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Documents on Prisoners of War

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DOCUMENT NO. 3

**DECREE OF THE THIRD LATERAN COUNCIL
(1179)****SOURCE**

5(2) Hefele, Histoire des Conciles de l'Eglise
1105 (DeClercq French trans., 1913)

NOTE

The statement is frequently made that during the Crusades the Catholic Church, acting through the agency of the Third Lateran Concilium, issued a ban against the practice of making slaves of prisoners of war of the Catholic faith. Actually, the pertinent decree, or capitula, of that Council, which met in Rome in March 1179 at the call of Pope Alexander III, was far less all-encompassing than is usually believed.

EXTRACT**Can. 24**

It has unfortunately occurred that Christians have delivered to the Saracens arms, iron, and wood for the construction of vessels, that they have given assistance to the Saracens in the latter's wars against the Christians, and that they have taken service on the vessels of the Saracen pirates. All those who have so acted are excommunicated, their property shall be confiscated by the lay princes, and, if they are captured, they shall be reduced to slavery. The sentence of excommunication pronounced against them shall be published in all the ports. There shall also fall under the ban of excommunication all those who make prisoners of war of, or who rob, Christian sailors as well as those who pillage shipwrecked Christians instead of assisting them.