

1095, Council of Clermont: Speech by Pope Urban II

In response to requests for help by the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I, who was facing attacks by the Seljuk Turks, Pope Urban II gave a speech in the city of Clermont in France in 1095 calling for a Crusade, a war in the name of Christianity, to save Christian lands from conquest by Muslim forces. However, the focus of the Crusade quickly shifted from helping the Byzantines to reclaiming the Holy Land and the city of Jerusalem for Christianity. There are a few different versions of Pope Urban II's speech at the Council of Clermont that were written down by different people claiming to have been eye-witnesses. Examine the two versions and try to identify similarities and differences.



This account is from the Crusade chronicler, Fulcher of Chartres.

POPE URBAN II: "...Your brothers who live in the east are in urgent need of your help, and you must hasten (rush) to give them the aid which has often been promised them. For, as the most of you have heard, the Turks and Arabs have attacked them and have conquered [much of] the territory of [the Byzantine Empire]... They have killed and captured many, and have destroyed the churches and devastated the empire. If you permit them to continue thus for awhile with impurity, the faithful of God will be much more widely attacked by them. On this account I, or rather the Lord, beseech (command) you as Christ's heralds (messengers) to publish this everywhere and to persuade all people of whatever rank, foot-soldiers and knights, poor and rich, to carry aid promptly to those Christians and to destroy that vile race from the lands of our friends... Christ commands it.

All who die by the way, whether by land or by sea, or in battle against the pagans (non-Christians), shall have immediate remission of sins. This I grant them through the power of God with which I am invested (empowered). O what a disgrace if such a despised (hated) and base (low) race, which worships demons, should conquer a people which has the faith of Omnipotent (All-Powerful) God and is made glorious with the name of Christ! With what reproaches will the Lord overwhelm us if you do not aid those who, with us, profess the Christian religion!

Let those who have been accustomed unjustly to wage private warfare against [fellow Christians] now go against the infidels (disbelievers) and end with victory this war which should have been begun long ago. Let those who for a long time, have been robbers, now become knights. Let those who have been fighting against their brothers and relatives now fight in a proper way against the barbarians. Let those who have been serving as mercenaries (hired soldiers) for small pay now obtain the eternal reward..."

Source: Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont, 1095, according to the account of Fulcher of Chartres.

1. According to this version of the speech, what land is Pope Urban calling on people to help save?
2. According to this version of the speech, what type of people does the Pope want to go on the Crusade? Is it open to anyone, or are there restrictions?
3. What does the Pope promise to those who go on the Crusade?

4. Based on what you know about the behavior of knights, what do you think the Pope is referring to with the words in the last paragraph

Another account, this one by Robert the Monk written in 1120, presents a different version of the speech.

POPE URBAN II: "From the confines of Jerusalem and the city of Constantinople a horrible tale has gone forth and very frequently has been brought to our ears, namely, that a race from the kingdom of the Persians (referring generally to the Muslims), an accursed race, a race [entirely separated] from God... has invaded the lands of those Christians and has depopulated them by the sword, pillage (violent robbery), and fire; they have led away a some of the captives into their own country, and some they have destroyed by cruel tortures; they have either entirely destroyed the churches of God or appropriated (taken) them for the rites (rituals) of their own religion...

They circumcise the Christians, and the blood of the circumcision they either spread upon the [church] altars or pour into the [water for baptism]. When they wish to torture people by a [painful] death, they [cut open] their navels, and dragging forth the... intestines, [tie] it to a spike; then with flogging (whipping) they lead the victim around until the [internal organs] having gushed forth the victim falls prostrate (on hands and knees) upon the ground. Others they bind to a pole and pierce with arrows. Others they compel (force) to extend their necks and then, attacking them with swords, attempt to cut through the neck with a single blow. What shall I say of the abominable (horrible) rape of the women? To speak of it is worse than to be silent. The kingdom of the Greeks (the Byzantine Empire) is now dismembered (cut to pieces) by them... [Whose responsibility is it, then, to take revenge and to recover these lost lands, if not you?]

[I] do not command or advise that the old, or those unfit for bearing arms, to undertake this journey; nor ought women to set out at all... Let the rich aid the needy; and according to their wealth, let them take with them experienced soldiers.

[The holy city of Jerusalem] is now held captive by [God's] enemies, and is [ruled by] those who do not know God. [Jerusalem] desires to be liberated (freed), and does not cease to implore you to come to her aid... Undertake this journey for the remission (forgiveness) of your sins, with the assurance of the imperishable glory of the kingdom of heaven.

Source: Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont, 1095, according to the account of Robert the Monk.

1. According to this version of the speech, what land is Pope Urban calling on people to help save?
2. According to this version of the speech, what horrible things are the Muslims doing to Christians?
3. According to this version of the speech, what type of people does the Pope want to go on the Crusade? Is it open to anyone, or are there restrictions?
4. What does the Pope promise to those who go on the Crusade?