

The Lords of Outremer

“Deus lo volt—God wills it!”

The crowd of clergymen, knights, and noblemen, assembled in a huge field in Clermont, France, roars with a single voice. It is a cold late-November day in 1095, but their collective fervor burns away the chill. They have just heard a speech that stuns and then galvanizes them—a call to arms unlike any they have ever heard.

The speaker is Pope Urban II, by birth a French nobleman. He speaks not in Church Latin but in French, the language of daily life. And his words are nothing short of incendiary.

“Distressing news has come to us,” he begins, “that the people of the Persian kingdom, an accursed race, a race utterly alienated from God...has [sic] invaded Christian lands and devastated them with sword, pillage, and fire.” Urban goes on to describe in graphic—and wholly inaccurate—detail the desecration of Christian holy sites, the torture and murder of innocent men, “the abominable rape of women.” And then he sounds his battle cry.

“Who shall avenge these wrongs, who shall recover these lands, if not you?” Urban challenges the crowd. “Oh, most valiant knights, descendants of unconquerable ancestors, remember the courage of your forefathers and do not dishonor them!”

His audience murmurs excitedly. Can the Pope actually be urging them to kill? Is killing not a mortal sin, a sin for which Christian knights—who are trained to fight wars yet know that Christ taught his followers to “turn the other cheek”—can never completely repent?

But Urban has an answer. “If you must have blood,” he says, “bathe in the blood of infidels. Soldiers of Hell, become soldiers of the living God!”

It is a revolutionary war cry, with its promise of eternal reward

Right; Caption painting

