3
The Call to Crusade

15
BISHOP LAMBERT OF ARRAS

Urban II’s Crusading Indulgence
1095

Several contemporary historians composed versions of what Urban II preached at Clermont, but none of them is entirely reliable. The only sure sentence about the crusade to survive from Clermont—preserved in a collection of decrees by Bishop Lambert of Arras, who attended the council—is notable for its brevity and for the qualifications that it places on the promise of indulgence. As such, it merits careful reading.

Whoever shall set forth to liberate the church of God at Jerusalem for the sake of devotion alone and not to attain honor or money will be able to substitute that journey for all penance.

ROBERT THE MONK

Urban II’s Sermon at Clermont:
The Version of Robert the Monk
ca. 1107

Robert the Monk was one of three northern French monastic writers who, around 1107, rewrote the anonymous eyewitness account of the First Crusade, The Deeds of the Franks. Robert did so in part because he had attended the Council of Clermont—though he was not necessarily interested in giving an accurate presentation of the pope’s words. Rather, he wished to give his own interpretation of the crusade and in particular of the enemies whom the Franks would face in the Holy Land.

In the year of our Lord 1095 a great council was held in the region of the Auvergne in Gaul, in a city known as Clermont. Pope Urban II presided over the meeting with bishops and cardinals. That council was renowned for bringing together both Gauls and Germans, and as many bishops as lay princes attended. When the ecclesiastical affairs were settled, the Lord Pope went into an open field. No single building could hold all those people. There he pronounced these beautiful and compelling words, in this fashion, to everyone gathered there:

“Frankish people! People from across the mountains! Splendid in so many deeds, people chosen and loved by God, distinguished from all other nations by the quality of your lands, the purity of your faith, and the honor that Holy Church has given to you, to you my sermon is directed and to you I offer my entreaty!

“From the lands around Jerusalem and the city of Constantinople, troubling news has arisen and many times has now come to our attention—namely, that the people of the kingdom of Persia, a foreign people, a people entirely hostile to God, a generation whose heart was not steadfast and whose spirit has not kept faith with God,¹ has attacked Christian

¹Psalms 78:8.

lands and devastated them with sword, plunder, and fire. Some of the captives they have led into their own land, while others they have laid low with a wretched death. The churches of God they have altogether overthrown or enslaved to their own cult. The altars they have wrecked, polluted with their filth; for they circumcise Christians and either pour the blood from the circumcision over the altars or else use it to fill baptismal vessels. And if it amuses them to punish someone with a truly foul death, they puncture his navel and pull out the ends of his intestines. These they bind to a pole, and then by whipping their victim, they force him to run around and around until his intestines have all come out and he falls dead to the ground. Some they tie to poles and shoot with arrows; others they force to stretch out their bare necks so that with their swords they can cut off their heads in a single blow. What can I say about the wicked violations of women? To speak of it is worse than to keep silent. The kingdom of the Greeks they have so eviscerated and claimed for their own that you could not cross the lands they have taken from them in a journey of two months.

"Who shall avenge these deeds? Upon whom shall fall the burden if not you? To you more than all other people God has conferred great fame at arms, great physical skills, and strength for laying low the hairy scalp of the enemy."  

"May the deeds of your ancestors move you and fill your minds with valor—the wisdom and magnificence of King Charlemagne and his son Louis and all your other kings who destroyed pagan kingdoms and spread far and wide the bounds of Holy Church." You should be especially moved thinking on the Holy Sepulcher of our Lord and Savior and on the other sacred places, now in the clutches of this most foul people. Unworthily they touch them, and sacrilegiously they pollute them with their filth.

"O strongest knights, offspring of indomitable forebears, do not decline from their standards, but rather remember your ancestors' examples! If perhaps the love of your children or your parents or your wives should hold you back, recall what the Lord says in the Gospel: Who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever abandons his home or father or mother or wife or children or lands because of my name will win it back hundredfold through eternal life."  

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3 The Frankish king Charlemagne (r. 768–814) enjoyed a largely undeserved reputation in the eleventh century for leading wars against Muslims. His son and successor was Louis the Pious (r. 814–840).
“Let none of your possessions nor any of your daily tasks restrain you! For this land that you inhabit, surrounded on all sides by sea and mountain, is choking under your great multitude. It has no real riches and provides barely enough food for its farmers. That is why you fight and kill one another, you wage wars and you mortally wound so many people. Let the hatreds that separate you cease! Let your feuds be settled! Let your wars calm and your quarrels and controversies be pacified. Take the path of the Holy Sepulcher, retake that land from so wicked a people, subdue to your will this territory given by God into the possession of the sons of Israel, flowing with milk and honey, just as the Bible says.\(^5\)

“Jerusalem is the navel of the world, a land fertile beyond all others, as if another paradise of delights. The Redeemer of the human race glorified it with his presence, enhanced it with his sermons, sanctified it with his passion, redeemed it by his death, and distinguished it through his burial. This is a royal city, placed at the center of the world, now held captive by her enemies, enslaved by a gentile people ignorant of the worship of God. She wishes and desires to be freed, never ceasing to plead for rescue. She especially demands help from you, since, as I have already said, God has set you aside before all other nations because of your skills at war. Take this path, then, for the remission of your sins, confident in the imperishable glory of the heavenly kingdom!”

With these words and many others like them, Pope Urban urbanely preached his sermon, such that the hearts of all those present came together as one and proclaimed, “God wills it! God wills it!” Hearing this outcry, the venerable Roman bishop turned his eyes to heaven, gave thanks to God, and raising his hands for silence said: “Dear brethren, today is made plain for us what the Lord said in the Gospel: When two or three of you are gathered together in my name, I am in your midst.\(^6\) If the Lord God was not in your minds, you would have not joined together in one voice. Although there were many voices, they originated from one only. Therefore I say to you that God put this into your heart and caused you to say this. Let these words therefore become for you a battle cry in the midst of combat, for the words come from God. When you join together and strike against the enemy, let this single divine rallying cry unite you all: ‘God wills it! God wills it!’

“Additionally, we order and encourage the old and the sickly, barely suited to carrying arms, not to set out on this road. Women without

\(^5\)Exodus 3:8.

\(^6\)Matthew 18:20.
husbands or brothers or legal guardians should not set forth either. People like that will be more of a hindrance than a help, more a burden than a benefit. The wealthier should aid the less fortunate and should take with them men whom they themselves have equipped for war. Priests and clerics of any order cannot depart without the permission of their bishops, because this road will prove useless to them if they go without sanction, just as laymen derive no benefit from a pilgrimage without the blessing of their priest. Whoever sets his mind and vows to God to go on this holy pilgrimage, promising freely to offer himself as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, shall put the sign of the cross on his brow or his chest. When he fulfills his vow and wishes to return, let him place the cross on his back between his shoulders. By this twofold procedure they will have fulfilled the Lord’s command given in the Gospel: Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”


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GUIBERT OF NOGENT

Urban II’s Sermon at Clermont:
An Excerpt from Guibert of Nogent’s Version
ca. 1107

Guibert of Nogent is another of the French monks who wrote a crusade chronicle around 1107. His style is more deliberately elevated than Robert the Monk’s (see Document 16), and Guibert infused his narrative with a much higher theological diction. Like Robert, Guibert used Urban’s sermon as a vehicle for advancing his interpretation of the meaning of the crusade. Unlike Robert, he did not attend the Council of Clermont.

“Now you need to think carefully about this: that if God is working with you as his agents to cause Christian worship to flourish again at that church that is the mother of all churches, he perhaps is doing so to restore some parts of the East to the faith against the oncoming time of Antichrist. Obviously, Antichrist is going to arise to make war not against Jews, not against gentiles, but—as the etymology of his name suggests—against Christians; and if Antichrist finds no Christians in that part of the world where hardly any are today, there won’t be anyone for him to oppose and no one whom he might rightly challenge. According to Daniel and to Daniel’s interpreter Jerome, Antichrist will fix his tents on the Mount of Olives, and we know through the Apostle that he will sit in the temple of God in Jerusalem as if he were a god. From the same prophet we learn that Antichrist will kill three great kings—of Egypt, Africa, and Ethiopia—undoubtedly because of their Christian faith. But this obviously cannot happen unless Christianity appears where now there is only paganism. If you dedicate yourself to the task of righteous battles, therefore, so that you (who have accepted from Jerusalem the seedbed of the knowledge of God) might fully restore the debt of grace once paid there, and so that through you the Catholic name might be spread against the wickedness of Antichrist and his Anti-Christians, who then could help but conclude that God, who exceeds the hopes of all through his bountiful goodness, might consume the reeds of paganism through that spark that you will light? Thus God might bring under the rudiments of our law Egypt, Africa, and Ethiopia, now separated from the communion of our faith, so that Antichrist, the sinner, the son of perdition, might find there enemies ranged against him.

“Listen also how the Gospel proclaims that Jerusalem shall be downtrodden by peoples until the times of nations are fulfilled. ‘Times of nations’ can be understood in two ways. It could mean that the nations have willfully lorded it over Christians and have wallowed in the pigsties of their own lusts and impurities, all the while experiencing no opposition (for to ‘have one’s time’ is said of a person who attains anything he desires; hence the verse, My time has not yet come, your time is always at hand, and hence it is said of pleasure seekers, You are having

1 Daniel is the Old Testament prophet whose book provided much material for apocalyptic speculation. His “interpreter” was St. Jerome (ca. 347–420), who translated the Bible into Latin and whose works include a commentary on Daniel.
2 Thessalonians 2:3–4.
your time).\(^4\) Alternatively, ‘times of nations’ refers to the full number of people to enter the faith before Israel will be saved.\(^5\) These ‘times,’ dearest brothers, may perhaps only be fulfilled through your agency and under God’s direction when the pagan powers are repulsed. And now, as the end of time approaches, these people have not been converted because, according to the Apostle, there must first be a falling away from the faith.\(^6\) Nevertheless, it is necessary according to the prophets that before the advent of Antichrist, Christian rule must be renewed in those parts of the world, either through you or through whomever it pleases God to use. In that way the head of all evil, who will have a throne there, will find some fodder of the faith against which he might strike.

“Just think what the Almighty may have prepared for you! Through you he might restore Jerusalem from its downtrodden state! I ask you to consider what joys might fill your hearts if we should see the holy city raised up through your help and thus prophecies—no! more truly, divine oracles—fulfilled in our times! Remember what the Lord himself said in his own voice: From the East I will lead your seed, and from the West I will gather you.\(^7\) God ‘led our seed from the East’ because, in a dual fashion, those Eastern lands produced the beginnings of our church, but in the West he gathers the church together because those Westerners, who after the Easterners accepted the lessons of the faith, will restore the losses of Jerusalem. We think that by God’s help this can happen through you.”

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\(^4\) The first expression is from John 7:6; the second appears to have been proverbial only.


\(^6\) 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

\(^7\) Isaiah 43:5.
5
Antioch: Where the Crusade Became a Holy War

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COUNT STEPHEN OF BLOIS
The Siege of Antioch:
A Letter from Count Stephen of Blois
March 1098

Stephen of Blois’s earlier prediction that the armies would reach Jerusalem in five weeks, if not delayed at Antioch (see Document 28), proved accurate. The crusading host did not, in fact, reach Antioch until nearly four months later, on October 20, 1097, and the outcome of the siege would not be resolved for another eight months. Despite the incredibly harsh conditions the crusaders faced, Stephen remained confident, as this letter, written in March 1098, demonstrates.

Count Stephen sends the blessing and grace of salvation to Adele, his sweetest, most beloved wife, to his dearest children, and to all his followers great and small.

You may surely believe, dearest, that this messenger whom I have sent to your sweetness left me safe and healthy and enriched by good fortune at Antioch, which now the chosen army of Christ has been besieging in the name of Lord Jesus for twenty-three straight weeks. Rest assured, my love, that I have now doubled the gold, silver, and other riches that

your sweetness handed over to me when I left you. For after taking counsel, all our princes have now established me (reluctant though I am!) as lord of the whole army and overseer and governor of their every deed. You have heard already that after the capture of Nicaea we fought no small battle against the treacherous Turks and that with God’s help we laid them low. Afterward we gained for the Lord all parts of Romania and then Cappadocia. In Cappadocia, we learned that there lived a Turkish prince named Assam, so we directed our path toward him. We manfully conquered all of his castles and chased him into a well-fortified castle atop a high ridge. We gave Assam’s land to one of our princes, and to help him subdue the aforesaid Assam, we left him there with many Christian knights. From there we continued to chase the wicked Turks through Armenia, eventually driving them to the great river Euphrates and forcing them to the riverbank. Abandoning their packs and packhorses, they fled across the river into Arabia. The bolder of the Turkish knights set a swift course night and day into Syria and hastened to enter the royal city of Antioch ahead of us. The whole army of God knew how they fled and gave due thanks and praise to the Lord.

We thus hastened joyfully to the aforesaid capital city of Antioch and besieged it. There we have had many conflicts with the Turks. In truth we have fought seven battles against the citizens of Antioch and against countless fierce souls who came to bring help to them, with Christ marching before us. With the Lord our God’s assistance, we were victorious all seven times, and truly we killed more of them than one could count! In these battles and in many other encounters around the city, to be sure, they killed many of our Christian coreligionists, whose souls they helped raise to paradise.

Antioch is a city great beyond belief, one we have found most powerful and invincible. More than five thousand bold Turkish knights have gathered in the city, not counting Saracens, Paulicians, Arabs, Turcopoles, Syrians, Armenians, and various other nations, comprising an infinite multitude. Thus far we have endured much toil and countless evils because of our adversaries and God’s enemies. Many have now used up all their goods in this sacred struggle. Indeed, many of our Franks would have suffered physical death from hunger if God’s clemency and our money had not come to the rescue! Throughout the whole winter in front of this city we have endured brutal cold and unbearably heavy rainfall in the name of Christ our Lord. It is false what some say about the unbearable heat of the Syrian sun, for their winter is similar to ours in the West.

A reference to the Battle of Dorylaeum, described in Documents 29 and 30.
When Caspian, the emir of Antioch (emir means "prince" and "lord"), saw how much he was suffering because of us, he sent his son, named Sensadolus, to the prince who holds Jerusalem and to the prince Calap Rodoan and to the prince of Damascus. He also sent him into Arabia to see Bolianuth and to Khorasan to see Hamelnuth. These five emirs with twelve thousand chosen Turkish soldiers suddenly came to attempt to relieve Antioch. In ignorance of all this, we had scattered many of our knights around the cities and castles. Indeed, in Syria now there are 165 cities and castles under our control. A little before they reached the city, however, we went out to meet them, going about three leagues with seven hundred knights onto a plain near the Iron Bridge. God fought for us, his faithful men, against them, and on that day through God's virtue we laid low our enemies in battle, and because God always fights for us, we killed more of them than you could count. To celebrate the victory, Christ's people gathered two hundred of their heads and carried them back to the army. Also, the emperor of Babylon sent his Saracen messengers to our army with a letter and through it he secured peace and amity with us.

Now, dearest one, I'd like to tell you what happened to us during Lent. Our princes decided that a tower should be built before one of the city gates that lies between our camps and the sea. The Turks had been coming out of that gate every day and killing our men who went to the sea. (The city of Antioch lies five leagues from the sea.) For this reason they sent that outstanding man Bohemond, Count Raymond of Saint-Gilles, and sixty knights to the sea to lead back sailors who might help with this project. But when they were bringing the sailors back to us, an army of Turks that had gathered together caught our two princes unawares and drove them into a harried flight. In this panicked flight that I am describing, we lost more than five hundred of our foot soldiers to the glory of God. From our knights we only lost two that I know of.

On that same day we went out to receive our brothers joyfully, completely ignorant of their misfortune. As we neared the aforesaid city gate, a crowd of Antiochene knights and foot soldiers, glorying in their

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2 Yaghi-Siyan was the emir of Damascus. His son was named Shams ad-Dawla. The lords referred to here are Ilghazi in Jerusalem, Ridwan of Aleppo, and Duqaq of Damascus. Bolianuth and Hamelnuth are less certain.

3 This battle occurred on February 9, 1098. Contrary to what Stephen says here, the army was led only by Ridwan of Aleppo. Six weeks earlier, Frankish soldiers had unexpectedly met up with a relief force led by Duqaq of Damascus.

4 Babylon here refers to Egypt, governed by the Fatimids, who, as Shia Muslims, were the confessional and political enemies of the Turks. After the siege of Nicaea, Alexius had arranged for the Franks to send ambassadors to Cairo.

5 This battle occurred on March 29, 1098.
triumph, fell upon us. Seeing them, we sent word to the Christian camps that everyone needed to join us and to be prepared for battle. Our men thus came together, even as the disoriented princes Bohemond and Raymond came back with what remained of their followers and told of the awful thing that had happened to them. This terrible news filled us with fury against the blasphemous Turks. Ready to die for Christ and saddened for our brothers, we assembled hastily. God's enemies and ours fled from us, trying to get back into their city, but by God's grace things went differently from what they had planned. For as they tried to cross the bridge built over the great river Moscholo,6 we pursued them closely and killed many of them before they reached the bridge. Many others we cast into the river, all of whom died. Others still we killed while crossing the bridge or else in front of the gate.

I tell you, my dear, and you can be sure it's true, that in this single battle we killed thirty emirs (that is, "princes") and three hundred other noble Turkish knights, not counting other Turks and pagans. Added all up, the number of Turkish and Saracen dead is 1,230. We did not even lose one of our men.

While my chaplain, Alexander, was hastily writing this letter, some of our men laid a trap for the Turks and defeated them in combat, through God's help. They killed sixty of them and brought their heads back to the army.

These are but a few of the details I am writing to you, my dearest, and since I cannot express to you what is in my heart, dearest, I ask of you that you do well, take good care of your land, and treat your sons and your men fairly, as is proper, since you will surely see me as soon as I am able.

Farewell!

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6 In fact, the Orontes.