

Pope Urban II and the First Crusade: An Analysis of the Jeremiad

On November 27, 1095 Pope Urban II gave a historical speech to a large, albeit predominantly religious audience at Clermont. The famed Council of Clermont was to be the start of the First Crusade against Jerusalem. While the acts of this great council were not preserved, four accounts of Urban's speech were written. Due to the reliability of other records kept by Fulcher of Chartres, his accounting of Pope Urban II's speech will be used and analyzed.

The scope of this analysis will focus on Pope Urban's use of the jeremiad in his attempts to compel the council to action. It was ultimately his covert use of this delivery form that allowed Urban complete control over the outcome of this meeting. Words were the most powerful tools available to the high council of the Church, which meant Urban had to deliver them in a way that left the Council of Clermont with no choice but to act. Through a combination of preparation and "being led by the Spirit," Pope Urban II knew that stating his support of the war could potentially divide the Church if its cause was not religious enough to warrant action.

The jeremiad is a typical rhetorical act in a religious setting. Yet it had never been used to cause a war. It is my desire to uncover how the jeremiad becomes the message through the simple fact that its use in precipitating the First Crusade was unique and had never been done before. Creating a holy war through a rhetorical act regularly used to obtain repentance gives Pope Urban even greater strength at the Council at Clermont. It would not be a message his audience would expect. It would not be a message they could deny. It would give Urban the greatest advantage.

It is my intention to illustrate how Pope Urban II's speech cleverly aligns with the basic structure of the jeremiad to demonstrate his expertise in rhetoric and how he used the jeremiad to his advantage in facilitating the First Crusade. I will rely on a variety of historical documents to assist in analyzing Urban's words and outlining the structure of his speech as it fits into each step of the jeremiad "process." In order

to help illustrate the implications of Pope Urban II's use of the jeremiad, I will attempt to give context to the event from a historical standpoint. Without context, the significance of the jeremiad as the message will be ultimately lost and this would be a speech like any other. First, I will examine Pope Urban II and his designs on waging war in the East. Then I will examine the events which lead to the Council of Clermont where Urban was to give his speech. Finally, I shall break down the structure of Urban's speech and align it to the specific elements of the jeremiad to identify his psychological approach for convincing and, I daresay, coercing his audience into action. To date, the jeremiad had been used by clergy to force repentance upon society as a whole. Simply put, the jeremiad was a means to get society to confess to its sins and then repent and move on. Its use upon the clergy itself had never been done before, which makes its use in this context rather unique. Not only was Pope Urban II using the jeremiad, but he was using this rhetorical device for a rather non-religious purpose.

Use of the jeremiad as a religious rhetorical device is by no means uncommon. Since the 7th century B.C. this form of rhetoric has been used by numerous religious figures (Campbell), having originally received its name from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. This was regularly used in sermons and speeches to compel people to action. Pope Urban II's choice in using the jeremiad in this instance was rather unusual considering the intended outcome. In the instance of the Council of Clermont, he wasn't attempting to merely obtain repentance from the masses or recognition as God's holy messenger. This was the first time that the jeremiad was used to declare a holy war.

Generic Criticism

For the purposes of this essay, generic criticism seems most appropriate considering the long-term use of the jeremiad. The genre of the jeremiad is a religious device in which the clergy compel their audience to action. Numerous accounts have been given historically in which the jeremiad was used in sermons. Religious ministers referred to this tactic because it was drastic enough to actually gain the attention of their audience and get them to act. Similar results could not be expected when pulling the sinner aside to speak with them privately. Public perception is everything, and if a sinner is called out publicly, they have but one option to save face: account for the wrong they've done.

Generic criticism is the best approach to take for this speech because certain situations require similar needs. Pope Urban II was faced with a specific need, though this need was somewhat atypical for a person of his station. Yet it was his clever understanding of rhetoric that allowed him to know the possibilities the jeremiad created. Through generic criticism, we can better understand how a specific situation affects a rhetorical act that is commonly used.

In a way, Pope Urban's use of the jeremiad on the clergy of the Church was a reminder that they were man. Seeing as how man is imperfect, they too must be compelled to repent. Were he to ask the clergy to support this holy war by meeting with each of them individually, he would likely have received the same answer: no. Pope Urban knew that the only way to get them to act would be in a large group setting where the opinions of the majority would influence the minority.

Pope Urban II was speaking to an audience of religious ministers and nobility, which means he could not take the approaches typical in the medieval period. For war, rulers would simply state the wrongs done them by an opposing nation and declare war. In other instances, rulers would not even feel the need to give a reason and would simply start a war. Urban did not presume that he had such political power to take either of these approaches. He was a shepherd of man, and he needed to guide his audience to the same decision as himself.

Ultimately the jeremiad becomes the message through the simple fact that it was being used for a different purpose. A war had never been called in such a fashion, which makes it an even more powerful message. If we were to ever question the effectiveness of the jeremiad, we need not look further than this speech. While this rhetorical device offers recurring patterns in action, the actions Urban hoped to attain were quite different from mere repentance.

Pope Urban II

Pope Urban II is well known as an eloquent and motivating speaker in his day and age. That fact alone means the close connection between the events which happened at the council of Piacenza and Clermont cannot go unnoticed by modern scholars. Piacenza was where Pope

Urban was first approached with the prospect of a military involvement in Asia Minor. Based on this, it would be wrong to believe a spontaneous reaction at Piacenza started a “chain of thought in Urban’s mind that ended with Clermont” (Riley-Smith 13). Numerous scholars, including Riley-Smith, believe that his response, a call for the First Crusade, was in fact premeditated.

Since the beginning of his pontification, Urban had been in negotiations with the Greek emperor Alexius over relations between the churches of Rome and Constantinople in addition to military aid from the West to the Byzantine Empire which had just lost most of Asia Minor. For years, Pope Urban II had been waging his own secret war against the Muslims with the desire to increase the influence and reach of the Church on a worldwide scale. In a way, Urban regarded the possibility of a holy war in the East as “part of a wider movement of Christian liberation and did not distinguish it from the Spanish Reconquest” (Riley-Smith 20). The Spanish Reconquest was a war that had been in effect for more than 300 years already, and Urban did not foresee it ending in the imminent future without such a direct assault on the Muslim people.

Riley-Smith further solidifies his claims of the premeditation of this event through the years of work spent negotiating in Greece. Only when Pope Urban “knew himself to be politically strong enough” (Riley-Smith 15) did he put into motion his actions of expanding the reach of the Church, both due to the decline of the anti-pope and western emperor’s strength in Constantinople. In the end, it was Pope Urban II who was considered to have “authorized the war in his capacity as pope” (Riley-Smith 15). His speech at Clermont is was undoubtedly premeditated because of his own personal beliefs about the war against the Muslims in the East. On previous occasions he had already supported wars against the Muslim people in Spain and Sicily. So it is quite understandable that he would support or even facilitate an attack directly in

the heart of the Muslim people. But why would he use the jeremiad as his method of delivery for his speech at Clermont? What made this occasion warrant for such a subtle tactic?

Council of Clermont

The event gives further reason for Pope Urban II to use the jeremiad. From a situational standpoint, this is a unique moment for the Church that requires non-traditional approaches. What better non-traditional approach than to use a traditional rhetorical act such as the jeremiad? Understanding the setting to the situation is important to understanding Urban's choice in using the jeremiad.

News of the ongoing war in the East was not unknown to the leaders of the Church. No, in fact, the happenings in Asia Minor were the reason behind the Council at Clermont. Eight months prior, Pope Urban II was presiding over a council at Piacenza when an embassy from Constantinople arrived to ask aid against the Turks. Urban responded by encouraging "many to promise, by taking an oath, to aid the emperor most faithfully as far as they were able against the pagans" (Erdmann 315). In itself, this was not enough to create a war suitable to Urban's liking. He needed to use a change in tactics. This presented Urban with an opportunity to wage a war and liberate two entities: the Muslim people and Jerusalem. Both he perceived in need of new leadership and a freedom from the "yoke of their own heathen religion" (Riley-Smith 17).

The church leaders in attendance knew the purpose of the meeting, and likely knew what the outcome would be. Urban approached this meeting with the intention of leaving the Church with no alternative but to act. What better way to accomplish that end than through use of the jeremiad? He builds up the importance of the church leaders and how they are ultimately the individuals control and guide humanity as a whole. Urban then calls them out for their sin of not already acting in support of the war, for having indirectly assisted enemies of the church with

their complacency. In closing, the Pope then calls the clergy to repent of their sins of sloth and indifference to support a war endorsed by God because “Christ commands it” (Bongars 516).

The Jeremiad

The term “jeremiad” is used to refer to a sermon or another work which accounts for the shortcomings of society, but demands changes for a happier future (Campbell). The structuring of the jeremiad is simple by modern standards, yet was perceived as quite effective by medieval clergy in facilitating repentance among local followers. For the purposes of this speech, Urban followed the basic format of:

- Recalling the courage and piety of the founders
- Lamenting present ills
- Crying out a return to the original conduct

Typically, clergy used this rhetorical device to an excessive degree and were quite ruthless in carrying it out publicly. Numerous accounts have been given in which clergy called out specific members in the congregation and demanded their repentance. Penance varied depending on the offense, but this was something the peasantry was willing to endure due to the power allotted religion. Religious leaders were given the right of justice to govern the people in all things religious.

Use of the jeremiad was an appropriate method of delivery in his speech at the Council of Clermont. While he did not use this device to its utmost extremes in declaring wickedness and prophesying the downfall of any individual group for a lack of action, he still used the basic structure to his advantage. He could not afford to alienate the individuals in attendance through harsh words and criticism, nor could he allow them to turn against him in this moment. It was no small goal of his to wage war in the East, which meant failure could ultimately lead to his downfall as pope. His speech came out much tamer than a traditional service, though not for a lack of effort. Each word was carefully planned and arranged to Urban’s advantage. The following sections will break down Urban’s speech into the structure of the jeremiad to demonstrate his approach to the topic of war.

You are the Salt of the Earth

Pope Urban II began by reminding the clergy of their role in the world: “For God has put you as stewards over his family to minister it” (Bongars 513). Urban carefully crafts his words to instill in the clergy a sense that the world is their concern and not just the region surrounding their parish. While each clergyman has an individual flock he oversees, there is still the rest of the world to account for. He continues, “If through your carelessness or negligence a wolf carries away one of your sheep, you will surely lose the reward laid up for you with God” (Bongars 513). Should any of humanity fall to unrighteousness, each of the Church leaders is responsible for that failure.

Their duty is a heavy one. Urban continues to build up on the egos of the clergy by likening them to Christ, saying, “You are called shepherds [...] But be true shepherds, with your cooks always in your hands” (Bongars 513). Their duty in society is an important one because it involves guiding the people in the ways of the light. Urban is quite careful in his approach to ensure that the clergy in assemblage know he is not overlooking the work they perform and the service they provide to humanity.

He quoted the New Testament Book of Matthew 5:13 where it says, “You are the salt of the earth.” This is praise indeed, for the man who applies salt shall be “prudent, provident, modest, learned, peaceable, watchful, pious, just, equitable, and pure” (Bongars 513). There are many positive attributes he associates with the servants of the Church. Here, Urban continues to build up the importance of the Church in the eyes of the clergy and how they are to be mentors and instructors to those ignorant to the truth of the gospel. He reinforces their importance by saying, “how can the ignorant teach others?” (Bongars 513). A good question to ask, for a servant of God is by no means ignorant, and quite often perceives themselves as more educated than the “worldly man.”

Simply using a scripture from Matthew, Pope Urban II proves each of them has the power of salt upon the earth. Each of them has the potential for unlimited amounts of influence on the world around them, as does a simple grain of salt. And so the seed is planted.

Weak in the Administration of Justice

Now that he has built up the power of the Church and its clergy in the minds and hearts of his audience, he declares their present ills. His transition is gradual, though there is an obvious shift in the tone of his rhetoric as he changes from praise to criticism. Now that the clergy were backed into the proverbial corner through eloquent words, flattery, and a reminder of their obligation as shepherds of God's children, Pope Urban II called the Church to action in supporting the war against the Turks and Arabs in Romania.

In recent months, crime rates had been steadily increasing throughout religious holdings in France. Tithing was either being withheld or stolen, and iniquity among the people was becoming more common. Pope Urban II quietly notes this disorder and how in some areas, "you are so weak in the administration of justice that one can hardly go along the road by day or night without being attacked by robbers" (Bongars 514). Certainly, it is not the job of the clergy to act as police, though they play a pivotal role in the justice system. While he does not state it outright, he insinuates that laziness or softness in applying the laws upon the land have led to this current state of affairs. Should they continue down this path of disorder, it is but a matter of time before the world as a whole overwhelms the Church with sin. In a sense, the religious leaders have sinned by failing in their obligation to be true shepherds.

He reminds the clergy of the promise they made when they took on their priesthood to "more firmly than ever to keep the peace among yourselves and to preserve the rights of the church" (Bongars 515), which acts as a segue into his true intent. He effectively built up the leaders of the church through flattery and then declared their downfall as teachers to the world.

Their one true course of action to restore order in the land would be a holy war. Denying assistance in this war would be to allow an enemy of the Church to “continue thus for awhile with impurity, [where] the faithful of God will be much more widely attacked by them” (Bongars 516). He calls out any who would shirk in their “duty” as essentially collaborators in the cause of their enemies. While he did not state it outright, any who did not support repelling the Arabs and Turks would cause further grief of the Church and its followers.

“The Will of God”

This final step to the jeremiad is the “call to action,” wherein ministers would then name the price for true absolution. Though he earlier had stated that they were shepherds to the followers of God, he got the attention of the clergy by stating simply that they were failing to protect the world from itself. Any who continued to fail in keeping order and peace in the land were no true followers of God. Whether the clergy wished to believe it or not, Pope Urban II intended to make it known that God was displeased with their performance in the land and that there was but one recourse for redemption. If they sought forgiveness and wished to be the friends of God, “gladly do the things which you know will please Him” (Bongars 513). Urban had a specific advantage in prescribing the penance for any conduct he saw as “unrighteous.” He held the highest position in the Church, and therefore could give orders in the name of Christ. After decades of building political power, this one move enabled him to make any command and people would not dare question if it was his agenda or truly the motivation of deity.

Pope Urban II continues to build his case with remarks that could not be irrefutable without making oneself appear sacrilegious, “I, or rather the Lord, beseech you as Christ’s heralds to publish this everyone and to persuade all people [...] to carry aid promptly to those Christians and destroy that vile race from the lands of our friends” (Bongars 516). The clergy are

once more the divine leaders of the world and must be the ones to compel the common folk to action. Then, to add even more icing on the cake, Urban tosses in, “All who die by the way [...] shall have immediate remission of sins” (Bongars 517). In that moment, Pope Urban II was reestablishing the Truce of God, a declaration that had not been used since the start of the eleventh century.

In essence, this prescription would call for a truce throughout all Christian nations for a set period of time, presumably long enough for Pope Urban II to wage his war in the East. He had sufficient insight to know that simply calling together the armies of Europe because of the actions in the East would not be sufficient to compel secular leaders and common folk into action. The Truce of God was a double-edged sword, promising salvation to those who participated and excommunication to those who did not. Urban called it *recta oblatio*, or “a right of sacrifice” and “an act of devotion for the salvation of the participant’s soul” (Riley-Smith 26). He could qualify it as an act of merit because the crusaders “would be obeying Christ’s injunction to take up their crosses and follow Him” (Riley-Smith 26). While Urban’s intention was to convince the leaders of the world, he knew that without an army there would be no war. Each individual soldier in the war mattered, and they were certain to face tribulation in the long trek east. Pope Urban II’s insight was very prevalent with this declaration and was described by medieval scholar Orderic Vitalis as “a wise and kind doctor [who] had the foresight to see that those who pilgrimaged would be most severely tried by many” (17).

By cleverly instigating the Truce of God, Urban suggested the level of support God held in this endeavor. Why else would such a claim be made? What greater incentive would the common soldier need? The possessions of the world and one’s family are subservient to the will of God, and any who would make such a sacrifice would reputedly be repaid “a thousandfold”

(Bongars 517). To the clergy of the Church, this is a blessing to which any and all should be willing to cast off the distractions of family, friends, and possessions.

The end result of his message's delivery left his audience with no choice but to take up the chant, "It is the will of God! It is the will of God!" (Bongars 517). This was the most powerful method of delivery the Pope could use, for who would deny a cause which the Pope claimed to come of God? If it was indeed sanctioned by deity, then none could refute or fail to act or enforce.

Jeremiad as the Message

Pope Urban II's use of the jeremiad, while effective, was apparently not unexpected. In describing his speech, Riley-Smith described his approach as "fairly conventional, even a little old-fashioned" (29). The jeremiad has been used throughout society, and most commonly among clergy. Yet, it was his main objective that was new. Many scholars noted that, while Urban's method of delivery was typical, it was the end result that had never before been done. In *The First Crusade*, the author emphasized that "never before had a holy war been proclaimed by a pope on Christ's behalf" (Riley-Smith 30). Even more importantly, the participants in this war were "treated as pilgrims, [who] took vows and enjoyed indulgences" (30). It wasn't enough to simply give a straightforward prescription to this societal dilemma. Pope Urban II felt the need to include "incentives," such as the renewal of the Truce of God decree.

The more we consider why Pope Urban II used the jeremiad, the more we see that he was deliberately appealing to those elements in French society which had been so disruptive in the past and were not to be brought to heel until the twelfth century (Riley-Smith 26). The clergy had never been addressed in such a fashion or left with such a potentially volatile prescription to

overcoming their failures as teachers of men. The holy war was an outcome none but Pope Urban II could have expected, yet through the use of the jeremiad it was an assured outcome.

Conclusion

Pope Urban II successfully went through the motions of his speech to call out the Church's imminent downfall and motivate his audience to act. Following the structure of the jeremiad, he stated they all have a heavy burden to hold, but that any who failed in their duty would be condemned to the depths of hell. They could not afford to shirk in this obligation and Urban was willing to pull any punches to convince the council of this decision. Urban's stance on the war was already blatantly apparent, his main goal was to convince the council that it was not his will, but the will of God that they march on the Holy Land. This objective he attempted to accomplish through the use of the jeremiad.

The jeremiad was not an uncommon rhetorical device in the Church, nor was it unexpected that Pope Urban II would use it. While the clergy were not used to having the jeremiad used on them specifically, it was ultimately an example of the effect of the jeremiad on medieval society. The method through which he delivered this speech gave greater strength to his intended purpose, which was to expand the influence of the Church eastward and reclaim Jerusalem and all the holy relics it contained. The delivery of his speech left the council with no other choice but to demonstrate their own piety in executing God's justice upon His enemies. And was Urban successful in his use of the jeremiad? The First Crusade speaks for itself.

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