**The Real History of the Crusades** THOMAS F. MADDEN

From: Catholic Education Resource Center

The crusades are quite possibly the most misunderstood event in European history. Most of what passes for public knowledge about it is either misleading or just plain wrong

Misconceptions about the Crusades are all too common. The Crusades are generally portrayed as a series of holy wars against Islam led by power-mad popes and fought by religious fanatics. They are supposed to have been the epitome of self-righteousness and intolerance, a black stain on the history of the Catholic Church in particular and Western civilization in general. A breed of proto-imperialists, the Crusaders introduced Western aggression to the peaceful Middle East and then deformed the enlightened Muslim culture, leaving it in ruins. For variations on this theme, one need not look far. See, for example, Steven Runciman's famous three-volume epic, *History of the Crusades*, or the BBC/A&E documentary, *The Crusades*, hosted by Terry Jones. Both are terrible history yet wonderfully entertaining.

So what is the truth about the Crusades? Scholars are still working some of that out. But much can already be said with certainty. For starters, the Crusades to the East were in every way defensive wars. They were a direct response to Muslim aggression — an attempt to turn back or defend against Muslim conquests of Christian lands.

Christians in the eleventh century were not paranoid fanatics. Muslims really were gunning for them. While Muslims can be peaceful, Islam was born in war and grew the same way. From the time of Mohammed, the means of Muslim expansion was always the sword. Muslim thought divides the world into two spheres, the Abode of Islam and the Abode of War. Christianity — and for that matter any other non-Muslim religion — has no abode. Christians and Jews can be tolerated within a Muslim state under Muslim rule. But, in traditional Islam, Christian and Jewish states must be destroyed and their lands conquered. When Mohammed was waging war against Mecca in the seventh century, Christianity was the dominant religion of power and wealth. As the faith of the Roman Empire, it spanned the entire Mediterranean, including the Middle East, where it was born. The Christian world, therefore, was a prime target for the earliest caliphs, and it would remain so for Muslim leaders for the next thousand years.

# Were the Berbers and Seljuks instrumental in decline of Muslim Civilisation?

By: Salah Zaimeche From: Muslim Heritage

It is actually a hostility to Berbers and Turks that explains their being blamed for the decadence of Islam. The Seljuk role, it could be said, was in actual fact instrumental in saving whole Islamic domains from total extinction.

It has been noted by several Western historians such as Shaw that:

*[Islam] could not rule since the barbarians (Turks, Berbers, etc.) took over the lead of Islam. The Islamic world then entered in a period of ignorant brutality, from which it emerged only to fall into the mournful agony in which it is struggling at present.*

Wiet also paints a picture of the Muslim lands suffering at the hands of these forces

*In the eleventh century the Moslem world was subjected to major invasions, those of the Berbers and especially of the Turks.*

Upon closer inspection, we find, it is actually a hostility to Berbers and Turks that explains their being blamed for the decadence of Islam. This hostility has its reasons. The Berbers, both Almoravids and Almohads, have contributed to a major historical phase of Islamic history, that is, holding up the Christian crusade advance in Spain. Indeed, soon after the death of the leader al-Mansur, Muslim Spain fell into disunity and chaos during the era of the `party (taifa) kings' (*reyes de taifas, muluk at-tawa'if*) (1009-1091), when the Peninsula dissolved into as many as thirty more or less independent rulers, who fought each other. This emboldened Christian princes in North West Spain who gradually moved south, absorbing one Islamic region after the other, very often using one against the other. In their ultimate panic some Reyes called on the Almoravid leader, Yusuf Ibn Tashfin, to assist them on three occasions; but each time after crushing the Christian armies, he was asked to leave Spain, to be re-called once the Reyes (taifa rulers) were threatened again. The third time he was invited, in 1090, Ibn Tashfin crossed the straits of Gibraltar from Morocco, and this time eliminated the inept Reyes, and installed Almoravid rule all over the country. Under Almoravid rule not only was the unity of the Muslim Peninsula regained, but also there re-appeared in the West a combative form of Islam that responded to the Christian combativeness.