

# CNN SERIES GETS IT WRONG ON THE CRUSADES

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the first episode of CNN's series on the papacy:

Last night was the first installment of CNN's six-part series, "Pope: The Most Powerful Man in History." Its treatment of the rise of the papacy through the centuries was mostly even-handed—until it got to the Crusades.

To be sure, the show featured some cogent observations from St. Louis University professor Thomas Madden. He pointed out that "the Crusades were, first and foremost, an act of piety," undertaken to stop Islamic invaders who were violently attacking nuns, clergy, and pilgrims; the Christians also sought to liberate the holy city of Jerusalem from its Muslim conquerors.

But Madden's observations were drowned out by the overriding theme of this segment: that the Crusades were little more than a power grab by Pope Urban II.

We are told that Pope Urban II saw the Crusades as "an opportunity to reunite Christians and restore the reign of the Roman Catholic Church"; that he "called for violence in the name of one world under one Catholic Church"; that the Crusades, while "partly motivated by religious zeal," were also "partly motivated by a simple desire for conquest"; and that as a result, Pope Francis "is today trying to heal wounds his predecessor inflicted almost a thousand years ago."

Such assertions are nothing new. Princeton's Bernard Lewis, one of the world's most noted historians, has written, "At the present time, the Crusades are often depicted as an early experiment in expansionist imperialism." Yet, "To the people of the time, both Muslim and Christian, they were no such

thing.”

Rather, Lewis explains, “The Crusade was a delayed response to the jihad, the holy war for Islam, and its purpose was to recover by war what had been lost by war—to free the holy places of Christendom and open them once again, without impediment, to Christian pilgrimage.”

Just as important, as Madden has pointed out many times before, “All the Crusades met all the criteria of a just war.” But one would never know this by watching this episode on CNN. There is no question that the uninformed viewer was presented with a jaundiced view of the Crusades.