure of the Crusades was not primarily a military defeat. The European nations eventually chose to withdraw from the endeavor.
 - The failure was chiefly a loss of will on the part of Europeans to continue the costly defense and maintenance of the Crusader kingdoms.

11 Popular Mythology of the Crusades

- Myth #1: The Crusades were an unjustified and unprovoked military campaign by barbarous Europeans against peaceful and enlightened Muslims.
- Facts:
 - Seljuk Turks had conquered the Holy Land and much of Byzantium, and were moving rapidly towards Constantinople.
 - The militant Turks were committing horrific barbarisms on Christians in the Holy Land.
 - Western Christendom launched the Crusades only after a plea from the Emperor of Byzantium for assistance.
 - The Crusades were launched as a war of defense, not of aggression, according to the principles of Just War Theory.

12 Popular Mythology of the Crusades

- Myth #2: The Crusades were an attempt to gain riches and land for individual European families, and the first European foray into colonization. Europeans needed to provide for an "excess of sons" who could not inherit family lands and wealth in Europe.
- Facts:
 - There was no promise of either wealth or land to the Crusaders.
 - It was not an "excess of sons," but typically leading members of families who led their relatives on Crusade.
 - The personal cost to Crusaders involved debt, mortgaging of entire estates, and often bankruptcy.
 - The chance of survival from a Crusade was less than 50%.
 - The Crusader Kingdoms were not colonies that provided resources and wealth back home. They were a heavy financial and strategic burden on the West (which is what led to the eventual failure of the Crusades).

13 Popular Mythology of the Crusades

- Myth #3: The Crusades were an attempt to spread Christianity by the forceful conversion and subjugation of Muslims.
- Fact:
 - The motivation or intention of converting Muslims to Christianity did not play a role in the call to Crusading.
- Myth #4: Muslims have held a grudge against Christians for the Crusades since the Middle Ages. The 9/11 attacks were a Muslim response after more than a millennium of resentment of Western civilization that began with the Crusades.
- Fact
 - So-called Muslim resentment was only aroused beginning around the beginning of the 20th century. Two primary causes of that resentment:
 - The decline of the Ottoman Empire (European advances into previously Ottoman territory.)
 - The Establishment of the State of Israel.

14 Popular Mythology of the Crusades

- Myth #5: The Old Testament war commands were the motivation and justification for the Crusades which were simply a continuation of a tradition of holy wars.
- Facts:
 - Christianity had no previous tradition of holy wars.
 - Old Testament war texts were not used to justify the Crusades or to motivate would-be crusaders.
 - In Medieval times the Joshua war texts were typically understood in Christian theology as a metaphor representing the church in Christian evangelism.
 - The primary biblical texts used to justify and motivate the Crusades were the Gospels and the teaching of Jesus re: loving your neighbor, the life of discipleship, etc.

15 Popular Mythology of the Crusades

- Myth #6: The Crusaders were barbaric and uncivilized invaders who sought to conquer the chivalrous, civilized, and sophisticated Muslims
- Facts
 - It must be remembered that this is medieval warfare, not 21st century warfare.
 - It was, in part, Islamic barbarisms against Christian pilgrims which precipitated the Crusades in the first place.
 - Throughout the Crusades there were numerous instances of Muslim brutality and massacres.
 - Much is often made of Ayyubid Sultan Saladin (sultan of Egypt and Syria) having spared the lives of the Christians when he retook Jerusalem in 1187 as evidence of Islamic civility. But Jerusalem was the exception. Saladin was otherwise notoriously brutal in his treatment of captured combatants, sometimes personally participating in the slaughter of captives.
 - There were cases of shameful Crusader barbarisms. These were clearly wrong, and should be acknowledged. (Though some that are popularly thought to be so are misunderstood or exaggerated.)

16 The Crusades: An Assessment

- The Crusades as initially conceived were not unprovoked, but a response to brutal Seljuk Turkish atrocities in the Holy Land and the threat to Byzantium. There was no history of a Christian tradition of holy wars that preceded or precipitated the Crusades. Old Testament war texts were not used in calls to Crusaders. In the medieval era those texts were viewed as metaphors for the Church in evangelism.
- The Crusades were not an attempt to Christianize Muslims nor the first foray into European colonization. They were not conducted for land or loot.
- The Crusaders were not barbarians bent on the conquest of the culturally sophisticated, cultured, and enlightened Arabs. Tales of medieval atrocities and brutalities are numerous on the part of both Arabs and Crusaders.

- Crusaders themselves consisted of many devout, pious, self-sacrificing men who believed themselves to be answering Christ's command to love their neighbors and lead lives of discipleship. They were accompanied by many others who were "louts, brigands, and killers" (Hart).
- After the first Crusade, subsequent endeavors were sporadic, limited, inconclusive, and seemingly pointless. (Hart)
- The Crusades are as much a story of the relationship and conflict between Christendom (Latin or Western Christendom) and Byzantium (Eastern Christendom) as it is a story of Christian conflict with Islam.
- It is misleading and historically inaccurate to represent the Crusades as either a completely unjustified and morally reprehensible Christian endeavor, or as every aspect of the Crusades being justified by Islamic atrocities and threats. The Crusades are an extremely complex story covering a period of two hundred years and several individual Crusades and countless battles.

17 **The "Wars of Religion"**

- Period: The 16th and 17th Centuries.
- Following the Protestant Reformation, a number of conflicts between Protestant and Catholic states throughout Europe.
- The exhaustion in Europe from the "Wars of Religion" played a part in the Enlightenment era's fierce antagonism to Christianity.
- They were the result of the political fragmentation of Europe (Christendom) into distinct independent nation states.

18 **The "Wars of Religion"**

- Religious feelings were often exploited as a motivator by the political powers. (As cynical politicians still do today.)
- Alliances existed in a number of cases between Catholics and Protestants, demonstrating that the conflicts were more geo-political than religious in nature.
- The wars were the first major wars of the modern nation-state era, rather than a continuation of some holy war tradition within Christianity.

19 **European Witch Hunts**

- The practice of witch hunts became a notable phenomenon during the early modern period (late 16th & early 17th centuries. i. e. after the Medieval era).
- During the Medieval era the church regarded the efficacy of magic as a superstition, and most dabblers in witchcraft and magic were treated leniently.
 - e. g. Charlemagne (742-814) prohibited the burning of witches.
 - e. g. Pope Gregory VII (1022-1085) prohibited Denmark courts from executing witches.
- The increase of witch hunts in the Early Modern Era coincided with the shift of power from the church to the civil authority.

- Witch hunts were sometimes associated with alarm among some Christians regarding witchcraft and Satanism. But the church's resistance to such practices, as well as the fact that they were only a phenomenon chiefly restricted to a relatively short era of church history, belies the claim that witch hunts are/were systemic to Christianity
- Precisely why the rise of witch hunts occurred in the Early Modern Era is not known. But it clearly was not a consequence of the teaching of the church, which dismissed witchcraft as a superstition and generally opposed and prohibited witch hunts.

20 **The Salem Witch Trials**

- Duration: For several months during the year 1692.
- Resulted in the tragic death of 19 mostly lower class or marginalized women.
- Instigated and led by the Puritan Christians in Salem, particularly their pastor, Samuel Paris.
- Puritans outside of Salem resisted and opposed the Witch Hunts/Trials.
- Outside Puritan influences eventually—
 - Brought the hysteria into check.
 - Resulted in the expulsion of the Salem minister responsible for the debacle.
 - Led to the repentance of the judge and jurors who participated.
 - Resulted in the (predominantly Puritan) Massachusetts legislature vote calling for repentance and prayer that such abuses not happen again.
- The Salem Witch Trials were part of a rare phenomenon in American history, so hardly reflect a widespread phenomenon within American Christianity

21 **Next Week:**

- The Jesus of History