



Transparency 4.1E: The Children's Crusade

What do you see here? What is unusual about this group of crusaders? How do the children seem to be feeling? How are the adults reacting? Why would some adults not be supportive of the children going on crusade? Why would others let these children undertake a dangerous journey to the Holy Land?

- ❑ In this transparency we see a picture of children joining in a crusade to the Holy Land.
- The unofficial movement which became the Children's Crusade began in 1212 in France and Germany. Two boys became the dramatic leaders. In Germany, young Nicholas set out from his home near Cologne wearing a cross and carrying banners. The crowd of children that followed him believed God would part the waters for them, as He did for Moses, so that they could reach the Holy Land without ever getting wet.
- In France, a shepherd boy named Stephen from Cloyes claimed to have seen a vision of Jesus dressed as a poverty-stricken pilgrim. Allegedly, Jesus gave Stephen bread and a letter for the king of France. Stephen is said to have collected as many as 30,000 children and adults. The group shouted "Lord God, exalt Christianity!" and "Restore the True Cross to us!" as they followed Stephen to St. Denis where he allegedly performed miracles. The children carried bundles, candles, and staffs like the one carried by Moses. Adults also joined the procession, including women carrying infants. When asked where they were going, the children replied, "To God." They represented the ideal of poverty-stricken, innocent crusaders armed only with divine will, in contrast to the wealth and knightly training of the many of the crusaders who had gone before them. Likely, for these children the Holy Land was not simply an earthly city but a divine destination where they would find the long prophesied City of God.
- While the children's dedication was admired, many adults and clergy protested the Children's Crusade. Pope Innocent officially released the children and the elderly from any vows of crusade they had taken. Philip II of France, acting on advice from the University of Paris, demanded that the children return to their homes. At Brindisi, the bishop refused to allow the children to board ships. Some parents joined their children, while others insisted they return home.
- The children gathered in Cologne, then traveled up the Rhine River, over the Alps, and into Lombardy, and Genoa, Italy. They sang as they marched and carried their wooden crosses. Sometimes people in the villages they passed through gave them food. When the children reached Genoa, they believed that God would part the seas for them. When this failed to happen, the crusade broke apart. The children were barefoot, hungry, suffering from excessive heat, and disillusioned.

- When the crusade fell apart, the children were scattered. Some went to Brindisi and Marseilles. In Brindisi, the bishop refused to let them board the ships. Other ships were offered to them. Two that set sail from Marseilles sank, killing all on board. The other ships were owned by merchant slave-traders who had tricked the children. Girls were raped, and some were killed. Many children were sold to Muslim slave markets. Those who made it to Rome were freed from their vows by the Pope, who declared, "These children put us to shame. They rush to recover the Holy Land while we sleep." (Wolff and Hazard, ed., *The Later Crusades, 1189-1311*, 335.). Many who did return home were lost, sick, and had lost their religious fervor and absolute faith in God. The Church claimed that the tragic fate of the children crusaders was the work of the devil.