The previous chapter has focused on the institutional and terminological development of the crusade indulgences, as seen in the *statuta* of the papal bulls. In this chapter, we will turn to the arguments in the other parts of the bulls, the *arenga*, *narratio* and *exhortatio*, and look at the ideas behind these declarations of indulgences and the theology that justified them. The arguments for granting indulgences for this purpose reveal how the crusader was believed to earn merit by going on crusade, and what – according to the papal bulls – was actually the meritorious thing about crusading.

The most important theological themes with regard to earning merit in the papal bulls were the crusade as defence, as service and imitation of Christ, as an opportunity for penance, and as a test. These themes were handed on from one bull to another, and some of them were used more or less constantly over the whole period. They were, however, adapted and given new emphasis in the course of events, and the theology of the bulls reflect the changing conditions for crusading as well as the learned discussions of the theologians and canonists.

### 5.1 Defence of Christ and Christendom

The crusade as defence of Christ, the Church, and the Christian brothers is without question the most constant theme in the papal discourse on crusading. It appears in almost all the letters we have examined from Urban II to Innocent III and this makes it the main reason given why participation in the crusade is meritorious.

Urban II clearly indicated in his letters that the purpose of the Crusade to the East was to liberate the eastern churches and the Christians living there from the Muslims. If we are to believe the chronicles, the pope made a very vivid description at Clermont of the alleged savage brutality of the Muslims and of why the Christians urgently needed defence and liberation. This rhetoric is not as prominent in his own letters; only in the letter for the Flemish did he speak of the “barbarian” invasion of the eastern regions and of the city of Christ, which had brought its churches into “intolerable slavery.”¹ Urban also

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¹ Ed. Hagenmeyer p. 136.
described the object that was to be liberated generally as the Church,² i.e. as the whole community of the faithful, and as Christianity (christianitatis).³ Thus, he underlined the common interests of his audience and the eastern Christians by describing the Muslim rule in Palestine as a threat to all Christianity. This same idea of the unity of Christians is also seen in his letters about the reconquista in Spain. Here, too, the object is the defence of the Christian people in general.⁴ The Christians in the East, as well as in Spain, are your brothers, Urban explained in a letter to the knights of Catalonia, and the spiritual reward is granted for giving one’s life for the love of God and one’s brothers when fighting for their liberation.⁵

The same idea was expressed by Calixtus II in 1123, in an exhortation to “defend the brothers and liberate the churches” of Spain: the sons of God were dying from the pagan oppression and therefore all the faithful who would fight steadfast in this war would get the same remission of sins as for the defence of the Eastern Church.⁶

In Quantum praedecessores of 1145/1146, Eugenius III also urged the king and knights of France to defend the Eastern Church and to liberate their brothers after the fall of Edessa. Moreover, Pope Eugenius admonished them to remember the great accomplishments of their forefathers, who conquered the holy places in the First Crusade, and he urged them to honour their ancestors by defending the lands that had been acquired through the spilling of their blood. This point was of course meant to incite the fighting spirit of the king and knights by urging them to live up to the example of their forefathers, but it also reveals a further argument as to why the crusader states were rightful Christian ground: not only were there Christian churches there, but the lands had been acquired through great Christian losses. Furthermore, with the fall of Edessa, not only the Christian rule in the East but all of Christianity was threatened, Eugenius declared, and he described participation in the defence as a “holy and very necessary work and labour” for which the remission of sins was granted.⁷ Eugenius III used the same argument about the crusade in Spain in 1152.

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² To Bologna 1096, ed. Hagenmeyer p. 137.
⁴ To Tarragona 1089, PL 151: 303; to Catalonia 1096/1099, ed. Kehr p. 287.