

# The Fourth Council of Lateran

1215

Mosaic: Pope Innocent III



St. Francis of Assisi



Innocent III, exceptionally talented and considered the most able pope of the medieval era, also had an exalted notion of the Vicar of Christ as midway between God and man, given the whole world to govern! His main concerns were: the crusades, church reform, and combating heresies. The crusades turned out to be failed attempts to regain the holy land from Islam. Against his intent, the particular crusade that Innocent III promoted diverted its forces toward Constantinople where the resulting violence and ruin reinforced the eastern church's distrust of the western church's intentions. Innocent's church reforms were more successful in raising standards of lay and clerical life.

He restored balance between the pope and the episcopate by encouraging more decisions at provincial and national levels. He approved St. Francis' request to start an order and encouraged the practice of evangelical poverty preached by certain groups such as the first Franciscans. However, Innocent did not use this opportunity to steer the church towards Francis' program\*.

Innocent declared heresies as high treason against God and urged bishops to find causes and remedies. However, after the murder of a papal representative by the Albigenses, he ordered a crusade against them with resulting bloodshed and devastation that cast a shadow over the 2nd half of his reign. Heretics were dealt with severely and the dreadful (although often over-stated by church critics\*\*) Inquisition was underway. This occurred due to the Church becoming an all exclusive society, hardly distinguishable from the state with heretics then viewed as a menace to society. Innocent III called Lateran IV into session and presided over it at which over 1200 prelates attended.

Depiction of the crusades  
The Siege of Antioch



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approved the seventy-one decrees presented to them by Innocent III. Examples are:  
(for a brief summary of the decrees see Tanner\*\*\*)

- |                                    |   |  |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Eucharist                          | ➔ | defined Eucharist in terms of terms of 'Transfiguration'.  |
| Crusades                           | ➔ | Set preparations for a new crusade in 1217 and asked rulers to observe a four year truce to allow launching the crusade. |
| Dress code                         | ➔ | Jews and Muslims should wear distinctive attire.   |
| Religious Orders                   | ➔ | banned the founding of <u>new</u> religious orders lest too great diversity bring confusion into the Church.             |
| Re-unification with Eastern Church | ➔ | Exhorted Greeks to reunite with the Roman Church so that 'there may be only one fold and only one shepherd'              |
| Standards for laity                | ➔ | A <u>minimum</u> of one yearly confession and communion.   |

\* Kung, Hans "The Catholic Church" Modern Library Chronicles (2001)

\*\* Vidmar, John, OP "Catholic Church Through the Ages", Paulist Press (2005)

\*\*\* Tanner, Norman "Councils of the Church", Crossroad Publishing (2001)