

The Fourth Lateran Council as the Main Agenda for the Preparation of the Fifth Crusade

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Abstract

The Latin Church in medieval time regarded crusades as holy wars against paganism and heretics. Pope Innocent III was one of church leaders who strongly believed that Christians need to regain the Holy Land. After initiating the Fourth Crusade and was disappointed by the failure of the crusaders, Innocent III organised the Fourth Lateran Council for the main purpose of launching the Fifth Crusade. While some scholars maintained that the reform of universal church was one of the main agendas of the Council, this paper shows that it was ancillary to preparation of all elements within the Church for the next Crusade.

Keywords: *Medieval theology, Crusade, Lateran Council*

Introduction

Crusade is a huge subject. According to Riley-Smith, a crusade was defined as “an expedition authorised by the pope, the leading participants in which took vows and consequently enjoyed the privileges of protection at home and the Indulgence, which, when the campaign was not destined for the East, was expressly equated with that granted to crusaders to the Holy Land.”¹ Pope Innocent III, born with the name of Lothar de Conti, was very passionate about the crusades. He was the one who initiated the Fourth Crusade (1201-1204). However, the Crusade turned out to be a disaster since the warfare was deflected against the city of Constantinople, their fellow Christians. The crusade was thus a complete failure for Innocent III. Nevertheless, the longing to regain the Holy Land seemed to be his deepest ambition. He consequently tried to make preparations for another crusade and put this into the agenda of the Fourth Lateran Council. On 19 April 1213 Innocent III issued the *Vineam Domini* bull to summon an immense council to assemble at Lateran in Rome on 1 November 1215.

Jane Sayers points out that the council had a dual purpose, which was “the calling of a new crusade for the recovery of the Holy Land” and “the reform of the universal Church.”² Marion Gibbs and Jane Lang also express a similar idea when they affirm that “in holding

¹ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades*, (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1977), 15.

² Jane Sayers, *Innocent III: Leader of Europe 1198-1216*, (New York: Longman Publishing, 1994), 95.

the council Innocent had two main objects in view, to expand externally by overcoming the forces of heresy and paganism and to develop internally by sweeping away abuses and encouraging a general spirit of enthusiasm and reform."³ As the result would show, most of the seventy decrees dealt with the reform of the Church and there was an appendix of *Ad liberandam*, which addressed the crusade. However, James M. Powell seems to emphasize that the promotion of crusade was the overarching agenda of the council. By adding the "establishment of peace" alongside the reform of the church, Powell contends that both agendas supported the crusade preparation. They were seen as "of vital importance to the ultimate success of the crusade" as the reform of the church would be "preparing the Christian community to be a worthy receptacle of divine favour" and the institution of peace would "remove a serious impediment to the recruitment of crusaders."⁴ This essay takes side with Powell's view and so will show that crusading preparation is the grand scheme underlying the summoning of the Fourth Lateran Council. Some of the decrees will be discussed and analysed to show the reflection of crusade themes.

The Background of the Fourth Lateran Council

The fact that together with a summons to the Fourth Lateran council, almost all the states of West Christendom were sent copies of *Quia Maior*, an encyclical which is considered to be "the apogee of papal crusading propaganda"⁵, seems to give a strong impression that the crusade was the chief motivation for the council. In the opening exposition of *Quia Maior*, Innocent III highlighted crusading as a benevolent deed, in respect to "the Holy Land in her great need."⁶ He eloquently argued that God could free it from the infidels if he wished, but he intended to put their faith to the test "as gold in the furnace." He emphasized the taking part in crusading to such an extent that he deemed it as "a means of salvation." On the contrary, not taking part in it meant suffering "a sentence of damnation on the Last Day of severe Judgement."⁷ He also pointed out the obedience to God's command of loving one's neighbour as oneself as the motivation for crusading.

To emphasise that the nature of crusade was not only physical but also spiritual, Innocent III instructed monthly crusade preaching and a series of penitential processes. A new system of service with an element of intercessory ceremony should be inserted into the liturgy. The emphasis on penitence in *Quia Maior*, according to Riley-Smith, "underlined the conviction that crusading could only be successful if accompanied by a spiritual reawakening of Christendom"⁸. This conviction was considered to be the reason the Fourth Lateran Council was "permeated with crusading themes."⁹

³ Marion Gibbs and Jane Lang, *Bishops and Reform 1215-1272: with special reference to the Lateran Council of 1215*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 96.

⁴ James M. Powell, "Innocent III and the Crusade", in *Innocent III; Vicar of Christ or Lord of the World?*, ed. James M. Powell, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 123

⁵ Louise and Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: Idea and Reality, 1095-1274*, Documents of Medieval History 4, ed. G. W. S. Barrow and Edward Miller, 118

⁶ G. Tangl, *Studien zum Register Innocenz' III*, (Weimar, 1929), 88-97, quoted in Louise and Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: Idea and Reality*, 119.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A Short History*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), 144.

⁹ Ibid.

The proclamation of the Fifth Crusade by issuing *Quia Maior* appeared to be influenced by the spontaneous movement called the Children's Crusades in 1212. The term itself seems to be misleading since the movements were not authorized by the pope and consisted not merely of children but also the poor, lower clergy, women, and even the elderly, led by Stephen of Cloyes, a shepherd boy, and Nicholas of Cologne. Both of them coincidentally claimed to have had visions of Christ telling them to preach the Crusade and go to the Holy Land by walking through the sea, as it would divide before them, just like the story of Moses and the Red Sea. Although Stephen was advised to go home after meeting King Philip of France, he continued to lead a flock of allegedly thirty thousand to Marseilles to wait for the miracle to happen. When it did not happen, the groups broke up. An unverifiable tale by Aubrey of Trois-Fontaines recounts that some of them embarked on ships with two deceitful merchants and were sold in North Africa as slaves. Nicholas and his followers experienced similar disappointment when they reached Genoa and found that the miracle did not happen. Some of them returned home while some others reached Rome and met Innocent III. The Pope persuaded them to go home and join the Crusade later after they grew up. He was reported to make a statement that "these children put us to shame. They rush to recover the Holy Land while we sleep."¹⁰ From this statement it seems likely that the Children's Crusade strengthened his passion for the idea of crusading to the East.

The Decree of the Fourth Lateran Council

The general council began in the Lateran basilica on 11 November 1215 with the pope's sermon. It was attended by 404 bishops from all of the western churches, a great number of abbots and canons from the Latin eastern churches, 800 leaders of monastic houses, and delegates of secular powers. Even though there were a patriarch of Constantinople, a patriarch of Jerusalem and representatives from Antioch and Alexandria, they were all Latins so that no Greek participants were present.¹¹ The Council was held in three sessions (11th, 20th, and 30th November 1215) arranged by the Pope himself to revere the Blessed Trinity.

The first decree deals with the profession of Catholic faith. The essential beliefs are formulated, which contain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the person and the work of Christ, and the doctrine of transubstantiation in the Eucharist. In the second decree, the teaching of Abbot Joachim of Fiore was condemned since he denied the one essence or substance of the Holy Trinity. Aside from Joachim, the council also condemned the teaching of Amalric, which was regarded as "mad more than as heretical."¹²

The third decree implicitly affirms crusades as the church's form of punishment against heretics. Since heretics were perceived as a serious threat and rebellious to the 'holy, orthodox, and catholic faith,' they would be clearly under the church's excommunication and anathema. Faithful secular powers would be obliged to "take publicly an oath for the defence of the faith" and take necessary actions to "expel from the lands subject to their

¹⁰ Peter Lock, *The Routledge Companion to the Crusades*, (London and New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 166

¹¹ Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1., (London & Washington: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), 228; L. Elliott Binns, *Innocent III*, (USA: Archon Books, 1968), 165-166.

¹² Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 233.

jurisdiction all heretics designated by the church."¹³ If they ignored this duty as instructed by the church, then they themselves would face excommunication and be deprived of all their vassals and lands.

All the faithful Catholics who participated in extirpating the heretics were promised the same indulgence and privilege "as is granted to those who go to the aid of the holy Land."¹⁴ It is obvious that even though the word 'crusades' was not mentioned at all in this decree, they were validated as a means of punishment. Riley-Smith confirms that this 'excommunicamus' actually "justified, and laid down rules for, crusades against heretics."¹⁵ The use of force against heretics was not actually a new decree since it had been justified in Canon XXVII of the Third Lateran Council in 1179. The Council granted the participants two years' remission of sins, full indulgence if killed, and the same church protection as given to those who would take the cross to the Holy Land. However, in the third decree of the Fourth Lateran Council the reward for crusaders was augmented from limited indulgence into the plenary one. Thus, the decree of using crusades against heretics was not only a continuation from the previous council, but it also increased the reward for the crusaders.

It seems very likely that the Albigensian Crusade, which was against the Cathar heretics in Languedoc, provided the context for the first three decrees. The Cathars were also called Christian dualists since they believed in two principles in this world, or two Gods - one was spiritual and good while the other was material and evil. The evil god actually created the material world from nothing. As they could not accept the material nature of Christ, they rejected the doctrine of incarnation and resurrection. They did not believe that Christ and the Holy Spirit were consubstantial with the good God, thus denying the doctrine of Trinity. Since Count Raymond VI of Toulouse did not make any move to expel the Cathars from Languedoc, Innocent III tried to persuade King Philip of France several times (May 1204, February 1205, and November 1207) to take military action against the heretics. However, the King was too busy handling his conflict with King John of England to tackle the situation. On 14 January 1208, Peter of Castelnau, one of the papal legates in Languedoc, was murdered by a follower of Raymond VI of Toulouse. Innocent III was suspicious of the complicity of Raymond as he was just excommunicated by Peter the previous month. As soon as Innocent III heard about the assassination, he proclaimed the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathar heretics with the promise of granting full indulgence and other privileges. This invitation was found attractive since Languedoc was much nearer than Jerusalem and the service was only for forty days. By the spring of 1209 a large number of crusaders gathered to go to Languedoc.

In formulating the church's attitude toward heretics, Innocent III must have realized that the church depended on secular powers in using force against them. Nonetheless, he also knew that secular powers were not always willing to use force against the heretics, as in the case of Raymond VI of Toulouse or King Philip of France in dealing with the Cathars. This consideration seemed to lie behind the emphasis in the third constitution on the obligation of secular powers to expel heretics from their lands. Neglecting this duty would result in excommunication, as happened to Raymond VI of Toulouse, although later on he yielded to the church and took the cross against heretics. The promise of the same plenary

¹³ Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 233.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁵ Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A Short History*, 144.

indulgence and church protection for the crusaders who were against heretics as those granted to the crusaders who went to the Holy Land must have reflected the policy in the Albigensian Crusade. Therefore, the crusade against the Catharism seems to provide the context of the decrees. Sayers holds that “it was clear that the framers of these decrees had the Cathars very much in the mind.”¹⁶

The fourth decree dealt with the relation between the Greek and Latin churches. The primacy of the power of the Roman church over all other churches was established in the fifth decree. The rest of the canons regulated the reform of the church. They managed the discipline of the church (6-13), the reform of the clergies’ morality (14-22), elections of bishops and benefices’ administration (23-32), procuration of taxes (33-34), establishing canonical lawsuits (35-49), marriage (50-52), regulating tithes (53-61), saints’ relics (62)¹⁷, condemnation of simony (63-66), and the Jews (67-70).¹⁸

The canons of sixty-seven and sixty-eight seemed to be devised to protect the economic, social, and, above all, religious life of Christians from the Jews and also Saracens. Any Christians who experienced oppression resulting from the practice of usury from the Jews were instructed to refrain from trading with them. The secular authorities were thus required to take severe action against Jewish oppression. In social life, the Council affirmed that people of either sex whether Christian, Jew or Saracen, had to wear distinguishing clothing in order to avoid ‘a certain confusion’ and ‘a damnable mixing.’ Helene Tillmann points out that this decree actually has ‘a pastoral meaning’ since it prevented Christians from unwittingly marrying or “becoming intimate with non-Christians.”¹⁹ The Jews and Saracens were also forbidden to show up during the Passion Week due to their habit of mocking Christians, which was regarded as insulting and blaspheming Christ himself. The secular authorities were then again commanded to punish the blasphemers.

It is interesting to note that Jews and Saracens were two major external enemies against whom crusaders fought. One cannot forget the horror of Jewish pogroms in May 1096 when the crusaders brutally massacred Jewish communities along the Rhine. The motivation of the pogroms, many Christian and Jewish writers believe, was “taking vengeance for the Crucifixion and thus were accomplishing a work pleasing to God.”²⁰ Therefore, Jews were regarded as the enemy of the Christian faith. The Saracens were not considered to be better than the Jews. In *Quia Maior*, Muhammad was labelled as ‘a son of perdition’, ‘the false prophet’, who deceived the world by ‘pleasures of the flesh.’ Moreover, they invaded the Holy Land, the patrimony of Christ, and inflicted harm on the Christians there. It was not surprising that the Saracens in Jerusalem were the main target of the next crusade to be fought. Viewed from this context, it is clear that the distinctive treatment of Jews and Saracens was grounded not on race, but ultimately on faith. The Jews’ practice of oppressive usury might indicate that their immorality correlated with their faith which

¹⁶ Sayers, *Innocent III: Leader of Europe*, 153-154.

¹⁷ Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 263.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁹ Helene Tillmann, *Pope Innocent III*, trans. Walter Sax, *Europe in the Middle Ages Selected Studies*, edited by Richard Vaughan, (Amsterdam/ New York/ Oxford: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1980), 197.

²⁰ Nikolas Jaspert, *The Crusades*, trans. Phyllis G. Jestice (New York and London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 40.

deserved punishment. The instruction to wear distinguishing dress might be intended to avoid intermarriage between Christian and Jew or Saracen which would be considered as leading to the corrupting of the faith of Christians. The rule of keeping Jews and Saracens away from churches during the Passion Week and the punishment of the mockers and blasphemers was established with the hope perhaps of safeguarding God's name and holiness from their abusive attacks. The belief that Jews and Saracens were enemies of Christian faith meant that the idea of intermarriage and their scornful words toward Christians' worship were completely intolerable and had to be regulated accordingly. Therefore, it seems likely that the enmity between Christians and both Jews and Saracens in terms of faith and the experience of crusades against them influenced the canons of sixty-seven and sixty-eight concerning the church's attitude toward them.

The last canon, called *Ad Liberandam*, dealt with all the necessary preparation for what many scholars identify as the Fifth Crusade. From the outset of the canon the main motivation for the crusade was mentioned, which was to "liberate the holy Land from infidel hands."²¹ All crusaders who planned to go by sea were required to gather in the kingdom of Sicily, either in Brindisi or Messina, on the first of June 1217. It was the date when the truce between the kingdom of Jerusalem and the Moslems would have come to an end.

In fighting the enemies of faith, the canon underscored the purity of the crusaders' heart and their manner of life. Thus, the role of priests and clerics who would join the army in pastoring the crusaders through praying, exhorting, and teaching was perceived to be significant. All the members of the Christian army were encouraged to be "humble in heart and in body, keeping to moderation both in food and in dress, avoiding altogether dissensions and rivalries, and putting aside entirely any bitterness or envy."²² This statement seems to reflect a belief that the sins of crusaders could incite God's wrath upon them and thus hinder them from gaining victory over the Turks.

The idea had become popular following the great loss suffered in the Second Crusade. They regarded the defeat as God's punishment upon the crusaders as the consequence of their sins. Innocent III certainly did not wish to repeat the same mistake and so the crusaders were given a warning to keep their lives holy "so that thus armed with spiritual and material weapons they may the more fearlessly fight against the enemies of the faith." The high correlation between the success of crusades and the purity of the church and all believers seems to explain the main agenda of the Fourth Lateran Council. The reform of the church was not a separate program from the crusades, but on the contrary, it was considered indispensable to support the success of the crusades. Therefore, it might be said that the preparation for the crusade was indeed the ultimate purpose of the council.

All bishops were ordered to persuade and warn those who had made their vows to fulfil them and take up the cross under the sentences of excommunication, unless they had serious obstacles which needed their vows to be commuted or deferred. All the officers of the church who were entrusted with the task of preaching the cross were to do so fervently. All the secular powers and magnates who did not join the army were compelled to send an adequate number of fighting men with three years necessary expenses and with the promise

²¹ Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 267.

²² Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 267.

of indulgences. A share of indulgences would also be granted to those who were willing to provide ships or even build them for the crusade.

Innocent III made every possible effort to augment the funding to avoid the dreadful experience of the previous crusade. He seemed to realize that part of its failure was “the unsatisfactory result of fund-raising.”²³ He might have remembered how the crusaders were driven by the Venetians to conquer Zara and attack Constantinople only because they could not pay for the ships. Accordingly, a system of crusade funding was laid out. The papacy would contribute thirty thousand pounds with the shipping for crusaders from Rome. It was also decreed that all clerics had to give a twentieth of their church incomes for three years for the crusade under the sentences of excommunication, except those who would join the crusaders. In fact it was not the first time Innocent III imposed crusade taxation on the church. He had already done it in 1199 when the clergy were required to give a fortieth of their income.²⁴ However, it turned out to be ineffective since its violation did not incur punishment. Innocent III hence seemed to have learned from the 1199 experience and this time he made it a canon law to guarantee submission. Some officers would be appointed for the tax collections. The pope and cardinals themselves were required to give a full tenth of their revenues.

The canon then decreed that all crusaders and their goods were under the protection of the church. Until there was definite knowledge of their death or return, the crusaders’ debt to creditors or Jews would be deferred. Any action of transferring ships from Christians to Saracens in the East was forbidden for four years. No tournaments might be held for three years and peace should be kept within all Christendom at least for four years.

The last section of this canon dealt with the promise of indulgences as a great reward for those who take up the cross as had been laid out in *Quia Maior*. The indulgences were then formulated for the three types of participants. First, full forgiveness of sins would be granted to those who join the military expedition by themselves. The second type of participants who would be granted plenary indulgences were both those who send out proxies at their own expense and the proxies themselves even though they go at another’s expense. The third type was those who could not go and so give goods or advice and help for the crusade whereby the remission of sins would be granted in proportion to the “quality of their help and the intensity of their devotion.”²⁵ The phrase ‘quality of help’ might actually be obscure. But the third type of participants in the *Quia Maior* was more explicit since the help was stated as money donation so that the remission of sins would be granted in proportion to the sum of their payment.

Conclusion

The emergence of the Children’s Crusade, the issuing of *Quia Maior* in 1213, and the analysis of several decrees from the General Council demonstrate that the central purpose of the Fourth Lateran Council, held by Pope Innocent III, was actually the preparation for crusade. The Children’s Crusade seemed to enflame Innocent III’s desire to regain the Holy

²³ Tillmann, *Pope Innocent III*, 277.

²⁴ Jaspert, *The Crusades*, 65.

²⁵ Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 271.

Land. The *Quia Maior* was filled with his passion for crusading. The Fourth Lateran Council's canons were infused with themes of crusade. The Albigensian Crusade was likely to provide the context for the first three constitutions. The experience of crusades against the Jews and Saracens as the enemies of faith seems to influence the formulation of sixty-seventh and sixty-eighth decrees. Although the reform of the church was discussed in most of the decrees, it was as part of the crusade program for gaining God's favour. In *Ad Liberandam* Innocent III carefully arranged all the preparation for the crusade hoping not to repeat the failure of the previous crusade. By getting approval of the council, according to Powell, "for the first time since its inception, the crusade possessed a body of legal regulation that incorporated virtually all aspects of its program, as well as spelling out the obligations of various segments of the Christian community to support it."²⁶

To modern eyes the crusades brought negative effects, especially to Christian-Muslim relationships. Nick Needham has pointed out that the crusades left "a lasting legacy of bitterness and hatred between Christians and Muslims."²⁷ The Crusades, Needham asserted, "introduced a new note of cruelty and religious intolerance into Christian-Muslim relationships."²⁸ However, judging from the context of their time, it is worth noting that the idea of the crusades sprang from "an authentic religious concern for the liberation of the holy places, the establishment of Christian unity, and the protection of Christian minorities in Muslim lands."²⁹ The religious worldview of the crusaders was that of political Christ. In this kind of worldview, "Christ's wishes for mankind were associated with a political system or course of political events in this world."³⁰ Christ's intentions were understood to be embodied in "a political conception, the Christian Republic, which was thought to be a single, universal, transcendental state ruled by him, whose agents on earth were popes, bishops, emperors and kings." Since the Holy Land was in the hands of infidels, Christ was believed to "authorize crusades himself",³¹ and so the Pope Innocent III was passionate to organise a crusade for the recovery of Christian property. This paper has argued that the Fourth Lateran Council was Innocent III's means to achieve this aim.

²⁶ Powell, "Innocent III and the Crusade", 131.

²⁷ Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power vol.2: The Middle Ages* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2016), 222.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ James M. Powell, "Rereading the Crusades: An Introduction," *The International History Review* 17, no.4 (November 1995): 663.

³⁰ Jonathan Riley-Smith, Introduction to *The Crusades: A Short History*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), xxviii.

³¹ Ibid.

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