**Communication and the Crusades:**

**Achievements and Failures**

The status of the medieval papacy was conditioned by the popes’ ability to maintain a fluent communication with the faithful, primarily their leaders. In face of the fragmentation characterizing the feudal regime, medieval popes succeeded to enhance their leadership in the social order, which they defined as *societas Christiana*. As such, it was the Christian faith and the popes’ status as God’s Vicars (**Matt.** xvi: 18-19; **John** xxi: 17), which substantiated its existence and goals.

Papal influence flowed beyond rhetorical theology and paved the way for socio-political movements, such as the Peace of God and the Gregorian Reform. Both developments were closely connected and hint at the fluent communication between the clergy, the pope at its head, and the laity, towards the Central Middle Ages.[[1]](#footnote-1) The crusades were considered an additional reflection of papal leadership and its unprecedented propaganda success. As such they are often being taught in communication schools. Further research of the crusades from a communication perspective, however, offers a more complicate insight. This article investigates two main aspects of the crusades, namely, the success commonly attributed to papal crusade plans and the following propaganda campaign. Focus on the communication perspective, furthermore, provides additional viewpoints behind the decline of the crusades at the Late Middle Ages.

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Pope Urban II launched the crusade at the Council of Clermont (27 November 1095), while establishing the ideological fundaments of the movement, its main audience, and targets. As claimed by Joshua Prawer years ago, it is however “a scorn of history” that the original apostolic homily was not preserved.[[2]](#footnote-2) Available historical records were written about ten years later, thus probably reflecting some of Urban’s plans, but also the achievements of the First Crusade. Nevertheless, the different versions reflect some common trends, which hint at the main apostolic goals, mainly: the liberation of the Holy Land while helping pilgrims and Eastern Christians, both suffering from the Moslems’ yoke. [[3]](#footnote-3) According to Robert of Rheims -- who was present at the council and wrote one of the most popular histories of the First Crusade[[4]](#footnote-4) -- the pope addressed a well-defined public, mainly, the knights of France:

*Frenchmen…men chosen by and beloved of God…it is to you that we address our sermon…Disturbing news has emerged from Jerusalem and the city of Constantinople…that the race of Persians, a foreign people and a people rejected by God…has invaded the land of those Christians…. May the deeds of your ancestors move you and spur your souls to manly courage….And most especially let the Holy Sepulchre of Our Lord the Redeemer move you – in the power as it is of four races – and the holy places now abused and sacrilegiously defiled by their filthy practices…*[[5]](#footnote-5)

Urban confirmed this trend in his letter to the faithful in Bologna (19 September 1096), while clearly establishing the guidelines of a very restrict military enrolment:

*But we do not allow either clerics or monks to go unless they have permission from their bishops and abbots. Bishops should also be careful not to allow their parishioners to go without the advice and foreknowledge of the clergy. You must also see to it that young married men do not rashly set out on such a long journey without the agreement of their wives*…[[6]](#footnote-6)

The papal letter acquires most relevance being Bologna the first European University – *Alma mater studiorum –* and the focus of law studies at the time. The pope emphasized once and again the military essence of the forthcoming expedition, one that excluded the participation of the clergy among other social sectors:

*We have heard that some of you want to set out with the knights who are making for Jerusalem…This is the right kind of sacrifice, but it is planned by the wrong kind of person. For we were stimulating the minds of knights to go on this expedition, since they might be able to retrain the savagery of the Saracens by their arms and restore the Christians to their former freedom…*[[7]](#footnote-7)

Urban’s call, however, expanded far beyond the boundaries of the French knighthood and his plans for a *Gesta Dei per Francos* turned in a few months into the Holy War of Christendom as a whole. Though it is quite difficult to verify participation in the First Crusade (1096-1099), it is rather clear that it embraced all social strata without any differentiation of gender, age, occupation, or military skills.[[8]](#footnote-8) Urban’s demonization of the Moslems,[[9]](#footnote-9) and his mention of old-venerated holy places expanded beyond feudal fragmentary structures, while creating a pan-Christian European movement for the first time in medieval history. The unprecedented massive reaction, according to Jonathan Riley Smith, resulted *inter alia* from Urban’s association of the war “with the most charismatic of all traditional penances, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Contemporary chroniclers were aware of the unprecedented response to Urban II’s message, and approached its wide diffusion in a very short time in terms of divine intervention:

*How many of various ages and abilities and stations in life took crosses and committed themselves to pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre! The news of that revered council spread throughout every country, and the story of its important decision reached the ears of kings and princes. It touched a chord, and more than 300,000 decided to go on pilgrimage and took action to carry out their vow insofar as God had given them the ability…*”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Furthermore,

*When it was God’s will and pleasure to free the Holy Sepulcher…from the power of the pagans and to open the way to Christians desiring to travel there for the redemption of their souls, he showed many signs, powers, prodigies and portents to sharpen the minds of Christians so that they should want to hurry there.*[[12]](#footnote-12)

“The many signs, powers, prodigies and portents” reached their purpose since by the month of December, i.e., only one month after the Council of Clermont, the pope could rightly assume that “it is **widely** known… [that] we imposed on them the obligation to undertake such a military enterprise for the remission of all their sins”(emphasis mine).[[13]](#footnote-13) Urban himself propagated the Holy War against the Moslems in the areas of Angers, Tours, and Limoges.[[14]](#footnote-14) Peter the Hermit complemented apostolic efforts in *urbes et municipia*,[[15]](#footnote-15) thus turning medieval cities into a focal point for crusader preaching and recruitment.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The question however remains whether the widespread attraction of the First Crusade should be regarded as a direct result of papal propaganda alone. One should note in this regard that neither the call to a Holy War against the Moslems nor the indulgence were unprecedented. On the contrary, they both were in line with papal policy throughout the eleventh century.[[17]](#footnote-17) The popular response to Urban II’s call should therefore be regarded as the manifestation of well-rooted ideas, symbols, and expectations, which the papacy **tried** but not always succeeded to canalize into a military enterprise against the Moslems in the Holy Land by a well-defined social class.[[18]](#footnote-18) Indeed, contemporary reactions to Urban’s call either in the cognitive, emotional, and/or practical levels were sometimes not only different – as reflected in the miscellaneous character of the crusade crowds[[19]](#footnote-19) -- but sometimes also opposite to the traditional policy of the Church.[[20]](#footnote-20) The systematic massacre of Jews alongside the People’s Crusade (1096) is the most faithful expression of the divorce between the mob moving to the “land of honey and milk” and papal crusade plans.[[21]](#footnote-21) It further stood against both the Augustinian principle of *testes fidei* – which advocated the Jewish presence in Christendom – and the tolerant policy of the medieval papacy, which precluded anti-Jewish riots and/or their expulsion from Christendom.[[22]](#footnote-22) The outbreak of anti-Jewish riots during the First Crusade was not exceptional; it further characterized the first stages of the Third Crusade in England, as well.[[23]](#footnote-23) The reiterated attempts of the high clergy to defend the Jews while putting their own life and possessions in jeopardy, provides an additional proof of the crusaders’ independent, if not contradictory policy vis-a-vis ecclesiastical norms. It further justifies an additional analysis of the papacy’ attributed success vis-a-vis the development of the crusades in actual practice.

The gap between apostolic plans and the crusades only increases when considering the popes’ pursuit of monarchical rule at the time. The crusades, indeed, were part of the attempts to strengthening apostolic leadership in eleventh-century Christendom. The meeting point between the pursuit of papal plenary power (*plenitudo potestatis)* andthe struggle against the anointed rulers in Christendom, and in parallel, the Christian programmed enterprises against the Moslems matured already during the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073-1085). Indeed, the *servus servorum Dei* was the first pope who considered apostolic support of the Eastern Christians and Byzantium, following a military campaign under papal lead against the insurgent Normans in Southern Italy. Gregory also bestowed his apostolic blessing on the *Reconquista* operations in Sicily and the Iberian Peninsula. In parallel, he fought for the *libertas ecclesiae* thus beginning the Investiture Contest. As rightly claimed by Paul Chevedden, “Once the recovery of the lost lands of Christendom became a stated objective of a newly emancipated papacy, attempts to achieve this political purpose were put into effect and crusading was born.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Urban II’s call from Clermont a few years later was therefore in line with the Gregorian projects. As claimed by Thomas Asbridge, “”Urban’s genius was to construct the idea of crusading within the framework of existing practice, thus ensuring that in eleventh century terms at least, the connection he established between warfare and salvation made clear, rational sense.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Still, Gregory VII’s failure vis-à-vis Urban II’s seemingly success, was in part due to the change of emphasis while Urban’s emphasis on the liberation of Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulcher were just complemented by the Eastern Christians and Byzantium. The goals declared by the eleventh-century papacy in both cases were however manipulated at the service of immediate apostolic interests. As Palmer A. Throop has convincingly claimed, the crusades were an important tool to achieve the desirable but not yet attained interaction between God’s Vicar and the anointed kings of Christendom, the Holy Roman Emperor at their head.[[26]](#footnote-26) The complete absence of kings in the First Crusade and, in parallel, Urban’s interdict of clerical participation were both undoubtedly connected to the kings’ reservations with regard the papal monarchical plans, on the one hand, and the indispensability of the clergy’s presence in Europe to achieve these very same goals, on the other.

The widespread support of the First Crusade does not therefore hint at a popular identification with the papal political goals, which in the most part remained limited to the ongoing conflict between the *rex et sacerdos*. The widespread support on the First Crusade reflects, rather, the needs and expectations generated by socioeconomic developments, first and foremost the demographic growth. Indeed, the papal call for the liberation of the Holy Sepulcher was concomitant with a process of change that embraced large sectors of the European population. Both goals – the liberation of the Holy Land and the pursuit of new markets for a growing population – were not contradictory but complemented each other. They together ensured the seemingly propaganda success of the First Crusade without ensuring the identification with neither the implementation of the apostolic goals to the long range.

On the other hand, the considerable mobilization to the crusade in eleventh-century Christendom reflects the effectiveness of contemporary communication channels to spread the papal message across Europe.[[27]](#footnote-27) The question still stands as to the suitability of these same channels with regard the challenging enterprise overseas. The crusades, indeed, confronted contemporaries, primarily the papacy, with the imperative of developing efficient communication channels with those who departed to the Holy Land. This was a rather difficult goal due to the heterogeneous character of the crusade crowds:

*And whoever heard of such a mixture of languages in one army? There were present Franks, Flemings, Frisians, Gauls, Allobroges, Lotharingians, Alemanni, Bavarians, Normans, English, Scots, Aquitanians, Italians, Dacians, Apulians, Iberians, Britons, Greeks, and Armenians. If any Briton or Teuton wishes to question me, I could neither reply nor understand.*[[28]](#footnote-28)

At the crusader period, however, a magnanimous God seemingly reversed the biblical myth of the Tower of Babel (**Gen.** xi: 1‒9), and those who departed to the Holy Land eventually amalgamated like brothers:

*Consider, I pray, and reflect how in our time God has transformed the Occident into the Orient. For we who were Occidentals have now become Orientals. He who was a Roman or a Frank has in this land been made into a Galilean, or a Palestinian […]. We have already forgotten the places of our birth […]. Words of different languages have become common property known to each nationality, and mutual faith unites those who are ignorant of their descent […]. He who was born a stranger is now as one born here; he who was born an alien has become as a native.*[[29]](#footnote-29)

Notwithstanding Fulcher’s enthusiastic but imaginary description, linguistic barriers did not disappear and characterized much of the crusade period. Twelfth-century chroniclers indeed recognized the “diversity of nations, customs, and languages” among those who restored Lisbon to Christian rule on 25 October 1147, as well.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Semantic diversity left its mark in preaching, the main propaganda network at the disposal of medieval speakers. Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, preached the Second Crusade at the urban centres of France, Lothringia, Flanders, and Germany (1146-47).[[31]](#footnote-31) Bernard, however, was able to preach in French and Latin while his listeners ignored these languages; still, they were captivated by the abbot’s message as if it was emitted in the German vernacular. When linguistic barriers disappeared, as in Vézelay, Bernard’s preaching aroused such enthusiasm that he had to tear up his clothing to meet the crowd demand for crosses.[[32]](#footnote-32) Archdeacon Gerard of Wales, as well, preached the Third Crusade (1188-92) in Latin to Welsh people, whose knowledge of the ecclesiastical language was nil; the clergyman further declared that the main importance of crusade preaching did not lie in its content but in the way it was delivered and the emotions it raised.[[33]](#footnote-33) Universal weeping and miracles were considered most fundamental proofs of success.[[34]](#footnote-34)

The wide reception of both Bernard of Clairvaux and Gerard of Wales makes it clear that beyond linguistic skills, body language and mass suggestion played crucial roles in enlisting medieval audiences to the Holy War against the Infidel.[[35]](#footnote-35) Indeed, the need to dialogue with their contemporaries and bring them to an immediate, active response – i.e., not only taking the crusader vow but also departing overseas -- fostered the preachers’ use of audio-visual channels, such as loud voices, songs (mostly in the vernacular), bells, processions, public prayers, ornaments, and gestures.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Beyond the many communication challenges in Europe itself, furthermore, the crusades faced contemporaries with long, unbearable distances. The slowness of transmission between the two shores of the Mediterranean, crucially affected communication and its effectiveness, as well. The Second Crusade provides a suitable example as to the prevailing delays in time-schedule: According to Bishop William of Tyre, “when the city of Edessa was captured [at the hands of ‘Imad al-Din Zengi, ruler of Mosul and Aleppo, on 25 December 1144] the story of the ominous disaster was carried by rumour[[37]](#footnote-37) throughout the entire west.”[[38]](#footnote-38) However, messengers from Antioch formally delivered the distressing news to the pope almost one year later. Eugenius III reacted immediately ‒ the first bulls calling for the Second Crusade dated on 1 December 1145.[[39]](#footnote-39) The pope reissued his call for a new crusade three months later, probably because the original letters were lost and did not reach their addressees. Carried by monastic messengers, the successive epistles safely arrived at England, Denmark, Tournai, the Lowlands, Flanders, and Lisieux very close to their publication. Eugene III also wrote about his crusade project to Emperor Manuel, who replied in August 1146 and again in March 1147.[[40]](#footnote-40) Still, the Christian armies left Europe only by April 1147, i.e., almost eighteen months after the papal call and two and a half years after the fall of Edessa.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The considerable delay in communication transmission appears to be the rule rather than the exemption: Pilgrims delivered in Jerusalem the news of Emperor Henry V’s death and his succession by Lothar almost one year later, in Easter day (11 April 1126).[[42]](#footnote-42) Similarly, the notification of Frederick I’s death in Asia Minor (10 June 1190) reached Germany only four months later.[[43]](#footnote-43)

If the average crusader could cope with the relative stagnation of information, the leaders required an up-to-date reception and delivery of reports and, no less important, supply. However, the urgent needs of the Latin States usually encountered a slow response, if any, from the West, thus neutralizing the fragile cohesion between the two shores of the Mediterranean.[[44]](#footnote-44) The long delays in transmission further justified, even dictated an independent policy, since it was impossible to rely on timely advice not to mention assistance from Christendom. The communication perspective thus calls for a reconsideration of the colonial essence ascribed to the Latin Kingdom, whose rulers had no choice but to act, more often to react, in a rather independent way. [[45]](#footnote-45)

The continuous use of traditional communication channels, on the other hand, hints at a conservative approach that could hardly face the new needs and the many challenges inherent in the Christians’ settlements *Outremer*. Regular mail services like those operating in the neighboring Muslim States and Byzantium, moreover, remained completely alien to the crusade world.[[46]](#footnote-46) In light of the absence of new communication channels, available letters may hint at the current interchange schedule between the Latin East and Christendom. Patriarch Daibert of Jerusalem, for example, referred in early February 1100 to the former letter of Henry of Castella and John Michael written to his predecessor approximately three months earlier, in November 1099.[[47]](#footnote-47) News of the Templar Master Gerard of Ridefort’s death on 8 October 1189 reached Rome by 11 January 1190.[[48]](#footnote-48) Similarly, the Temple preceptor’s report on the losses at Hattin (3-4 July 1187) inspired Gregory VIII’s encyclical *Audita tremendi*,dated 24 October 1187,and a lost letter of Clement III the following year.[[49]](#footnote-49) It is therefore reasonable to conclude that letter exchange across the Mediterranean took at least between two and three months. Sometimes, however, the delay was much longer: The sealed letter of Patriarch Evremar of Jerusalem on 3 April 1104 reached Lambert, Bishop Arras, only by 17 November the same year.[[50]](#footnote-50) Pope Alexander III urged the prelates and Christian rulers to help the Templars on 22 February and, again, on 12 April 1180, following their request dated on 29 August 1179 -- that is, between six and eight months earlier.[[51]](#footnote-51) King Louis VII referred to Bishop Nablus’s appeal for contributions from earlier that year in his letter dated 28 August 1170. Hostile conditions, the danger of letters’ being stealing, as well as the many accidents in the route that could hinder transmission, led to the parallel use of multiple messengers with the risks of repetition.Prior Guido of La Grande Chartreuse, in his letter to Master Hugh of the Temple (c. 1129), specifically mentions that he is sending copies of this same letter by two separate messengers;[[52]](#footnote-52) similarly, Stephen of Blois referred to the possibility of repetition in his moving letter to his wife Adele. [[53]](#footnote-53) Worse still, writers and receivers were aware of the disturbing possibility that their messages might be falsified.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Although letter exchange across short distances – between Byzantium, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Acre – was relatively efficient, it could therefore fail across the Mediterranean.[[55]](#footnote-55) The maritime journey between Christendom and the Latin East was relatively short -- from fifteen to twenty-five days with favorable winds -- but only during specific seasons, from late March to late October.[[56]](#footnote-56) Climate conditions thus posed additional impediments, leading to an inflexible schedule of missions and messengers,[[57]](#footnote-57) thus avoiding a fluent connection between the Latin East and Europe. Although the crusaders embraced the Muslim practice of carrier pigeons,[[58]](#footnote-58) such a practice could hardly ensure a fluent communication across the Mediterranean.

Considering the precarious geopolitical conditions, there are considerable testimonies of the many perils experienced in the route eastwards and, eventually, the travelers’ joy upon safely arriving at the Holy Land.[[59]](#footnote-59) These feelings of relief were not simple rhetoric, since divine help or the forces of nature were not always on the crusaders’ side*.* Communication problems thus became a constant concern for the population *Outremer*, especially, the leaders. In his letter to Archbishop Henry of Reims, King Amalric refers to his continuous attempts to send a suitable delegation to Christendom (May 1169). Since the ship carrying the first delegation sank, the king had to appoint a new suitable delegation. Archbishop Tyre, Bishop Banias, and Hospitaller Knights thus replaced the members of the first mission, namely, Patriarch Jerusalem, Archbishop Caesarea, Bishop Acre, Hospitallers and Templars, as well.[[60]](#footnote-60) The high dignitaries selected in both missions, hint at the king’s awareness of choosing most reliable messengers, probably due to his reluctance to rely on written messages alone.

The careful selection of messengers thus reflects a most important feature in message transmission between the Latin East and Christendom, mainly, the combination of written and oral practices. Along with their original duty as couriers, indeed, messengers orally transmitted pieces or even large amounts of information.[[61]](#footnote-61) In his letter to the Catholic prelates and laymen in the German region (May or June 1100), Patriarch Daibert of Jerusalem formally declared that:

*… we would have written at length on the amazingly great miracles and countless blessings which the generous goodness of God frequently showered on the army of Jerusalem on its journey and in the capture of the holy city of Jerusalem, but the practiced eloquence of brother Arnulf, who was there to see and hear everything, will provide you with a full chronological account of events if you are kind enough to lend him an ear.*[[62]](#footnote-62)

Arnulf of Chocques was undoubtedly well qualified to fulfil his mission, being the former chaplain of Robert of Normandy, papal legate in the First Crusade, elected Patriarch of Jerusalem (1099, 1112–1115, 1116–1118), and eventually, also Archdeacon (1099–1112) and Chancellor of the Kingdom (1099–1118).[[63]](#footnote-63)

From a statistical perspective, available correspondence reflects the recurrent military-political crises in the Holy Land. Not surprisingly, they encouraged dramatic appeals to the pope and other leaders of Christendom, the kings of France at their head. The King of Jerusalem, the Masters of the Military Orders, and some members of the high clergy wrote fifteen letters to King Louis VII in April 1163 forwards, hinting at their longings for the *Gesta Dei per Francos,* more exactly, for the personal involvement of the Most Christian King.[[64]](#footnote-64) The addressees’ number increased when the situation called for most critical resolutions, such as Saladin’s progress in the Latin East. The Grand Commander and the Preceptor of the Temple wrote a series of letters (July- August 1187 to January 1188) to Pope Urban III, Philip II of France, Henry II of England, Philip of Alsace, and the Western knights describing the traumatic defeat at the Battle of Hattin,[[65]](#footnote-65) and the resulting execution of 230 Templars.[[66]](#footnote-66) The deteriorating situation *Outremer* found full expression in a letter of Conrad of Montferrat – ruler of the Kingdom of Jerusalem as consort to Queen Isabella I -- to Baldwin, Archbishop Canterbury, two years after Hattin (1189):

*The holy city of Jerusalem, despoiled of its worshippers, is to be mourned and lamented. As a consequence of their sins, its inhabitants have been placed under tribute to Saladin, and, having paid the capitation tax, are driven far from the kingdom. The walls of Jerusalem are bereft of their hermit occupants. God has stood back as if from the defilement of our evil, and Mohammed has taken over; where Christ was prayed to day and night at the appointed hours, now Mohammed is praised with uplifted voice.*[[67]](#footnote-67)

Unfortunately, letters of did kind did not encounter the so-expected assistance in manpower and/or supply. On the contrary, a growing sense of frustration and disappointment characterized the thirteenth-century prevailing attitudes to the Holy Land, while the miraculous aura of the former encounter with "a land flowing with milk and honey" (**Ex.** iii: 8) was gradually replaced by the biblical warning of "a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof" (**Num.** xiii: 32).

What one may call “emergency pleas” accompanied the Mongols’ advance in the following century, as well.[[68]](#footnote-68) The Master of the Temple wrote to the Order officials about the Mongol advance and the downfall of Aleppo and Damascus, which brought about a large number of refugees (4 March 1260).[[69]](#footnote-69) Thomas also complained about the distressing incidents of letters’ theft, a crime rather common in the Levant.[[70]](#footnote-70) In light of the crucial situation and the many dangers in the route eastwards, the papal legate and Bishop Belen advised pious women to commute their crusade vows into financial contributions, instead of departing in pilgrimage to the Holy Land.[[71]](#footnote-71)

The crusaders’ recurrent calls for assistanceusually found a positive response at the Apostolic See. [[72]](#footnote-72) It will be rather redundant to detail the popes’ continuous efforts for an effective assistance and, in parallel, their abortive attempts to bring about the mobilization of the Western rulers. Pope Gregory X, for example, a former crusader himself, sent Archbishop Corinth to Philip III of France asking the king to strengthen his support of the crusaders (4 March 1272)*,* andthe same day took care to inform the high dignitaries of the Military Orders about his diplomatic efforts.[[73]](#footnote-73) Papal policy, however, was not in line with the hesitant attitude of most Christian princes, who conditioned their support on the crusade to their own immediate political interests.[[74]](#footnote-74) In most cases, the crusader vow just served the anointed kings as an additional tool to engross the royal income, especially in France and England, the two leading kingdoms of Europe and as such a vital factor in the renewal of the crusades.[[75]](#footnote-75)

The growing indifference toward the Holy Land throughout the thirteenth century was due to multiple reasons, some of them successfully encapsulated by Guillaume Lagarde in the title of his book, “the emergence of the lay spirit at the Late Middle Ages”*.*[[76]](#footnote-76)The laicization and secularization processes embraced all fields of life, and left their mark on the prevailing attitudes to the crusades, as well. [[77]](#footnote-77) True, the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the crusades could be regarded as “a byproduct of a changing world…ever evolving historical reality.”[[78]](#footnote-78) They further embodied more realistic attitudes toward the Holy Land – which included a better knowledge of the Levant and the Moslems -- instead of the mythical approach of former generations.

This process of change favored a gradual diversion from the papal crusade original plans, if not their collapse. Venice’s conquest of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade (13 April 1204) and the Children’s Crusades (1212),[[79]](#footnote-79)both exemplify not only the polarity of the crusades but also the relegation of papal leadership to a marginal place, if any. Although the *realpolitik* of the Italian City State fighting for its economic markets was in open contrast to the mythical approach of the youth, both movements neither reached the Holy Land nor got apostolic approval. Still, the Holy See could sometimes enjoy the consequences, like following the emergence of the Latin Empire (1204-1265) in the Fourth Crusade, which seemingly ended the painful schism. To the long range, however, Venetian achievements were only provisional and brought about the deterioration of the already problematic relations with Byzantium and the much-desired alliance with the Eastern Christians, as well.

The deviation from Urban II’s original goals, however, was not monopolized by the laity. It further permeated apostolic policy, which throughout the thirteenth century turned the crusade into an effective tool against political adversaries and/or the so-called heretical movements.[[80]](#footnote-80) Although *realpolitik* was characteristic of the Italian City States, it did not get much approval toward the policy of God’s Vicar and strengthened the criticism of the crusades, the papacy, and other ecclesiastical sectors involved. The growing criticism justify a revision of the crusade meaning toward the Late Middle Ages.

Jonathan Riley-Smith had defined the crusades as a Holy War proclaimed by the pope in the name of God; as such, it was Christ’s own enterprise, legitimized by His mandate.[[81]](#footnote-81) Although this definition does not restrict the crusade to any enterprise in the Holy Land and/or against the Infidel, the First Crusade did create these links in actual practice. Furthermore, the Christian victories in the battlefield were perceived as an irrefutable proof of Christ’s involvement in and blessing of the Christian enterprise overseas:

*…each faithful soul had no leadership but that of God alone, while he saw himself as God’s companion-at-arms and did not doubt that God went before him, by whose will and inspiration he had started out and with whom he would rejoice as his consolation when he was in difficulties*.[[82]](#footnote-82)

Rather predictably, the recurring reverses in the battlefield later on, brought about opposite results, while facilitating the first seeds of criticism. The main advocate of the Second Crusade, Bernard of Clairvaux, voiced before Pope Eugene III his frustration in light of the crusaders’ defeats, supplemented by his strong own feelings of *mea culpa*:

*[F]ear and sorrow and confusion are in the inner chambers of their kings... we have promised good things and you see there is disorder, so that it looks as though we have gone into this business rashly without stopping to think…. But perhaps our contemporaries say, ‘How can we know that what you say is truly inspired by the Lord? What proof can you give us to make us believe in you?’ I have no answer to their questions; they must spare my embarrassment….*[[83]](#footnote-83)

The confusion and mortification alluded by St. Bernard resulted from the disappointing results of the Second Crusade, the undertaking of which had been so vehemently preached by the Cistercian monk a few years earlier. The frequent defeats in the Levant further stimulated doubts and even suspicions, whether the crusades were indeed inspired by an almighty God or by the greed and ambitions of human beings, the Vicar of God at their head. The crusaders’ failure to recuperate Edessa thus encouraged a process of dissociation between God’s hidden designs and those voiced by His vicar, who was not immune to error and miscalculation.[[84]](#footnote-84)

The continuous failure to defend and maintain the achievements of the First Crusade faced consequently contemporaries with difficult queries, such as how Christ refrained from bestowing victory on the Christian armies and, instead, choose the Infidel — whose terrible crimes were by then well known. The most common ecclesiastical response of *peccatis nostris exigentibus* (required by our own sins), transferred the guilty from the pope, the sponsor of the crusades, to his sinful flock, especially *Outremer*. But this trend, traditional as it was, did not encounter much support. As well expressed shortly after the fall of Arsuf at the hands of Sultan Baybars at late March1265 by the Templar knight Ricaut Bonomel:

*Anger and grief are entrenched in my heart*

*So that I am almost ready to kill myself*

*Or abandon the cross that I had taken*

*In honour of the One who was put on the cross;*

*For neither cross nor faith bring me succor or protection*

*Against those felon Turks, God curse them!*

*On the contrary, from what one can see,*

*God wants to support them to our detriment….*

*So, he is really mad who wages war against the Turks*

*Since Jesus Christ does not oppose them;*

*…And every day they defeat us here,*

*Since God, who used to be vigilant, is asleep,*

*Mohamed is operating with all his might,*

*…For here the Turks have dominated us,*

*Captured, defeated and sold us for cash.* [[85]](#footnote-85)

The balance of forces between Jesus and Mohamed thus gradually turned in favor of the later. Considering the constant defeats, moreover, the Muslims' mockery of the many weaknesses and lack of initiative of the Christian God – “Who … is asleep” -- turned into irrefutable truth. Austore d'Aurillac, a poet from Southern France, did not hesitate to criticize the designs of Providence, which seemed to have allowed if not favored Louis IX's defeats in Egypt (Battle of Faraskur, 6 April 1250).[[86]](#footnote-86) Austore even went a step further and hinted at the possibility that some faithful would embrace Mohamed and Islam in light of this outrageous injustice.[[87]](#footnote-87) Contemporary chroniclers, as well, referred to the wide disappointment from King Louis IX’s crusades, while turning the papal zealous struggle against Emperor Frederick II in Europe, into the main cause of the Christian defeats overseas.[[88]](#footnote-88) At a time when the “Holy War” flourished in the Continent at the service of papal interests rather than in the Holy Land against the Moslems, Guillem Fabre, a citizen from Narbonne, could therefore conclude:

*He who is our head, placed to govern our faith, merits even greater blame. In fact, although the greater part of the known world obeys him, he did not command a crusade against the perfidious wretches who hold the Holy Land before the present discord occurred and before the world became bad; for [if he had done this] I believe that all the great who maintain hatred would now be there [in the Holy Land] doing good*.[[89]](#footnote-89)

The deteriorating situation overseas appeared once and again in thirteenth-century reports. Humbert of Romans, the Minister-General of the Dominican Order and as such, a distinguished member of the high ecclesiastical hierarchy, was aware of his contemporaries’ reservations with regard not only papal policy but the crusades in general:

*…are asking what is the use of this attack upon the Saracens? For they are not roused to conversion by it, but rather are provoked against the Christian faith. When we are victorious and have killed them, moreover, we send them to hell, which seems to be against the law of charity. Also when we gain their lands we do not occupy them as colonists, because our countrymen do not want to stay in these regions, and so there seems to be no spiritual, corporeal, or temporal benefits from this sort of fighting*.[[90]](#footnote-90)

Other contemporaries, as well, emphasized the contradiction inherent in the crusades vis-a-vis Christ’s pursuit of peace.[[91]](#footnote-91) Dante Alighieri could therefore sarcastically refer to “the Holy Land, which seems to have slipped from the pope’s memory,” notwithstanding the papal continuous but still abortive efforts to renew the crusades after the fall of Acre. [[92]](#footnote-92)

The papacy was well-aware of the growing criticism and tried to neutralize it with the same argumentation, which had served so well Urban II’s purposes at Clermont. Pope Innocent III exemplifies this trend at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) when trying to enlist Christendom to the Fifth Crusade:

*Because at this time there is a more compelling urgency than there has ever been before to help the Holy Land in her great need…For it was entirely in the power of almighty God, if he had so wishes, to prevent that land from being handed over into hostile hands…since nothing can resist His will. He has granted them an opportunity to win salvation, nay more, a means of salvation so that those who fight faithfully for him will be crowned in happiness by him, but those who refuse to pay him the servant’s service that then owe him in a crisis of such great urgency will justly deserve to suffer a sentence of damnation on the Last Day of severe judgment…So rouse yourselves, most beloved sons, transforming your quarrels and rivalries, brother against brother, into associations of peace and affection; gird yourself for the service of the Crucified, not hesitating to risk your possessions and your persons for Him…*[[93]](#footnote-93)

Though expressed in a feudal vocabulary that might had facilitated its reception, papal exhortations failed once and again in neglectful hears. The growing criticism embraced additional ecclesiastical institutions, such as the Military Orders, their very existence identified with the heroic defense of the Holy Land. Those same knights who only one century earlier were regarded as *milites Christi,* ready to sacrifice their life and possessions in the Holy War against the Infidel, [[94]](#footnote-94) by the mid-thirteenth century became to exemplify pride and avarice.[[95]](#footnote-95)

The deterioration of relations with Byzantium and the Eastern Christians, as well as the papacy’s difficulties to renew the crusades and, ultimately, the fall of Crusade Acre on 28 May 1291, reflect the collapse of papal crusade plans. It is rather doubtful if the many projects *De recuperatione Terrae Sanctae --* which did not materialize -- could balance the decline of papal leadership.[[96]](#footnote-96) As claimed by Palmer Throop, “as long as the pope could organize public opinion in the interest of the Holy Land, his power was superior to that of temporal rulers.” [[97]](#footnote-97) Thence a clear link between the decline of the crusades and the regression of the medieval papacy up to the papal exile in Avignon.

To conclude, the success or failure of the crusades was concomitant to the papacy’s ability to be receptive to its contemporaries’ needs in time and space. As time went by, however, the papacy failed to adapt its message and goals to a changing world. The Holy War of a united Christendom did not suit anymore the needs of the thirteenth-century emerging territorial states nor the secularization process. The papacy further failed to adapt its communication traditional channels to a Mediterranean society, whose very subsistence was submitted to a fluent communication with Christendom. Thence a twofold failure: first and foremost, toward the European audiences who were not any longer receptive to the papal message. Additionally, the almost complete lack of initiatives that should have facilitated a fluent communication across the Mediterranean and the most required assistance to the crusaders, as well. One may therefore conclude that the crusades were not just a propaganda fiasco but to the long range perhaps also a communication blackout.

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