

# *God Wills It! Supplementary Divine Purposes for the Crusades according to Crusade Propaganda*

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*It is well known that the crusades were represented as wars sanctioned by God, who helped the crusaders. At the same time, according to crusade propaganda, the liberation of the Holy Land was most probably not the only purpose of the crusades. Some sources allow us to affirm that the papacy and preachers had the idea that God would allow the crusaders to settle in Outremer only when they would merit it by the absence of sin. Furthermore, in the second half of the twelfth and, to a greater extent, in the thirteenth century, there was a spread of the idea that God could destroy the Saracens on his own, but was testing his faithful. In fact, all these ideas together suggested that, according to the propaganda, the liberation of the Holy Land was not considered to be God's only goal, for he also wished to bring to this land faithful people without sin who would settle there, elected by God.*

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Much has been said by historians about the purposes of crusading. However, this discussion has mostly been concerned with the motivation of the papacy and of individual participants rather than the purposes of the crusades as they were formally declared in the propaganda.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, some of these stated purposes were not

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of the scholarship concerning the motivation of the papacy and the individual crusaders see Corliss Slack, 'The quest for gain: were the First Crusaders proto-colonists?', in Alfred J. Andrea and Andrew Holt (eds), *Seven myths of the crusades*, Indianapolis 2015, 70–90, and Norman Housley, *Contesting the crusade*, Malden, MA 2008, 75–98. The political purposes of the crusades are discussed in almost all general works on crusading.

usually the focus of inquiry: the crusade was instead deemed to be an expedition aimed at the liberation of the Holy Land, which is the idea usually at the forefront in propaganda sources. Some studies have examined why exactly the conquest of the Holy Land was thought to be so extremely significant: apart from being a sacred space connected with the Scriptures the Holy Land was considered to be God's heritage, the conquest of which by Saracens was an insult to him.<sup>2</sup> However, the scholarship does not go further and investigate whether the liberation of the Holy Land was the sole purpose of the crusade. It will be demonstrated in this article that, at least from the time of the Second Crusade, it was not. Many scholars have referred to such questions when discussing sources where different ideas of crusading are indeed present,<sup>3</sup> but there has been no attempt to pull them together and reconsider the purposes of the crusades from the point of view of those who initiated and preached them.

Anyone who has ever read about the crusades to the Holy Land in either academic or popular literature has heard about the well-known slogan of the crusaders, from the time of the First Crusade onwards: 'Deus vult!' (God wills it!). Furthermore, it seems to be clearly demonstrated in various types of sources and taken for granted by scholars that God was interested in the crusades and helped the crusaders. Thus, if one does not delve any more deeply it is assumed that, according to crusade propaganda, God simply wanted the Holy Land to be freed and the Saracens driven out. In many contemporary sources the crusade was held to be a kind of pilgrimage to the Holy Places.<sup>4</sup> Much propaganda material insisted on the importance of the Holy Land because, among other things, it was a land especially important to God. This seems to be true, but if all the crusade propaganda sources are studied attentively, it is clear that this was not God's only aim. Other purposes, not emphasised either in papal letters or in sermons of the preachers, and not given much weight by historians, none the less did exist.

It appears that God wanted the Holy Land not just to be liberated, but liberated and possessed by people who were without sin, and that he wanted to test his faithful by means of the crusade. Originally both these supplementary purposes appeared in crusade propaganda as a means of explaining the reverses which the crusaders suffered. Especially from the time of the propaganda campaign for the Second Crusade (1147–9), the

<sup>2</sup> The most recent works are Susanna Throop, *Crusading as an act of vengeance*, Farnham–Burlington, VT 2011, and Ane Bysted, *The crusade indulgence: spiritual rewards and the theology of the crusades*, c. 1095–1216, Leiden 2015.

<sup>3</sup> See, above all, two monographs on the preaching of the crusades to the Holy Land: Penny J. Cole, *Preaching the crusades to the Holy Land, 1095–1270*, Cambridge, MA 1991, and Jean Flori, *Prêcher la croisade (XIe–XIIIe siècle): communication et propagande*, Paris 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Villey, *La Croisade: essai sur la formation de la théorie juridique*, Paris 1942, 248–54.

expedition which followed the loss of Edessa in 1144, it was necessary to explain to potential future crusaders why things were going so badly, even though God still theoretically wanted this expedition. Still worse, in 1187 Jerusalem and many other parts of the Latin East were conquered by Saladin. All subsequent crusading to the East was rather unsuccessful, ending in 1291 with the loss of Acre and other remaining parts of the crusader states. In this situation, while preaching the cross, the Church needed to explain why things were going so badly wrong despite God's theoretically ever-present support.

This article is based on two blocks of sources. First, there are those that directly reflect crusade propaganda: papal letters addressed directly to the potential participants, exhorting them to take the cross; crusade sermons preserved in the chronicles (they are very few, but they do exist); letters from church officials intended to encourage people to join the crusade (in this case the letters of Bernard of Clairvaux). Second, there are sources which reflect crusade propaganda more indirectly: papal letters to the clergy prescribing how to preach the crusade; and types of sources whose actual use is uncertain, namely model sermons conceived for crusade preaching, and instructions for preachers. Resources are scarcer for the twelfth century than for the thirteenth, partly due to the fact that the papal registers for the twelfth century are no longer extant. However, there are some papal letters, as well as letters of Bernard of Clairvaux, which allow us to trace the evolution of the thought processes behind crusade propaganda.

*The first supplementary divine purpose of the crusades: the purification of the crusaders*

The first supplementary purpose is connected with the problem of the crusaders' sinfulness. During the First Crusade, the eastward march of the crusaders was not always successful; the chroniclers had therefore to explain these local defeats, trying to reconcile them with the idea that God supported the crusaders. Elisabeth Siberry has demonstrated with a number of examples that crusader chroniclers ascribed all these defeats to sinfulness.<sup>5</sup> As she has shown, this same explanation was typical in crusade sources for justifying the failures of the crusades and the losses of the Kingdom of Jerusalem during the second and subsequent crusades. Basically, sinfulness was a traditional explanation for various disasters which can be found in sources produced throughout the Middle Ages.

<sup>5</sup> Elisabeth Siberry, *Criticism of crusading, 1095–1274*, Oxford 1985, 72–95. On the First Crusade see also N. Morton, *Encountering Islam on the First Crusade*, Cambridge 2016, 152–4.

Such cause-and-effect relationships can of course be found in the Bible, the most known example being that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

When analysing the argument in propaganda sources from the time of the Second Crusade onwards – when the crusaders began to suffer their first, lasting losses – it is not always clear whose sins the pope and the preachers meant. From looking at various examples, it seems that there was no unanimity about the author of this sinfulness: it could be the sins of the Christian inhabitants of the Holy Land or of the whole Christian world.

In the bull *Quantum predecessores* (1145), addressed to the French king Louis VII, Pope Eugenius III states that the city of Edessa was captured by the Saracens because of our sins and the sins of its inhabitants.<sup>6</sup> Pope Alexander III in his letter to all Christendom (1165) generally uses the text of Eugenius' bull, but mentions only the sinfulness of the population of Edessa itself.<sup>7</sup> However, in his bull *Cor nostrum*, addressed to all Christians (1181), he says that the problems of the Kingdom of Jerusalem are caused by sin (*peccatis exigentibus*) without specifying whose sins he is talking about.<sup>8</sup> St Bernard, in one of his letters sent to the German clergy and lay people in order to promote the Second Crusade, explains the disasters in the East as a consequence of 'our sins' (*'peccatis nostris exigentibus'*).<sup>9</sup> He says 'our' probably meaning the sins of the whole of Christendom. The same formula (*'peccatis enim nostris exigentibus'*) can be found in a letter of the archbishop of Canterbury to his suffragan bishops (1185).<sup>10</sup> The bull *Audita tremendi* (1187) says that the conquests of Saladin are not caused by an injustice, but by the iniquity of the people.<sup>11</sup> In another segment of the bull, the pope says more clearly whose sinfulness he is referring to: in order not to lose the lands which remain in Christian hands, we have to think about the sins of inhabitants of the Holy Land and of all Christians.<sup>12</sup> Innocent III, in his letter to the archbishops and bishops of England (1201) promoting the crusade, preserved in the chronicle of Roger of Howden composed around that date, states that 'the Lord wanted to punish our misdeeds by means of the occupation of the

<sup>6</sup> 'nunc autem nostris et ipsius populi peccatis exigentibus ... Edessa civitas ... capta est': *PL* clxxx.1064C.

<sup>7</sup> 'ipsius populi peccatis exigentibus ... Edessa civitas... capta est': *PL* cc.384D.

<sup>8</sup> *PL* cc.1294D.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard von Clairvaux, *Sämtliche Werke lateinisch/deutsch*, III, ed. Gerhard B. Winkler, Innsbruck 1990, 312.

<sup>10</sup> Balduinus Cantuarensis, *Epistola* xcviij, *PL* ccvii.307A.

<sup>11</sup> 'Nos autem credere non debemus quod ex iniustitia iudicis ferientis, sed ex iniquitate potius populi delinquentis, ista provenerunt': *PL* ccii.1540D–1541A.

<sup>12</sup> 'non solum peccatum habitatorum illius, sed et nostrum et totius populi Christiani debemus attendere ac vereri, ne quod reliquum est illius terre deperat': *PL* ccii.1541B.

Jerusalem province'.<sup>13</sup> He says 'our', probably in reference to the sins of all Christians. The same pope, in his letter to the French king Philip II (1199), says that the Holy Land is practically lost without specifying whose sins have led to these deplorable events.<sup>14</sup> Honorius III, in his letter to Leopold VI, duke of Austria (1223), describes how the crusaders became arrogant, thinking that their success was due to their martial skill and not to God's might and consequently God abandoned them and they lost the fortress of Damietta.<sup>15</sup> This sin of arrogance can be found in the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

To sum up, it is unclear whether the success of crusading depended on the degree of sinfulness of the crusaders and of those people who had settled in the crusader states or of the whole Christian world. The latter option is logical, given the importance of the Holy City for all Christians. However, how exactly did the interaction between God and humans in the question of sinfulness function? How exactly does God act when people sin? Usually the sources mention only the fact that disaster is God's punishment for people's sins, but there are several exceptions. And then, what exactly should crusaders and Latins resident in Outremer do in order for divine help to return to them?

An example for consideration is the bull *Cum ad propulsandam* (1193), issued by Celestine III several years after the disastrous loss of Jerusalem and addressed to the English bishops and archbishops. There the pope asserts that the crusaders who had come to the Holy Land many times provoked the anger of God ('divinum contra se suis perversitatibus iudicium provocantes') when they started to rely upon their own forces rather than on God's power and had no fear of God ('quia non in Deo, sed viribus propriis confidebant, et non erat ante ipsorum oculos timor Dei'). At the same time, the pope states that if we become humble and return to God ('si ad eum cum debita fuerimus humilitate reversi ... firmum propositum assumpserimus'), he will grant us a brilliant victory over the enemies of Christ's name ('de inimicis nominis Christi plenam indulgebit de coelo victoriam').<sup>17</sup> That is to say, if Christians stop being sinful, things in the Holy Land will improve. Divine support still exists and has not disappeared at all, but to have it one should not behave badly. At the same time the pope says 'they' and then 'we'

<sup>13</sup> 'voluit Dominus in occupatione Ierosolimitane provincie punire sic nostros excessus': *Chronica magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, ed. William Stubbs, iv, London 1879, 165.

<sup>14</sup> 'fere nunc tota peccatis exigentibus est viris et viribus spoliata': *Die Register Innocenz' III*, ii, ed. Othmar Hageneder, Werner Maleczek and Alfred Strnad, Vienna 1979, 460.

<sup>15</sup> 'fatue cogitantes quod manus eorum excelsa et non Deus omnia hec fecisset': *Epistolae saeculi XIII e regestis pontificum Romanorum selectae*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, i, Berlin 1883, 156.

<sup>16</sup> 'et non reminiscaris Domini Dei tui ... ne diceres in corde tuo fortitudo mea et robur manus mee hec mihi omnia prestiterunt, sed recordetis Domini Dei tui quod ipse tibi vires praeberit': Deuteronomy viii.14–20.

<sup>17</sup> *PL* ccvi.971BCD.

concerning sinfulness, leaving indistinct whose sinfulness in fact provoked the anger of God.

The same pope gives some explanation in his letter *Misericors et miserator* (1195) to the archbishop of Canterbury and his suffragan bishops. According to Celestine, the sinfulness of the contemporary generation ('in tantum excrevit malitia modernorum') provoked the anger of God who wanted to transfer the Holy Land to the Saracens ('manum suam super nos in tantum voluit aggravare, ac terram nativitatis sue, quod sine cordis amaritudine non possumus explicare, in manibus tradere paganorum').<sup>18</sup> It is unclear whether God sent the Saracens intentionally or just did not prevent them from invading Christian lands. In any case, this resulted in the 'pollution' of the Holy Land by infidels ('Jerusalem ... calcatur pedibus iniquorum et illorum spurcicia inquinatur').<sup>19</sup> At the same time, simple repentance in combination with taking the cross is sufficient to change the situation: 'Unburden your hearts before Him so that God might take pity on you' ('effundite coram illo corda vestra, ut adiiciat misereri Deus').<sup>20</sup> If people wish to hurry with proper humility ('cum humilitate debita voluerint festinare') to defend the land of the earthly life of Christ ('ad defensionem terre nativitatis Christi, passionis, resurrectionis et ascensionis ipsius'), God will blow the heathens away as straw ('multitudinem paganorum ut paleam ante faciem venti protinus exsufflabit').<sup>21</sup> Thus, the key factor in the conquest of the Holy Land is not how well the crusaders can fight, but how sinful they are. If they abstain from sin, God will allow them to possess the Holy Places.

Several days after the previous letter, Celestine III wrote to the German clergy in order to organise preaching in those lands. The pontiff specifies whose sins he actually means: God punishes 'for the sins of the Christian people and especially of those who have insulted God in the lands of Jerusalem' ('pro peccatis populi christiani et specialiter illius, qui in Iherosolimitanis partibus ipsum Deum offendebant').<sup>22</sup> Consequently, God allowed the Saracens to conquer the Holy Land ('terram in qua filius Dei dignatus est nasci ... nostris temporibus permisit a Sarracenis potenter invadi') and he invites people to do penance.<sup>23</sup> Obviously, the pope means that God has not sent the Saracens intentionally, but has simply not hindered their coming.

A bull of Innocent III entitled *Utinam Dominus* (1208),<sup>24</sup> addressed to the faithful of Lombardy and the Marches, suggests that God has lost his realm because of the fault of his servants ('qui cum servorum suorum culpa

<sup>18</sup> *Radulfi de Diceto Opera historica*, ed. William Stubbs, ii, London 1876, 132.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 133.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 134.

<sup>22</sup> *Urkundenbuch des Hochstifts Hildesheim und seiner Bischöfe*, i, ed. Karl Janicke, Leipzig 1896, 484.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Die Register Innocenz' III*, xi, ed. Othmar Hageneger and Alois Zauner, Vienna 2013, 296.

regnum proprium amisisset'). He is exiled from his heritage because of our sins, i.e. the sins of the whole Christian world ('ipse de sua hereditate pro nostris iniquitatibus pulsus exulat'). Further, the pope adds that God intentionally allowed the Holy Land and the relic of the Holy Cross (captured in the battle of Hattin in 1187) to be conquered by the Saracens ('capi ab inimicis fidei Christiane permisit') in order to know whether anyone was touched by the insult committed towards him, and whether the zeal of divine law would inflame and excite anyone to take revenge on the insult to the cross ('si quem forsitan tangeret eius iniuria, si quem zelus divine legis accenderet, et ad vindicandam crucis iniuriam excitaret').<sup>25</sup> Thus, God himself allowed the Holy Land to be conquered by the Saracens, and the Christian people were guilty because they provoked his anger with their sins and forced him to act in that way. Since the pope speaks about the insult, the Saracens seem to remain unwanted guests in Outremer whom God prefers to sinful Christians.

Another apposite text is a sermon of the thirteenth century attributed to John of Abbeville which develops the problem of sinfulness.<sup>26</sup> It was probably a 'model' sermon composed for use by other preachers. According to this text, God immediately becomes angry when Christians commit sins ('vehementer irascitur Dominus peccatis Christianorum'), and this is what created problems in the crusades. The Lord intentionally allowed the Saracens to conquer the Holy Land and to pollute it ('eiectis Christianis permittit eam Dominus pollui gentibus'). He did so because the sins of non-Christians are a less important penalty for the Holy Land than the sins of Christians ('minus honerant patriam eius peccata gentilium, nimis honerant ipsum peccata Christianorum'), which are much more considerable than those of heathens or Jews ('multo graviora sunt peccatis gentilium vel Iudeorum'). So, virtuous Christians are more suitable to be the inhabitants of the Holy Land. Theoretically, the arrival of the Saracens in the Holy Land was against God's will ('gentes ingresse sunt sanctuarium contra preceptum Domini'), but he might have preferred Saracens to sinful Christians. Probably the preacher means that the Saracens are not in any way to be saved after their death, nor does God expect anything of them in terms of behaviour, while Christians can be saved, but can lose their chance of salvation if they sin. Furthermore, the preacher says that God accuses us, and thus we must correct ourselves ('Increpat enim nos Dominus et nos corrigi deberemus'). In fact the sermon suggests that in order to have the Holy Land in their possession, future crusaders must meet, so to say, several 'technical requirements'. The author says that God could say 'I am looking attentively, but I do not see to whom I should give the Holy Land' ('Bene intueor sed non

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. xi. 297.

<sup>26</sup> Cole, *Preaching the crusades to the Holy Land*, 222–6.

video cui debeam reddere terram sanctam'). That is to say, none of the potential settlers of the Holy Land deserve to live there.

Here again the sinfulness of the people living in the Latin East, as well as of the whole Christian world, is often mentioned. Settlers in the Holy Land should be without sin; the rest of the Christian world could probably be excused for its sins if it devoted itself to self-correction and sent virtuous people to the Holy Land. Thus, God was believed to have a second objective together with the most apparent and primary one, which was the liberation of the Holy Land. He wanted the lands of Outremer to be possessed by a people free of sin. At the same time, probably the whole Christian world had to work to be less sinful as well. That is to say, the whole world had to be cleansed of sins, and the least sinful part of it, those who had proved capable of waging the holy war wanted by God, could settle in the Holy Land.

The requirements concerning the absence of sin were likely to be stricter for potential settlers than for the Christian world in general, a circumstance that is confirmed by one of the letters of Innocent III. This suggests that profoundly sinful people were not to be allowed to enter the Holy Land to conduct God's war. Leaving for the Fourth Crusade, the crusaders had not raised enough money to pay the Venetians for transportation to the Holy Land by sea. In order to solve the problem, the Venetians suggested attacking their old opponent, the city of Zara on the Adriatic coast, and the crusaders agreed to do so. Angered, the pope excommunicated the Venetians. Shortly afterwards, in 1203, the pope wrote to the crusader army reminding it that the Venetians were excommunicate, and strictly ordering that if the Venetians repented and received their absolution ('si ergo Veneti potuerunt ad satisfactionem induci et absolutionis beneficium meruerunt obtinere'), the crusaders would be allowed to use their transportation to go to the Holy Land and conduct the war against the Saracens together with them ('secure cum eis navigare poteritis et prelium Domini preliari'). But if the Venetians did not repent, they could provide transport for the crusaders, but had no right to take part in military action ('cum eis nullatenus presumatis prelium Domini preliari').<sup>27</sup> If you wage war against the enemies of the cross having anathemised people together with you, this will bring defeat to the whole of the crusader army ('ne, si eis habentibus aliquid de anathemate in crucis insurrexeritis inimicos, non prevaleatis in eos, sed terga vertentes fugiatis potius et cadatis').

Three conclusions may therefore be drawn. First, sins provoke God's anger and the loss of God's help; if Christians repent and stop sinning they can obtain divine support again. Second, God did not send the Saracens intentionally in order to punish his people, he just did not prevent them from coming when he stopped supporting the Christians.

<sup>27</sup> *Die Register Innocenz' III*, vi, ed. Othmar Hageneder, John C. Moore and Andrea Sommerlechner, Vienna 1995, 166–7.



Third, the Saracens remain for God the unwelcome owners of the Holy Land, but he prefers them to sinful Christians.

Success in the crusades without God's help was probably impossible. For example, in the bull *Post miserabile* (1198), Innocent III notes that the crusaders must rely on God's power and not on their forces or number.<sup>28</sup> In the bull *Plorans ploravit ecclesia* issued in order that the clergy preach the crusade (1198), the same pope says that God is angry because during the last expedition the crusaders relied on their power and not on him.<sup>29</sup> In two of his letters relating the capture of Damietta and inducing the faithful to join the crusaders' army, Pope Honorius III states that the victory has been totally achieved by God.<sup>30</sup> In his letter addressed simultaneously to the clergy of many regions (1252), Pope Innocent IV prescribes regular prayers for the crusaders and stresses that victory is achieved not due to the number of crusaders, but as a result of heavenly support.<sup>31</sup> Another example can be found in the treatise *De predicatione crucis* of Humbert of Romans (c. 1266–8).<sup>32</sup> Giving some examples from Maccabees, in chapter xlv Humbert says that the crusaders must rely not on their forces ('non debent confidentiam ponere in viribus suis'), nor on their number ('nec in multitudine') (cf. I Maccabees iii.19) or their weapons ('nec in armis suis'), but on God ('sed in Deo debent spem suam ponere') (cf. Psalm lxxii.28). That is to say that while generally the crusaders were expected to work hard, only God's support was deemed to be the crucial factor in their victory. Thus it is not surprising that when God stopped supporting the crusaders, they inevitably lost.

*The second supplementary divine purpose of the crusades: the test of the faithful*

The second 'supplementary' purpose was closely linked to the first. Originally, it was another way of explaining the defeats of the crusaders from the time of the Second Crusade onward. The disasters of the crusaders were also justified by the idea that God could defeat the Saracens alone, but he wanted to test his faithful in order to determine whether they were really faithful to him. That is why the crusaders suffered even though they were theoretically supported by God.

<sup>28</sup> 'non in numero aut viribus, sed Dei potius ... potentia confidentes': *Die Register Innocenz' III*, i, ed. Othmar Hageneder and Anton Haidacher, Graz–Köln 1964, 501.

<sup>29</sup> 'nec in digito Domini sed sua potius potentia confidebant': *ibid.* i. 431.

<sup>30</sup> 'non manus humana, sed Dominus fecit hec omnia': *PL* ccvii.480D; *Das Rommerdorfer Briefbuch des 13. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Friedrich Kempf, Vienna 1933, 565.

<sup>31</sup> 'non in multitudine exercitus est belli victoria, sed fortitudo de celo': *Registra Vaticana*, disk 22, Città del Vaticano 1999–2000, fo. 212v.

<sup>32</sup> Humbertus de Romanis, *De predicatione crucis*, ed. Valentin Portnykh and Christine Vande Veire, Turnhout 2018, 163.

The first supplementary purpose of the crusades does not detract from their original purpose, which was the conquest of the Holy Land. The military action of the crusaders remains necessary, though it is not efficient without divine support which in turn depends on the degree of sinfulness of the crusaders. However the test for the faithful does provide a different perspective.

The effect is subtle. The significance of the Holy Land and the importance of its defence or reconquest always remain in the forefront of crusade propaganda, probably as the most convincing motivation for taking the cross. But at the same time, popes and preachers assert that God can defeat the Saracens without human participation. He needs the latter for another purpose, namely, in order to test the crusaders and to be sure that the people who settled in Outremer are the most faithful.

As in the case of sinfulness, this serves as an answer to the question that some would have raised at the time of the fall of Edessa (1144): if the crusaders are supported by God, why does the Kingdom of Jerusalem suffer such important disasters? St Bernard, who was largely responsible for preaching the Second Crusade, suggested that while God is able to 'send a dozen of angelic legions' and liberate the Holy Land alone, even without any human participation, he is nevertheless testing you and wants to learn whether among Christians there are some who understand, inquire about, and grieve about his destiny.<sup>33</sup> This explains why very often war waged by the crusaders is extremely hard, despite the fact that they are supported by God. At the same time, Bernard declares that God has started to lose his land, which he had 'dedicated by His own blood'.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the importance of the Holy Land is placed in the foreground.

With this statement St Bernard began an entire tradition of explanations for the disasters which overtook the crusades. Thus, in the bull *Inter omnia* (1169) addressed to the whole of Christendom, Pope Alexander III wrote that God pretends that he does not hear his faithful calling him for help in order to understand whether among them there are any 'searching for him'.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, it must be noted that the foreground of the pope's letter is still occupied by problems of the Eastern Church, with which the papal letter starts.<sup>36</sup>

The idea of a test for the faithful became widespread at the time of the Third Crusade and in the thirteenth century, probably reinforced by the

<sup>33</sup> 'tentat vos Dominus Deus vester, respicit filios hominum, si forte sit qui intelligat, et requirat, et doleat vicem eius': Bernard von Clairvaux, *Sämtliche Werke*, 313.

<sup>34</sup> 'cepit Deus celi perdere terram suam, quam illustravit miraculis, quam dedicavit sanguine proprio': *ibid.* 312.

<sup>35</sup> 'dissimulat interdum clamorem exaudire gementium ... ut videat si aliquis sit intelligens aut requirens Deum [Psalm xiii.2]': *PL* cc.599D.

<sup>36</sup> 'necessitas orientalis ecclesie et fidelium christianorum': *ibid.*

conquests of Saladin, the loss of Jerusalem, and the very difficult situation in the East. Preachers had to justify why things were going so badly, though theoretically the crusades were still willed and supported by God.

In the bull *Audita tremendi* (1187) addressed to all Christians, Pope Gregory VIII says that God ‘could protect [the Holy Land] by his will alone’, but by means of the crusade he wants to ‘learn whether there is anyone who is thinking about God and searching for him’.<sup>37</sup> As in the previous cases, the letter starts with a depiction of a difficult situation in the East, this time caused by Saladin’s conquests. In his famous bull *Quia maior* (1213) Pope Innocent III affirms that ‘The Almighty God could defend this land [Outremer] if he wanted to ... but ... he suggested [to his faithful] a competition, in which he tests their faith as gold in a furnace ... so that those who fought for him faithfully would be happily crowned by him.’<sup>38</sup> This theme is invoked at the beginning of the letter, right after a statement on the necessity of helping the Holy Land.<sup>39</sup>

These two themes – the needs of the Holy Land and the testing of Christians – appear in subsequent papal letters, although the Holy Land still takes prime place. In his letter to the German clergy with instructions to preach the crusade, Honorius III says that God endures the possession of the Holy Land by the infidels as a test for the faithful in order to see if anyone still wants to avenge the insults committed against him.<sup>40</sup> The same pope in his letter to the faithful of Friesland (1226) writes that God can liberate the Holy Land alone, but he endures the infidels occupying it in order to test the faithful.<sup>41</sup> Pope Gregory IX writes to the faithful of England (1234) in a letter preserved in the chronicle of Matthew Paris: ‘[God] allowed [the Holy Land] to be occupied by the infidels for an exercise for the faithful, because his hand is not so abbreviated that it could not liberate [the Holy Land] at once.’<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> ‘Poterit Dominus quidem sola eam voluntate servare ... Voluit enim forsitan experiri, et in notitiam ducere aliorum, si quis sit intelligens aut requirens Deum’: *PL* ccii.1542A.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Poterat enim omnipotens Deus terram illam, si vellet, omnino defendere ... agonem illis proposuit in quo fidem eorum velut aurum in fornace probaret ... ut qui fideliter pro ipso certaverint, ab ipso feliciter coronentur’: *PL* ccxvi.817BC.

<sup>39</sup> ‘instat necessitas ... ut terre sancte necessitatibus succurratur’: *PL* ccxvi.817A.

<sup>40</sup> ‘ad exercitationem tamen fidelium eam passus est ab infidelibus detineri ut videat, si est intelligens aut requirens ipsum, qui eius ulcisci velit iniurias’: *Epistolae saeculi XIII*, 174.

<sup>41</sup> ‘ipsam tamen ad exercitationem fidelium patitur ab infidelibus detineri’: *Groot Charterboek der Graaven van Holland, van Zeeland en Heeren van Vriesland*, ed. Jacob van Beijere, i, Leiden 1753, 200.

<sup>42</sup> ‘ad exercitationem fidelium ab infidelibus detineri permittit, cum non sit abbreviata manus Domini ... quin eam ... liberare valeat in momento’: Matthaei Parisiensis, *Chronica maiora*, ed. Henry R. Luard, iii, London 1876, 282.

There are many iterations and variations on this argument. A thirteenth-century preacher, James of Vitry, in his first ‘model’ crusade sermon, says that ‘the Lord has indeed suffered the loss of his patrimony and wants to test his friends and find out if they are his faithful vassals’.<sup>43</sup> Another preacher, Gilbert of Tournai, adds that ‘the Lord could have liberated Jerusalem, but he wanted to test his friends’ and then repeats James of Vitry’s reflections on vassallic service towards God.<sup>44</sup> Here it should be noted that the idea of a test is fused with another argument in thirteenth-century crusade propaganda, the idea that crusading is a kind of ‘vassallic’ service. Thus, being vassals of God, from whom we hold everything, we should protect our heavenly Lord in the same manner as a secular vassal fights to defend his secular lord.<sup>45</sup>

There are examples where it is declared that God personally calls people to help and at the same time gives them an opportunity to test their faith. Thus, a sermon of the bishop of Strasbourg preserved in the *Historia peregrinorum*, a chronicle of the Third Crusade, first mentions the desolation of the Holy Land and then states that God is ‘calling for help’ in order to ‘test his faithful’.<sup>46</sup> In the bull *Utinam Dominus* (1208), addressed to the faithful of Lombardy and the Marches, Pope Innocent III also talks about the test for the faithful. He begins with a rhetorical question: ‘Is not [God] mighty enough himself to liberate [the Holy Land]?’<sup>47</sup> Certainly, he is able to do that without his people’s help,<sup>48</sup> but he wants to learn who is really faithful to him. At the same time, Innocent starts with a description of problems in the Holy Land, and continues that God personally calls people to help him.<sup>49</sup> Finally, Humbert of Romans, in chapter xi of his *De predicatione crucis*, comments on the capture of the Holy Land by the Saracens: ‘Without doubt, the Lord could take revenge on everything in a moment, but in order to have an occasion for a glorious recompense,

<sup>43</sup> ‘Dominus quidem affligitur in patrimonii sui amissione et vult amicos probare et experiri, si fideles eius vassali estis’: Christoph T. Maier, *Crusade propaganda and ideology: model sermons for the preaching of the cross*, Cambridge 2000, 98. Maier also provides the translation.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Poterat Dominus Ierusalem liberare, sed voluit amicos probare suos’: *ibid.* 186.

<sup>45</sup> Valentin Portnykh, ‘“L’Argument vassalique” au service de la prédication des croisades en Terre sainte (fin XIIe–XIII siècles)’, *Medieval Sermon Studies* lxi (2017), 59–72.

<sup>46</sup> ‘ut suos examinet et probet, ad suum vos invitat auxilium’: *Historia peregrinorum*, in Anton Chroust (ed.), *Quellen zur Geschichte des Kreuzzuges Kaiser Friedrichs I*, Berlin 1928, 124.

<sup>47</sup> ‘aut non est virtus ad liberandum in ipso?’: *Die Register Innocenz’ III*, xi, 297.

<sup>48</sup> ‘non deficiet nec etiam laborabit quin orientalem provinciam quando voluerit et sicut voluerit de manibus eruat impiorum’: *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> ‘ecce ipse ... ad suam subventionem auxilium nostrum quasi exhereditatus implorat’: *ibid.* xi, 296.

he wants to test his faithful and learn whether the ignominy committed towards him touches anyone, while saying: *Who shall rise up for me*, that is for my honor, *against the evildoers?* [Psalm xciii.16], that is in order to take revenge of a dishonor committed by them towards me.<sup>50</sup>

These sources assert the idea that God can do everything alone, but is testing whether we are actually his faithful people. The combination suggests in turn that God intentionally provides us with an opportunity for salvation. In a letter sent to the faithful of Vienne (France) and then to other regions (1200), Innocent III interprets the crusade as an 'opportunity for salvation' provided by God ('voluit fidelibus suis occasionem prestare salutis').<sup>51</sup> It should be noted that in the same text the pope says that the crusade is a test for the faithful ('fideles suos temporaliter probare disponit'). This concept of an occasion for salvation is repeated in the bull *Quia maior* (1213) ('[Deus] ... occasionem salutis, imo salvationis causam prestando').<sup>52</sup> Again, this idea is put together with the quotation about gold in a furnace. In his 1216 letter sent to clergy and magnates, Honorius III states that God can cut off the Holy Land from the Saracens 'with his word only' ('terram ... quam posset eruere de illorum manibus solo verbo'), but he allows the infidel to occupy it ('occupari permisit') until those taking care of its liberation have received their recompense ('quatenus instantes ad liberationem illius ... premium mereantur').<sup>53</sup> In chapter xi of his treatise Humbert of Romans asserts that God is able to defeat the Saracens alone, but wants to test his faithful and at the same time provide them with an opportunity for salvation ('ut habeat occasionem gloriose remunerandi').<sup>54</sup>

Such texts stress that God wants to test his faithful, selects those who are actually faithful to him, and also deliberately provides them with an opportunity for salvation by means of the indulgences given to participants of the crusades to the Holy Land. The offer of an indulgence probably served as an incentive for undergoing the test of faith.

To sum up, God could eject the Saracens himself, even without the help of any crusaders, but he does not do so since he wants to test them, to see whether they are faithful to him. This suggests that only crusaders who prove that they are faithful to God are allowed to possess the Holy Land. Thus, in addition to being without sin, they have to suffer during the

<sup>50</sup> 'Posset siquidem in momento Dominus omnia vindicare, sed ut habeat occasionem gloriose remunerandi, vult probare fideles suos, et scire, quos tangit ignominia sibi illata, et dicit: *Quis consurget mihi* [Psalm xciii.16], hoc est ad honorem meum, *adversus malignantes*, ad vindicandum scilicet contumeliam ab eis mihi factam?': Humbertus de Romanis, *De predicatione crucis*, 42.

<sup>51</sup> *Die Register Innocenz' III*, ii, ed. Othmar Hageneder, Werner Maleczek and Alfred Strnad, Vienna 1979, 499.

<sup>52</sup> *PL* ccxvi.817C.

<sup>53</sup> *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, ed. Michel-Jean-Joseph Brial, xix, Paris 1833, 610.

<sup>54</sup> Humbertus de Romanis, *De predicatione crucis*, 42.

crusade to prove their fidelity. Both supplementary purposes are aimed at selecting people who, according to God's viewpoint, deserve to possess the Holy Land. Such purposes add a new dimension to the entire crusade enterprise beyond territorial, geopolitical, military, ecclesiastical and institutional concerns.

According to crusade propaganda God wanted people to go on crusade. From the Second Crusade onward, it was recognised that although God was able to drive the Saracens out of the East without human help, by means of the crusade God tested his faithful in order to learn whether they actually were his faithful through their participation and suffering. The very fact of participation in the crusades did not give anyone the right to settle in the Holy Land. Not all those who went on the crusades were automatically welcomed by God as settlers. They were allowed to settle only if they were without sin, and the whole Christian world was also expected not to sin too much. If, through their merits Christians were able to conquer the Holy Land, but subsequently started to sin grievously, then they would have been chased out by the Saracens and thus punished.

All in all, it seems that, according to crusade propaganda, the goal of crusading was not only the liberation of the Holy Land, but also its settlement by a righteous people especially chosen by God. The question of settlement was deemed crucial for God: many of the sources dealing with the idea of a test for the faithful clearly state that God could liberate the Holy Land alone. The test, then, was even more important for him.

Such conclusions concur with the views of contemporaries about the status of the crusades and crusaders. Historians have already noted that crusaders were often compared to the Israelites of the Old Testament.<sup>55</sup> Sometimes they are clearly portrayed as a 'new elected people'. For example, the chronicle of the First Crusade written by Raymond of Aguilers tells how St Andrew appeared to Peter Bartholomew, one of the

<sup>55</sup> Paul Rousset, *Les Origines et les caractères de la première croisade*, Neuchâtel 1945, 93–9; Dennis H. Green, *The Millstätter exodus: a crusading epic*, Cambridge 1966, 237–71; Karen Skovgaard-Petersen, *Journey to the promised land: crusading theology in the De profectioe Danorum in Hierosolymam (c. 1200)*, Copenhagen 2001; Svetlana I. Luchitskaya, 'Библиейские цитаты в хрониках крестовых походов' [Biblical quotations in the chronicles of the crusades], in *Одиссея: Человек в истории*, Moscow 2003, 65–72; Nicholas Morton, 'The defense of the Holy Land and the memory of the Maccabees', *Journal of Medieval History* xxxvi (2010), 275–93; Armelle Leclercq, *Portraits croisés: l'image des Francs et des Musulmans dans les textes sur la Première Croisade: chroniques latines et arabes, chanson de geste françaises des XII et XIII siècles*, Paris 2010, 311–23; Martin Völkl, *Muslimen – Mätyrer – Militia Christi: Identität, Feindbild und Fremderfahrung während der ersten Kreuzzüge*, Stuttgart 2011, 77–82; Elisabeth Lapina, 'Maccabees and the battle of Antioch (1098)', in Gabriela Signori (ed.), *Dying for the faith, killing for the faith: Old-Testament faith-warriors (Maccabees 1 and 2) in historical perspective*, Leiden 2012, 147–59.

crusaders, and told him that God had chosen the crusaders from among all people ('elegit vos Deus ex omnibus gentibus').<sup>56</sup> Fulcher of Chartres, another chronicler of the First Crusade, writes that crusaders are people especially elected by the Lord ('Dominus ... populum suum ... ad hoc negotium preelectum').<sup>57</sup> The same idea can be found in another fragment of the same chronicle: crusaders are 'pre-elected by the Lord' ('iamdudum a Domino preelecti').<sup>58</sup> Finally, a chronicler of the Third Crusade, Ambroise, also notes that crusaders are elected people ('ço estoit bone gent eslite').<sup>59</sup> But in these descriptions a question arises: who is more important, the Israelites or the crusaders? Elisabeth Lapina noticed that in the chronicle of Guibert of Nogent (for the First Crusade) there is a tension between the two groups.<sup>60</sup> The crusaders have a more legitimate status than the Israelites, because the Israelites of the Old Testament, as it was explained by Guibert, fought for material values, while the crusaders are fighting for spiritual ones. The same idea can be found in the treatise *De peregrinante civitate Dei* of Henry of Albano, a preacher of the Third Crusade.<sup>61</sup> In the chronicle of Raymond of Aguilers, God appears to Peter Bartholomew and says that he had been disappointed with the Israelites, hinting that the crusaders are now the people whom he loves the most.<sup>62</sup> Finally, Humbert of Romans, in the second chapter of his treatise *De predicatione crucis*, demonstrates that the Israelites are no longer the elected people of God ('qualiter etiam Iudei, quando fuerunt Dei populus').<sup>63</sup> This issue may be developed further, but for the moment it is enough to demonstrate that the purposes of the crusades identified in this article are consistent with the opinion of contemporaries on crusading and the crusaders.

<sup>56</sup> *Le « Liber » de Raymond d'Aguilers*, ed. John H. Hill and Laura L. Hill, Paris 1969, 70.

<sup>57</sup> *Fulcheri Carnotensis Historia Hierosolymitana (1095–1127)*, ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer, Heidelberg 1913, 306. <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 226.

<sup>59</sup> *The history of the holy war: Ambroise's Estoire de la guerre sainte*, I: *Text*, ed. Marianne Ailes and Malcolm Barber, Woodbridge 2003, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Elisabeth Lapina, 'Anti-Jewish rhetoric in Guibert of Nogent's *Dei gesta per Francos*', *Journal of Medieval History* xxxv (2009), 249–51, and *Warfare and miraculous in the Chronicles of the First Crusade*, University Park, PA 2015, 107–16.

<sup>61</sup> 'Si carnales illi homines sola carnalia sapientes, et carnales ceremonias venerantes, ad sanctorum suorum profanationem adeo inconsolabiliter doluerunt, quid facturi sunt Christiani, qui non *in vetustate littere* serviunt, sed *in novitate spiritus* ambulat, qui non ad servitutem tam multarum, tamque importabilem ceremoniarum, sed ad libertatem gratie sunt vocati; qui non *spiritum servitutis in timore*, sed *spiritum adoptionis, in quo Abba Pater* exclament, acceperunt?': Henricus de Castro Marsiaco, *De peregrinante civitate Dei*, PL cciv.352CD. <sup>62</sup> *Le «Liber» de Raymond d'Aguilers*, 115.

<sup>63</sup> Humbertus de Romanis, *De predicatione crucis*, 10.