

## MOTIVATIONS IN THE CRUSADES

Examining the underlying causes that motivated Western Christians to participate in the Crusades

The Crusades was a mission orchestrated by the Church to reconquest and restore Christian control in the Holy Lands and to protect the Church's interests, authority, and power with the motto "Liberate the Church of God." Employed by the Church, the use of ecclesiastical exploitation, notably through Pope Urban II, created a strategic blend of false promises, privileges, and spiritual incentives that allowed them to rally and motivate its population to participate in the Crusades as well as leveraging the recruitment of mercenaries and methods of their payment along with the installment of religious apprehensions to increase participation, strengthening the Church's overall power through multifaceted exploitation tactics. The leader of the Church, Pope Urban II, exploited his high, untenable position to create false promises, privileges, and spiritual incentives to motivate the people of the Church to participate in his plans for the Crusades. Furthermore, the Church leveraged the recruitment of mercenaries. It displayed their shrewdness by compensating them in payment from which the mercenaries themselves seized during the Crusades, allowing this strategic approach not only to incentivize the mercenaries to support but also facilitate the procurement of virtually cost-free manpower to bolster the Church's power in the Crusades. In addition to promises and incentives, The Church placed religious and spiritual consequences upon those who opposed buttressing the Crusades and were administered as a potent tool to compel support, ultimately strengthening the Church's overall power through the exploitation of threats.

The members of the Church were motivated by the attractive promises that Pope Urban II—using his high status—promised them in return for their support for the Crusades. Pope Urban II created the "Crusade Indulgence," which made all the sins his supporters committed during the

Crusades to be cleansed from them, and supposedly made their wait in purgatory shorter.<sup>1</sup> The Crusade Indulgence was an exploitation of Urban's position and practically a propaganda way by the Church to get people to support and fight in the Crusades so that they could receive spiritual benefits and blessings.<sup>2</sup> Urban allowed his people to be barbaric through the impunity that he implemented, allowing for the most courageous army. In addition, many supporters believed that if they died in the Crusades, they would invariably go to Heaven due to their martyrdom. Even those who did not wish to die in battle strongly believed that their wait in purgatory would substantially shorten. Pope Urban II successfully used his high status as the Pope to convince the members of the Church to participate in his plan because of his promises and the benefits of sinless murder.<sup>3</sup> Pope Urban II was highly skilled in creating a great name for himself, as many thought of him as a good person and, therefore, wanted to support his goals and beliefs. One writer, Fulcher of Chartres, who lived during the time of Urban, stated similar ideas about him: the popular opinion of Urban as a role model and someone to follow. Thus, when Urban announced his ideas of the Crusades, many were very supportive and believed in his "righteous" goals.<sup>4</sup> Fulcher of Chartres stated in his chronicle, "In Rome ruled Pope Urban II, a man distinguished in life and character, who always strove wisely and actively to raise the status of the Holy Church above all things. He saw that the faith of Christianity was being destroyed to excess by everybody, by the clergy as well as by the laity."<sup>5</sup> He continues to speak about the problems that Urban saw and how compassionate and caring he was of his people. His good

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<sup>1</sup> Paul E. Chevedden, "The View of the Crusades from Rome and Damascus: The Geo-Strategic and Historical Perspectives of Pope Urban II and 'Alī Ibn Ṭāhir Al-Sulamī," *Oriens* 39, no. 2 (2011): [Page 11-12], JSTOR.

<sup>2</sup> Chevedden, "The View," [Page 1].

<sup>3</sup> Chevedden, "The View," [Page 13].

<sup>4</sup> Edward Peters, *The First Crusade*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), [Page 65], JSTOR.

<sup>5</sup> Peters, *The First*, [Page 65].

name and the many who supported him from the start compelled even more supporters for a cause they thought of as good. For this reason, the people did not look at the exploitation used and the deaths caused but rather averted their attention elsewhere. Pope Urban II frequently held public speeches in which he praised and exclaimed his plans for the Crusades and introduced his promises and benefits of support. In one instance, Urban proclaimed, "I speak to those who are present, I shall proclaim it to the absent, but it is Christ who commands. Moreover, if those who set out thither lose their lives on the journey, by land or sea, or in fighting against the heathen, their sins shall be remitted in that hour; this I grant through the power of God vested in me."<sup>6</sup> Urban stated that Christ is commanding this mission, not him. As the Church believes in Christ as their true and only God, it is conclusive that whatever mission led by Him is for good reason. Additionally, Urban II proposed his idea of remitted sins and declared that he would do so through the power of God that lies in him. These pieces of evidence show exactly how Pope Urban II used his status, skilled exploitation, propaganda tactics, and speeches to incentivize both church members and non-members to support the cause of the Crusades. In addition to incentivizing its people to increase in number, the Church strengthened its support by leveraging mercenaries and exploiting their compensation in payment.

Mercenaries were recruited and paid with money they seized, providing the Church with free and needed manpower. Two of the major capitals previously under the rule of the Church, Jerusalem and Constantinople, were especially sought after and were the main targets of the Crusades. Even though the Church had gathered many crusaders already, members of the Church and non-members were not experienced in battle. Furthermore, their numbers were still inadequate to take over these major powers, incentivizing the Church to take measures into their

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<sup>6</sup> Dana C. Munro, "The Popes and the Crusades," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 55, no. 5 (1916): [Page 1], JSTOR.

hands to hire mercenaries for such purposes. During the sacking of Constantinople, the Church used some of the valuables seized to pay the mercenaries while allocating the rest to themselves,<sup>7</sup> virtually allowing the Church to profit as well as attain free mercenaries who had satisfactory and even superior pay: this was highly successful due to such benefits offered. Throughout the Crusades, hundreds of thousands of crusaders participated in the support of the Church. For example, the Venetians, a republic of Venice, provided a fleet to carry over 30,000 crusaders and 5,000 horses alone.<sup>8</sup> Following the lead, many people provided tens of thousands of knights, infantry, sailors, and marines. In addition to manpower, hundreds of siege weapons, horse and troop transports, and war galleys assisted the Church in dominating the Crusades.<sup>9</sup> Separate from the members of the Church, Pope Urban II also held speeches addressing the mercenaries and knights, promising remission to all of them as well as earthly and eternal rewards.<sup>10</sup> The promises of these rewards, along with Urban's call to action, greatly urged the mercenaries, knights, and others to join in supporting the Crusades. Pope Urban II was successful not only in gaining a following of his people but also in gaining the attention of others through his use of strategic plans. The ability of the Church to exploit the use of mercenaries and incentives is proved through these pieces of evidence and shows how successful the Church was in the Crusades. Along with mercenaries and offering rewards, the Church threatened its people with consequences if they did not support them, creating a much larger motivation to participate in the Crusades.

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas F. Madden, "The Venetian Version of the Fourth Crusade: Memory and the Conquest of Constantinople in Medieval Venice," *Speculum* 87, no. 2 (2012): [Page 1], JSTOR.

<sup>8</sup> Madden, "The Venetian," [Page 1].

<sup>9</sup> Madden, "The Venetian," [Page 1].

<sup>10</sup> Edward Peters and Fulcherius, *The First Crusade : the Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials. Ed. with an Introd. by ...* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), [Page 382].

To further increase motivation to support the Crusades, the Church declared spiritual consequences that would be placed upon those who did not support their cause. Pope Urban proclaimed in one of his speeches that punishments would occur if they did not participate in the Crusades. Urban announced, "Therefore it is necessary to reenact the truce, as it is commonly called, which was proclaimed a long time ago by our holy fathers. I exhort and demand that you, each, try hard to have the truce kept in your diocese. And if anyone shall be led by his cupidity or arrogance to break this truce, by the authority of God and with the sanction of this council he shall be anathematized."<sup>11</sup> Under "God's authority," Urban warned that those who go against him will be cursed. Offering benefits for support is one thing, but threatening curses for not supporting gave the people almost a need to participate in the Crusades. In addition to offering privileges, Pope Urban II skillfully made people think deeply that they would not get those rewards if they did not participate. Urban II had excellent speaking skills and manipulated the minds of the people of the Church to rethink their decisions. He reminded them that if they did not intend to gain indulgence by doing what they needed to get such indulgence granted, they would simply not receive it.<sup>12</sup> Urban was very good at getting into people's heads and making them consider their choices to sway them toward supporting him and the Church. Finally, once the Church had the majority of people supporting their objectives in the Crusades, they caused the rest to feel like outsiders who were experiencing excommunication and damnation. Humans, innately social beings who prefer to fit in, are greatly influenced by popular opinion. For this reason, support for the Crusades became a social norm, and many who may not have cared about the threats and benefits still participated because they wanted to fit in. All in all, the Church's use of exploitation of promises and spiritual incentives, the status of Pope Urban II, loopholes in

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<sup>11</sup> Peters and Fulcherius, *The First*, [Page 382].

<sup>12</sup> Chevedden, "The View," [Page 13].

mercenary payment, and religious apprehensions allowed it to rally its people to gain a large following in the Crusades.

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