

12th March 2024

Conflict

**“No matter how ancient the conflict, no matter how hateful,
no matter how hurtful, peace can prevail.”**

George J Mitchell, *The Sadat Lectures: Words and Images on Peace (1997-2008)*

On 12th March 1088, Otho de Lagery, grand prior of Cluny and Bishop of Ostia, was elected Pope, taking the papal title of Urban II. He was deeply concerned about the diminishing influence of the Church, particularly the Holy Roman Empire's loss of territory and further encroachments into their land. The chronicler, Robert the Monk, reports Urban II as saying this:

This land which you inhabit, shut in on all sides by the seas and surrounded by the mountain peaks, is too narrow for your large population; nor does it abound in wealth; and it furnishes scarcely food enough for its cultivators. Hence it is that you murder one another, that you wage war, and that frequently you perish by mutual wounds. Let therefore hatred depart from among you, let your quarrels end, let wars cease, and let all dissensions and controversies slumber.

Such sentiments are laudable indeed, and all the more so because of the distressing nature of current conflicts. Pope Urban II's words, however, don't seem to be matched by his actions, for he is best known as being instigator of "The Crusades" to the Holy Lands, and the forced destruction of all who stood in the way of God's purposes. Indeed, he is reputed to have encouraged Christians to join the crusades under the slogan of "God wills it", and the promise that Crusaders would have their "sins remitted":

All who die by the way, whether by land or by sea, or in battle against the pagans, shall have immediate remission of sins. This I grant them through the power of God with which I am invested.

Ah! I have a problem with this, as I do with all so-called "holy wars", or any form of destruction which masquerades as "holy" under the banner of "God's Will", whatever divine being you believe in. Indeed, does it not have echoes of the wonderfully prophetic lyrics of Bob Dylan's 1964 classic *With God on our side* from the album "The times they are a changin'"?

When actions and words don't match, and even more, when destructive actions are perpetrated in the name of any religion, I have deep concerns. I'm sorry to say, that I believe that Pope Urban II, and many others since – even now – have got it quite wrong.

A prayer for today

If my ways are to be God's Way, let me walk in the paths of Peace. Amen