



History

Paper 1A (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 02 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0 26/02/16

Specimen Answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 1A (AS): Specimen question paper

02 'The crisis of the Byzantine Empire was the main reason for the First Crusade.'

Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

The main reason for the First Crusade being called by Urban II was due to his desire to further the Papal Reform Movement, and not the crisis facing the Byzantine Empire. The reason for this is that although the First Crusade was multi-causal, with each factor – Papal Reform Movement, crisis of the Byzantine Empire and the situation in Western Europe – feeding into the extraordinary take-up of the crusaders after Clermont, what drove Urban was the need to strengthen the papacy and Catholic Church. Alexius' letter to Urban at Piacenza in March 1095 was just the final push the papacy needed to force through plans which had been in existence since Gregory VII's appeal in 1074.

The main reason that the First Crusade began was that Urban II needed to further the Papal Reform Movement in order to strengthen the power of the papacy and Catholic Church. When Urban preached the sermon at Clermont in November 1095 calling the crusade, he was echoing a call made by Gregory VII in 1074, albeit with a different result. The problem that Urban faced was that within Western Europe, the pope was not the automatic leader of Christendom. For example, the Emperor Henry IV claimed supremacy over the pope, and the Investiture Crisis had begun in 1073. In 1080 Gilbert of Ravenna was made Clement III, the Anti-Pope, and Gregory VII and his successor, Urban were kept out of Rome. By the 1090s, Urban was looking for something to lead which would allow him to take back the leadership of the Church from Clement III. He also faced problems within the Church itself, with sins such as simony, clerical marriage and pluralism (having more than one job) having taken hold amongst clerics. He hoped that the crusade would unify the Church and allow the papacy to gain ascendancy over its politics, which would push the ideals of the Papal Reform Movement. Finally, Urban wanted to end the 1054 Schism with the Orthodox Church, where they believed that the Byzantine emperor was semi-divine and the Oikoumene meant Constantinople was centre of the Christian world. Urban hoped that the crusade to aid 'Eastern Christians' (as he said in Canon 9 at Clermont) would patch up the doctrine differences with the Orthodox Church and unite both churches under him. Therefore, Urban called the crusade at Clermont because he needed a 'project' to unite the Catholic Church and place the popes as the leaders of Christianity. This was the main reason, and not offering help to the Byzantines who were in crisis.

A reason of lesser importance for the calling of the First Crusade was because Alexius I Comnenus, Emperor of Byzantium, sent a letter to Urban at the Council of Piacenza in March 1095 asking for help. The Byzantines developed the concepts of Oikoumene and Translatio Imperii, and ruled most of the Eastern Mediterranean. However, after 1025 there was a decline in Byzantine power due to several crises threatening them. In 1071 Romanos Diogenes was captured at the Battle of Manzikert by Alp Arslan. This let the Seljuk Turks into Anatolia and by 1077 Nicaea was under their control. It

also sparked a civil war, ended only when Alexius Comnenus took power in 1080. He was defeated in 1081 by an Italian Norman army led by Robert Guiscard at Durazzo. In the 1080s-90s the Pechenegs raided the northern border. Although Alexius looked stable, he wasn't, and after the death of Sultan Malik Shah in 1092, no-one in Baghdad could control the expansion of Kilij Arslan, who formerly took Nicaea at the beginning of 1095 – Constantinople looked under threat. Alexius felt he had no option but to ask Urban II to help him. Byzantine emperors had a long history of asking for papal help – Michael Dukas asked Gregory VII in 1074, who promised 50,000 men (no-one went), Alexius had used Norman mercenaries eg Rousel of Bailleul, and Robert of Flanders with his Latikon had served at Lebounion in 1091. Alexius and Urban had been in contact before 1095 and may have discussed an expedition to the East. Although the Piacenza letter has not survived, it seems Alexius asked Urban for military help for the 'Eastern Christians', as Constantinople was under serious threat, and probably suggested the military help continue on to Jerusalem. Although some of the ingredients of crusade are here, Alexius was only asking for soldiers – what Urban preached at Clermont became quite different. Therefore, the crisis in Byzantium was a long term issue, and not the main reason why the First Crusade was called.

The least important reason why the First Crusade was called is the role played by political and religious developments in Western Europe in the latter part of the 11th century. As mentioned earlier, the Investiture Crisis was part of a struggle for religious and political power in Western Europe. Henry IV was in dispute with the papacy, but so too (to perhaps lesser degrees) were other kings eg Philip I of France. These leaders in turn often fought each other, and also had to contend with rebellious barons of their own. This led to endemic warfare, and the development of knighthood. As warfare involved killing, it broke the 6th Commandment 'Thou shalt not kill', and so every knight was a sinner in need of redemption. The papacy knew this, and Urban aimed his sermon at Clermont squarely at the knights and men of war – an armed pilgrimage to Jerusalem would save their souls and put their fighting to good use. Popes had used warfare for their own ends, ever since Civitate in 1053, and despite attempts to stop war (Peace and Truce of God movements), Urban had partially endorsed it with the Milites Sancti Petri, Fideles Sancti Petri, and Pax et Concordia Leagues. At Clermont he encouraged it – for the benefit of themselves and the Church. There were developments in theology in the 11th century which also encouraged Urban to want to control and shape things through a crusade. For example, the growth in millennialism as 1100 approached, the importance of pilgrimage and supposed problems pilgrims had getting to Jerusalem, the ideas of Christocentrism, Hereditas Christi, and the importance of the Devil, all meant souls needed saving and Jerusalem was where to do it. However, these were only background reasons – without Alexius asking for immediate help, or Urban orchestrating the launch of the crusade, then these political and religious reasons would not have been enough.

In conclusion, the crisis in the Byzantine Empire was not the main reason for the First Crusade. Instead, it was the way Urban II needed something to unite the Catholic Church and push forward the power of the papacy. It is the case that Alexius asked Urban for help at Piacenza in 1095, but this was one request amongst many from 1074 onwards, and Urban did not even mention Alexius or the Orthodox Church at Clermont (only the more general 'Eastern Christians'). The developments in religion and politics in Western Europe provided the crusader participants, but not Urban's main reason, as they were background reasons. So, the statement has to be disagreed with, as it was Urban's 'project' which started the First Crusade, and not a crisis in Byzantium.

Commentary – Level 4

The answer is direct and clear with an effective introduction which sets out the argument to be advanced. There is impressive use of knowledge to support the arguments advanced. The answer also has range, considering, as it does, a number of reasons for the First Crusade.

Whilst effective and in parts sophisticated (as in the statement that what happened in 1095 went far beyond military aid requested by Comnenus), it is advisable that such answers are structured to respond to the proposition in the question first. There is also some lack of development of the various factors outlined in the final main paragraph. This is a good Level 4 response.