The Use of the Bible in the Arengae of Pope Gregory IX’s Crusade Calls

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This chapter presents the first analysis and comparison of the arengae (preambles) from a wide range of papal crusade calls, in order to assess how Pope Gregory IX (1227–41) used biblical imagery to justify and promote crusades in a variety of different theatres and against a number of different targets. During his pontificate, Gregory authorized crusades against heretics in Germany, the Baltic and Bosnia, and against his political enemy, John Asen (whom he accused of harbouring heretics). Gregory launched crusades to recover the Holy Land, to support the Latin Empire, and to defend the West from the Mongol invasion. This chapter argues that, while Gregory carefully tailored his use of the Bible in the arengae of his crusade letters, picking out the most relevant and powerful analogies for each of the crusade targets, so as to maximize the chances of winning recruits for the campaigns, there were also a number of common themes that transcended the theatre and target of the crusades. Through these shared references, Gregory linked different crusades together as part of a coherent theology of crusading on diverse fronts.

The structure of medieval papal letters was quite formulaic. After the salutatio, or greeting clause, many (but not all) medieval papal letters contain an arenga, or preamble section. The arenga was a rhetorical and theological section designed to persuade the audience to follow the pope’s orders – which were found in the later dispositio section – by expounding his authority and setting the papal orders in a continuum of biblical history. In essence, it was a miniature sermon on the theme of the letter’s contents. Although both common letters (those on routine ecclesiastical affairs, such as the granting of privileges) and curial letters (those on diplomatic matters) contained arengae, those used for common letters were generic ones copied from papal chancery.

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formularies. Curial staff reused these constantly since the efficient expedition of such routine business took precedence over impressing the recipient with the originality of the pope’s theological conception of his office. The *arengae* of curial letters, on the other hand, were often bespoke products, presumably because their intended rhetorical impact relied on originality.

The pope and his staff invested a significant amount of time and energy in the composition of these *arengae*, especially in the case of crusade encyclicals, for which they constructed complex preambles drawing heavily on the authority of the Bible in order to motivate the recipients to take the cross. Although there has been a great deal of recent interest in the launch of crusades by Gregory IX, the approach adopted in this chapter has never been attempted before, despite the fact that the impact of *arengae* was of the utmost importance to the launch of a new crusade.

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