

War Sermons

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Edited by

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War Sermons, Edited by Gilles Teulié and Laurence Lux-sterritt

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INTRODUCTION

GILLES TEULIE & LAURENCE LUX-STERRITT

That war is more than justified, that it is of solemn obligation, when required by the direct command of God is unquestionable.¹

Some twenty-seven centuries ago, the Chinese military theoretician Sun Zu warned rulers that lack of popular support in times of war might herald their untimely downfall. Throughout history, monarchs asserted the legitimacy of their rule of divine right in order to secure their people's allegiance and to avoid any dissension with regards to their martial command. A ruler's authority was not to be questioned by commoners, and neither were his decisions to wage war. In order to embark upon military campaigns with the full support of public opinion, leaders often stressed the collusion of the political and the religious spheres to justify involvement. They depicted their wars as holy and sacred; they were not merely pleasing to the gods, they were also the expression of their divine will, and their direct intervention would guarantee victory on the battlefield. As illustrated by Roman generals' performing of pre-battle religious ceremonies to secure the gods' good will and by the Aztecs' sacrifices of war prisoners as tokens of gratitude for the divinities' help, mankind has always resorted to some form of spirituality in times of conflict. According to Azar Gat, such ritual ties led to the cohesion of a group of individuals who therefore could use their solidarity to oppose others;² subsequently:

[i]n war, the gods, temples, and cults constituted at one and the same time an entity to which appeals for help could be made, a sacred part of the shared culture for the defence and glory of which people could be easily aroused, and, indeed, a semi-independent source of warfare for the satisfaction of the gods' own special requirements, such as a human sacrifice. This powerful projection of the community in the supernatural

¹ Rev. Thomas T. Stone, *Sermons on War*. Boston: Pierce and Williams, 1829, 8.

² Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization*. Oxford: OUP, 2006, 55.

sphere thus constituted as potent an instrument of and motivation for war as did other –more ‘real’- tangible or symbolic factors.³

Thus, war came to be considered not only as spiritually acceptable, but also a means of personal improvement; combat could become a process of redemption for soldiers who, through the selfless and ultimate sacrifice of their lives, gained eternal life in the afterlife.

From the very beginnings of Christianity, the incompatibility of the act of killing with the message of love expressed in the Gospels was tackled by theologians willing to reconcile the masses with this apparent contradiction. The importance devoted by the primitive Church to non-violence was close to Christ’s message of love and peace. Origen (185-253), one of the Fathers of the Church, argued in his *Contra Celsum* that no reason could ever justify the drawing of one’s sword. Yet others like Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373) or Ambrose of Milan (338-397), on the contrary, believed that killing an enemy on the battlefield was permitted and paved the way for future efforts at legitimising war violence in certain circumstances. During the slow process of Christianisation which followed Constantine’s Edict of Milan (313), the defence of the empire against invaders quickly became a Christian duty; in the context of the Barbarian invasions facing Rome in the 5th century onwards, Augustine of Hippo was prompted to delineate the concept of “Just War”. In his *City of God*, he expressed the idea that peace was order and war was evil; however, he also admitted that in the context of the invasions, waging war was necessary to bring order back to God’s creation. Figures as diverse as Isidore of Seville (560-636), champion of the Hispanic resistance to barbarism, or the Benedictine monk Gratian (359-383), author of the *Decretum Gratiani* (1150), justified war as a means of retribution through which injustice may be avenged. During this period, little distinction was made between the notion of just war and that of holy war; indeed, although great efforts were made to promote the Crusades, the spiritual unease of warriors forced to slay fellow soldiers had to be taken into account. Likewise, the Crusades witnessed blurring of the boundaries between military and religious activities, as embodied by the various military orders which created the unique status of monk-soldiers such as the order of the Hospital of St John (the Hospitallers), the Teutonic Knights of the Hospital of St Mary of Jerusalem (the Teutonic Knights) or the famed order of the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon (the Knights Templar) among others. At the heart of these Orders’ *raison d’être* was the dual characteristic conferred to their members: as monks,

³*Ibid.*, 433.

they would devote their lives to God while as soldiers they would safeguard pilgrims to Jerusalem. Their martial mission was therefore based on defensive wars, as underlined by the supporter of the order of the Temple, French Cistercian abbot Bernard de Clairvaux, who stated to Hugue de Payens, co-founder of the order in a famous letter (*Liber ad Milites Templi: De Laude Novae Militae*, 1135) that the Templars had a double protection: an armor of faith and another of steel.

It was in the 13th century, however, that the theory of just war (*jus ad bellum*, or the right to wage war) was finally developed in its fullest form by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) in his *Summa Theologica* (1266-1273).⁴ According to him, a defensive war was always “just” whereas an offensive one could be justified only under three conditions: first, it should be waged by the legitimate and highest authority in the land (by kings, emperors or popes) and not be a private war. Secondly, it should be waged upon legitimate grounds, as justified retribution against the offence given by the enemy, and only as a last resort after exhausting all other means of pacification and justice. Thirdly and finally, the intentions behind the offensive spur should never be moved by personal interest but rather by a true moral concern for the common good.

One of the corollaries of the Protestant Reformation was a sharp decline of the notion of just war, since Reformers advocated a return to the pacifism of the primitive Church; following a different reasoning, Machiavelli’s *The Art of War* (1520) also rejected the just cause theory, this time on the grounds that states need not justify their wars, so long as they obeyed their own political rules on the subject. Yet echoes from the medieval past remained, especially in the Counter-Reformation Church; in an effort to counteract the spread of Protestantism, the Spanish founder Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) created his Society of Jesus. Jesuits, although members of the regular clergy, were invested with a mission in the secular world; theirs was a work of conversion and conquest which was detailed in explicitly martial vocabulary in Loyola’s own *Formula Instituti*. The Jesuits were ‘to serve as a soldier of God, beneath the banner of the cross’; known as the ‘Soldiers of Christ’, they were acknowledged to be the foot soldiers of the Pope and playing a crucial role in the efforts of the counter-reformation in Europe and the Americas.

The just war theory was once more the object of polemic in the century of Enlightenment, since the philosophical shift towards reason was opposed to a theological discourse based on faith. Later on, the ideas of

⁴ A subsequent concept will follow: the *Jus in Bello*, or what is permissible in times of war.

“just war” and of “crusade” were debated in the 19th century and dissident voices (such as those of the Society of Friends, or Quakers) claimed that God could not support warmongers. Yet, in Britain, advocates of the imperial triptych of the three Cs (Civilization, Christianity, Commerce) supported the concept of the “muscular Christian” and the nation’s mood for war. Such a brand of Protestantism encouraged individuals to fight a good war against the various guises of evil, be they personal (the inner struggle) or social in nature. For many, the civilizing mission, underpinned by the Christian ethos to evangelise, justified and legitimised war.

In the twentieth century, the fast-changing nature of warfare could not but provoke new reflections: thus, the idealized vision of war which had flourished since the 19th century met with disillusion in the 1920s. National churches had supported their state in the sustained efforts of World War I, but as the full scale of the devastation became clearer, they often questioned whether such horrors could ever be truly warranted. In the aftermath of the first global modern conflict, the promotion of pacifism took hold of consciences and many Christians were preaching peace in the 1930s, while totalitarian countries were establishing their power. Yet some clerics such as Kenneth Oliver, considered war as a lesser evil than Nazism: “I decided I could not stand aside and that if my services were required as a chaplain, I must go. War was evil, but submitting to a tyranny that threatened to enslave the whole of Europe was a far worse evil”.⁵

In the context of total conflicts such as the Second World War, the notion of just war became more obsolete and was replaced by that of ideological wars in which two ideologically-defined blocks faced each other. The nuclear bombs launched on Hiroshima and Nagasaki triggered new reflection on the changing face of war, as Michael Walzer noted: “A new kind of war was born at Hiroshima and what we were given was a first glimpse at its deadliness”.⁶ With the atomic bomb, traditional warfare appeared outdated and armed conflicts bore the certainty of destruction on an unprecedented scale; thus, as nations became gradually aware of the deadly potential of the nuclear threat, they endeavoured to avoid military engagements whenever possible. The greater nations changed tactics for domination and, without jeopardising the defence of their own territory, began supporting relatively small-scale conflicts, often based on guerrilla warfare, in strategically important locations. In parallel, new types of war emerged, such as decolonisation wars, psychological wars, cold wars, or

⁵ Kenneth Oliver, *Chaplain at War*. Chichester: Angel Press, 1986, 9.

⁶ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars A Moral Argument with historical Illustrations*. New York: Basic Books, 269.

wars against “terror”. Interestingly enough, with the advent of global war against terrorism, the notion of a just war became actual once more: since the Gulf War of 1990 was both by claimed by the United Nations and accepted by Pope John Paul II as justified. Since then, some Western countries have defined other recent conflicts as “just”; the war in Iraq, for which the American President George W. Bush openly resorted to “crusade” rhetoric, testified that the spirit of the holy war had returned.

This collection of essays ponders upon the intricate relations between the military and the spiritual from the Middle Ages to the present day. In order to analyse human attitudes towards conflicts, it is necessary to dwell upon the nebulous area where the religious and political spheres interweave so tightly that they become virtually impossible to distinguish. Indeed, despite remaining the responsibility of the state, the political decision to go to war depends heavily on some spiritual underpinning since, without a moral, ethical, or religious justification, it stands for gratuitous violence and is often equated with aggression. In the last decades of the 20th century, the opinions of Church and State leaders have differed greatly on the necessity to wage war. Keith Robbins reminds us that: “[...], in relation to specific conflicts over the last quarter of a century, church leaderships have expressed scepticism if not outright hostility to British military activity overseas”.⁷

Situated as they are at the intersection of religious and political awareness, war sermons are an invaluable source of information regarding societies in times of conflict. Indeed, whether favourable or hostile to the waging of war, preachers participated in the edification of their parishioners’ opinion. The writing, delivering or reading of sermons shaped the mental process of peoples who sought their ministers’ moral and spiritual guidance in times of crisis.⁸ According to French theologian Laurent Gambarotto, writing about French Reformed Church pastors during the First World War, preachers were impregnated with a culture of war.⁹ Through their sermons, preachers sometimes opposed their congregations’ positive viewing of war; Rev. F.W. Aveling and Rev. G.

⁷ Keith Robbins, “Onward Christian Soldiers? British Churches and War in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century” in Gilles Teulié (ed.), *Religious Writings and War*, Montpellier, Les Carnets du Cerpac no 3, Montpellier UP, 177-197, (196, 197), 2006.

⁸ Christiane D’Haussy (ed.), *English Sermons, Mirrors of Society*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1995, 23

⁹ Laurent Gambarotto, *Foi et Patrie. La prédication du protestantisme français pendant la Première Guerre Mondiale*. Genève : Labor et Fides, 1996, 415.

Critchley, for instance, both opposed the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and became the objects of intimidation and collusion; they both received threats of physical violence and endured the smashing of their houses' windows, until the latter was finally driven to resign.¹⁰ Yet most preachers acted in accordance with the public mood, and through their assent, they helped legitimise popular opinion on specific wars.

This collection of essays inscribes itself within the renewed debate on the function of war, its representations and its rhetoric as generators of identity. Historians have already focused upon specific wars¹¹ or upon the sermons devoted to a particular religious group.¹² The purpose of our collection is somewhat different since it will trace, over the *longue durée*, the evolution of the rhetoric used from the pulpit to justify a divinely-ordained conflict or to condemn an unjust one. In the field of religious studies in the English-speaking world from the Middle Ages to the present day, an examination of the body of texts constituted by war sermons preached by Catholic or Anglican priests, Protestant pastors and ministers of other confessions, will throw considerable light on the evolution of ideologies. Sermons by their nature serve a multi-faceted function, they aim at the education, the edification and the exhortation of their congregations. As they commented upon events, homiletics and sermonists gave their audiences advice and moral guidelines; they combined the educational aspect of their sermons with exhortations which ranged from fund raising "to downright propaganda, when the influence of

¹⁰ See Greg Cuthbertson, "Pricking the 'Nonconformist conscience': Religion against the South African War", in Donal Lowry (ed.), *The South African War Reappraised*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000, 169-185 (177).

¹¹ See Beverly Mayne Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy, and Crusade in Occitania 1145-1229: Preaching in the Lord's Vineyard*. Rochester NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2001; Christoph T. Maier, *Crusade, Propaganda and Ideology. Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross*. Cambridge: CUP, 2000; Charles Wilbanks, *The American Revolution and Righteous Community: Selected Sermons of Bishop Robert Smith*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2007; William H. Duke, Jr., *For the Living in these Days. Responses to Terrorism. Sermons Preached by Virginia Baptist Ministers on the Sunday following the September 11 Terrorist Attack*. Richmond VA: Centre for Baptist Heritage & Studies, University of Richmond, 2001; David B. Cheesbrough, "God Ordained This War": *War Sermons on the Sectional Crisis 1830-1865*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991; Unknown author, *Sermons on Slavery and the Civil War*. Ann Harbor: University of Michigan Library, 2001.

¹² See Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching in Times of War, 1800-2001*. Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007.

the sermon is used as a weapon for political or social indoctrination”.¹³ This collection of essays will therefore attempt to decipher how ideologies were elaborated and implemented, through time, in order to exhort people to support wars. One of the essential keys to understanding the influence played by war sermons is the justification of war through Scripture, which cannot be dissociated from the notion of a just war and the way in which that theory evolved. Thus, peace sermons in times of war, as well as those using the metaphors of war and peace, are an integral part of this analysis since they are as revealing of religious positions about armed conflicts as sermons which supported war.

The following fourteen chapters are set in chronological order so as to show the evolution of war sermons through the ages. As the power of the Church increased in the Middle Ages, war in Europe became codified by Christian nations. The creation of the Truce of God set a standard for lords and knights and defined a religious framework for war. Clergymen came to play an essential role in war, as proved by the creation in mid-12th century of the “Bishop” as a chessman in the war game played by kings and aristocrats and the subsequent use of chess war terminology in 13th century sermons.¹⁴ The military and the religious became so close that sometimes there was no difference as intertwined when, during the third crusade, the bishops of Lydda and Acre fought during the battle of Hattin (July 1187). Thus, the collection opens with the troubled times of the Crusades when, as Waltraud Verlaguet argues, sermons were an essential component of the emergence of a European ideal and shaped modern Western representations; at the core of the system which incited people to start their military pilgrimage to Jerusalem, preachers adjusted their rhetorical arguments in order to overcome the growing popular reticence which met the frequent calls for crusades. In chapter two, Catherine Hemet-Royer delves into the origin and evolution of medieval “propaganda”: focusing upon Thomas Bradwardine’s preaching of his *Sermo Epinicius* after the battle of Crécy, she demonstrates the importance of thanksgiving sermons as tools to uplift the deflated morale of the English troops. The writing of such war sermons was therefore, she argues, an essential part of a court preacher’s activity; through such admonitions, clerics became an integral part of the war effort.

The Renaissance, and the Reformation in particular, heralded some important changes in sermon-writing and, in chapter three, Leticia Alvarez

¹³ Christiane D’Haussy (ed.), *English Sermons, Mirrors of Society*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1995, 23

¹⁴ See James Robinson, *The Lewis Chessmen*. London: British Museum Press, 2004, 23.

Recio highlights the emerging specificity of English Protestant sermons, in which homiletic literature became increasingly central. These highly-politicised writings encapsulated the rhetoric elaborated to protect England, its Queen and its faith against their enemies, whether they came from overseas (Spain) or from within (English Catholics). From then on, Protestant pulpiteers perpetuated the art of sermon writing and preaching in England as a codified literary genre of crucial consequence even in the highest of spheres. Thus, in early modern England, sermons became a means for the nation to unite against a common enemy, and to grow stronger in its conviction that God favoured that chosen kingdom, that new Israel. In chapter four, through an analysis of the rhetoric of John Donne's sermons, Marie-Christine Munoz shows that the dichotomy of war and peace came to represent the symbolic fight of good against evil. Donne distanced himself from strictly political issues regarding his monarch's legitimacy in waging war and, rather, chose to address individuals Christians, through the evocation of their inner struggle to lead a good life. This was a battle of momentous import, a daily war against moral evil, the principles of which applied, of course, in the more tangible instance of military conflict: the Christian, in the end, had to choose a side, and to fight for a cause. Thus, in sermons about war, the frontiers between the religious and the military, between spiritual and physical war, are constantly breached; indeed, both the conceptual framework and the rhetorical tools used to refer to moral struggle or martial warfare have much in common, and participate of the same effort to tackle issues as absolute as good and evil. Marie L. Ahearn, referring to New England's Militia in the 18th century, commented upon the difficulty to distinguish between spiritual and military conflict: "Sometimes, in treating the dual theme of spiritual and temporal warfare, rhetorical distinctions blurred, and descriptions of spiritual war became interchangeable with war in this world; [...]."¹⁵

In Chapter five, Christine Ronchail studies the thanksgiving sermon of a French Reformed Church pastor celebrating the end of a conflict between two Protestant countries, England and the United Provinces. Although war sermons generally oppose a Christian nation to infidels, thus accounting for the obvious dichotomy between good and evil, this thanksgiving sermon, on the contrary, praises both sides, thereby raising the question of how two Protestant peoples can both benefit from the same divine support. Indeed, sermons focusing on the war effort were meant to emphasise the differences between opposing nations, to enhance the virtue

¹⁵ Marie L. Ahearn, *The Rhetoric of War. Training Day, the Militia and the Military Sermon*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989, 56.

of the civilised “us” whilst demonising the barbaric “them”; their purpose was clearly to exacerbate antagonism and galvanise the troops. Peace sermons, on the contrary, focused upon the similarities which made a peace treaty possible between nations which had been formerly opposed. Since peace was a sign of God’s blessing, thanksgiving sermons showed that both sides were blessed, through peace, by divine grace. Peace was therefore construed as a sign of divine approval, as a reward bestowed upon two nations by the Almighty.

If the achievement of peace was understood as a clear sign of divine benevolence, war was, on the contrary, the symptom of God’s wrath, a punishment sent upon all sinners. Through his analysis of rhetoric, Michael Rotenberg-Schwartz, in chapter six, shows that 18th century British sermons presented war as a God-sent punishment for the sins of society: using a wide range of Biblical references, they both justified defensive wars and commented upon the wrath of God against sinners. However, their theology was enriched by humanist trends which condemned brutality even in justified or divinely-ordained wars, thus heralding the pacifism of later years.

In the 18th century, an emerging notion of pacifism was concomitant with a desire to exhort European countries to federate their populations. Indeed, since the Middle Ages, sermons played an important role in the slow creation of national identities in European countries; this theme, introduced in chapter one, is analysed further in chapter seven, where Pasi Ihlainen’s comparison of English and Prussian homilies demonstrates how 18th-century sermons contributed to the development of national awareness in both countries which, through religion and the preaching of war, developed a new sense of nationhood.

In chapter eight, Rémy Duthille sheds further light upon the transitional process which took place in the long 18th century, demonstrating the importance of fast sermons as a tool for dissenting preachers to contest the validity of the governments dealing with matters of war, while Anglican sermonists tended to be obedient supporters of the government’s military policy. Through his sermons, a critic like Richard Price revealed the preoccupations of his time, in particular about new types of conflicts such the war of the American Revolution, in which a colony rose against its mother country. Though Price did not intend to defend the principle of revolution, he nonetheless advocated the right of resistance and the sovereignty of a people. The same spirit of resistance of the American people was key to the ideology which galvanised the opposing camps in the other conflict which shaped and defined modern America, the American Civil War. Massimo Rubboli, in chapter nine,

tackles the problem which faced both Northern and Southern preachers: the justification of a civil war when “brothers fought against brothers”. In such a traumatic context, new elements of justification had to be invented to replace the traditional arguments based on the Old Testament; the issues of independence and of slavery were at stake, and the concept of transgression was examined by the ministers of both sides, with sometimes surprisingly converging views about the common sins of the divided nations.

Thus, preachers naturally tackle political issues in their war sermons, and conversely, politicians, particularly in the United States, include the religious sphere in their speeches. The complementary nature of politics and religion was exemplified by statesmen such as Paul Kruger, President of the Republic of the Transvaal, who at the end of the 19th century spoke in the Parliament in Pretoria and preached on Sunday at his local Dutch Reformed church. Many political leaders well-versed in theology were keen on delivering speeches which, in their content, were akin to sermons. In chapter ten, Marie Beauchamps considers the “political sermons” of two American presidents, Abraham Lincoln and Woodrow Wilson in times of war. Written to serve national consciousness during two major conflicts (the American Civil War and First World War), those sermon-like speeches used and, in turn, perpetuated images and elements of the American Christian tradition. The war-like religious rhetoric of these two Presidents-turned-priests played an important part in the shaping of modern America’s sense of identity.

A similarly glorified representation of war became increasingly embedded in the imperial mental process of newly industrialized countries across the Atlantic, especially so in the various wars opposing them to traditional “natives” from the 19th century onwards. Thus, sermons took on a certain entertainment value in Victorian England, and the nation’s fondness for religious admonition was acknowledged and catered for in 1835 with the publication of a guidebook listing the London churches and preachers where one might hear the best sermons delivered.¹⁶ Since the emergence of low cost prints enabled cheaper publications, there was a growing popular demand for the printing of sermons originally written to be delivered orally only. Hearing, reading, and discussing sermons thus became a favourite activity amongst sections of the Victorian population.¹⁷ Thus, some outstanding preachers have marked both their contemporaries

¹⁶ See Christiane D’Haussy (ed.), *English Sermons, Mirrors of Society*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1995, 23

¹⁷ Robert H. Ellison, *The Victorian Pulpit. Spoken and Written Sermons in Nineteenth Century Britain*. London : Associated University Press, 1998, 33.

and subsequent generations and, through the intellectual quality and the stirring verve of their sermons, they have gained a place in history.

Keith Robbins, in chapter 11 focuses on one such outstanding man. Hensley Henson, who preached in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, represents a landmark in the relationship between war sermons and the subject of war. Instead of rousing the troops to battle and justifying conflicts as expressions of God's will, such sermons came to reflect the general mood of disgust about war, and especially the First World War. Hensley Henson's sermons were undoubtedly patriotic, since they supported the general view that Germany was to blame for the ongoing bloodshed; however, Hensley transcended this simplistic and dual vision of good and evil. Far from inciting his flock's hatred towards their German foes, he attempted to show that the Germans were the victims of their leaders' propaganda. He continued preaching a sense of shared humanity during the Second World War before he finally retired.

Hensley witnessed the emergence of new media which enabled preachers to propagate their religious message on a larger scale. It was during the Second World War that the BBC developed its network and increased its broadcasts, including religious ones in which sermons about war played a significant part. Yet there were difficulties intrinsic to the preaching of sermons on radio broadcasts. In chapter twelve, Suzanne Bray takes a close look at William Temple, who became the voice of Britain's conscience despite a state censorship which was symptomatic of the growing distrust between the political and the spiritual spheres, especially with regards to the issue of controlling the media. Thus, Temple had to submit his sermons to the approval of political authorities before being allowed to broadcast; pacifist preachers were forbidden to speak on the radio and, in some instances, Temple himself was censored despite his position of Archbishop of Canterbury.

The presence of war sermons on BBC radio programmes has continued since the Second World War; in chapter thirteen, Serge Auffret brings to the fore what he calls "mini sermons" aired on the often controversial programme *Thoughts for the Day*, and particularly the slots relating to the sensitive issue of the American and British intervention and the war in Iraq. This chapter highlights how speakers on the show were carefully selected in order to comply with the BBC's strict policies about the equal representation of all races, faiths and socio-economic categories, and shows that a radio programme of this format differs from traditional war sermons since it allows the expression of a multiplicity of viewpoints, and acts as a platform for a lively debate.

Yet even in today's modern world, voicing a variety of opinions and allowing the free expression of dissidence in matters of religion and war remains challenging. For all the evolutions and changes which have shaped the Western world since the Middle Ages, there remain some elements of continuity; thus, the final chapter of this volume concludes on the everlasting presence of the concept of Just War codified many centuries before, a concept which is still used in the context of modern war and which was a dominant theme in President Bush's campaign for the American war in Iraq. Through the sermons of some American Catholics priests, Anne Debray unveils the turmoil of people torn between their obedience to their Church, which advocated pacifism, and their allegiance to the state. In the events leading up to the war and once conflict was engaged, these dissident preachers expressed the untenable position of citizens whose faith could not be reconciled with their patriotism.

The links between State and Church, and between faith and war, are an intrinsic part of the historical mechanisms which influence a nation's relationship to warfare. Arguments used in the Crusades, or even earlier, are still current in the 21st century, and by their very nature, war sermons will always put military conflicts in relation with the divine, thereby perpetuating dogmas such as that of Just War or divine retribution. However, new types of wars have also prompted new forms of rhetoric meant to guide and convince an audience. This anthology on war sermons has spanned five centuries in the hope to provide a better understanding of the devices through which parishioners are led to form an opinion upon the legitimacy of a war; such varied articles set war sermons in a historical perspective which sheds a light on the genre of writing and delivering sermons on or about war throughout the centuries in Western countries.

CHAPTER ONE

CRUSADE SERMONS AS A FACTOR OF EUROPEAN UNITY

WALTRAUD VERLAGUET

The Crusades are a very special phenomenon in the history of the West. They took place at a crucial time when, over the two centuries of their influence, many changes and developments, alliances, successes and failures occurred. Leaving aside the specific political, economic and social motivations –avowed to a greater or lesser degree – which led up to the crusades, this paper will focus on a few chronological milestones, putting into perspective the war sermons of this period. Indeed, at that time, a singular intermingling of history, theology and poetry produced something new: the emergence of the idea of crusade, which evolved to become the flag bearer of the specific medieval worldview from which it grew.

The Origins

The history of the crusades begins, strictly speaking, with a sermon: that of Urban II at Clermont, France in 1095, when the association of war and holiness was sufficiently incongruous to necessitate justification. Yet the idea was not an absolute novelty but had ancient roots, which can be traced in the history of thought to at least three sources: the concept of a just war, the practice of pilgrimage and a feudal ideology. Even during the first centuries of Christianity, the question was asked whether a soldier could become a Christian and whether a Christian should be a soldier. As Christianity became a State religion, this question took on more importance, since the emperor was also the defender of Christendom. How could this demand be combined with the non-violence taught by Christianity?

Saint Augustine answered this conundrum by distinguishing between just and unjust wars;¹ he was later followed in Spain by Isidore of Seville (560-636), and in Germany, by Hraban Maur (776-856) who commented on the Book of Maccabees, comparing the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus IV to that of Christians in the Roman Empire. In a typological reading, Mattathias symbolised Christ, Antiochus the Antichrist, and the Maccabees prefigured the Christian army called to defend the people of God who were rewarded by the crown of martyrdom. At the same time in England, Aelfric used the same image and referred to Isidore of Seville to justify the war against the Scandinavians who were invading his country.² His bishop, Wulfstan, in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*³ announced the end of the world and the coming of the Antichrist to call for the defence of the realm and for justice. This was construed as the will of God. For Aelfric, armed defence in such circumstances should be compared to fighting the flames of Hell at the Last Judgement.

Thus, a shift in meaning appeared between a war permitted by God and a war desired by God; yet the notion of the defence of the *realm* was still absent in the 9th century when, as the suburbs of Rome were pillaged by the Saracens in 846, the Popes still spoke of defending the *Faith* by the sword. Leo IV proclaimed a “holy war” and affirmed that the soldiers who died in the fray merited eternal life, while John VIII made them martyrs and promised them absolution from sin.

War could therefore be just if it was waged in defence of the faith; however, for an expedition into a foreign land to be justified, another element must be present, and it is the notion of pilgrimage which serves as a cement for this singular connection between war and holiness. Significantly, the documents of the period do not refer to a “crusade” but use the vocabulary of the pilgrims. Since the beginning of Christianity, pilgrimages to the Holy Land have held great importance in the history of the Church. During the Middle Ages however, with the new ideology of feudalism, something changed in the way these places were considered.

As the political pole of power spread to integrate peoples whose customs and anthropology were different, the Emperor’s status as the defender of Christianity mutated, giving an almost redemptive role to the

¹ His *De civitate dei* discusses different types of war. In Chapter XV of Book IV he writes: “Si ergo iusta gerendo belle, non impia, non iniquia.” Cf. <http://www.ac-nice.fr/philo/textes/Augustin-DeCivitateDei/>.

² J. E. Cross, “Vernacular sermons in Old English”, in Kienzle, Beverly Mayne, (ed.), *The Sermon*. Brepolis: Turnhout, 2000, 583.

³ *Ibid.*, 591.

Empire. Conflict management became a central point which determined the difficult balance between temporal and spiritual power. Certainly the military domain belonged by rights to the political lords. In order to safeguard its authority, the Church had to affirm its own prerogatives, on the one hand, by calling the Emperor to the defence of Christian lands, and on the other, by limiting the lords' freedom of action.

Thus, from the early Middle Ages, as Pope Gregory I already underlined in the 6th century, the Emperor's duty was to subjugate the pagans in order to convert them. In the 10th century, Widukind of Corvey described in his history of the Saxons the coronation of Otto the Great and reported the bishop as saying: "Take this sword and put to flight all the enemies of Christ... since you hold power in the Frankish realm by the will of God, in hope of an unshakeable peace for all Christians".⁴

Furthermore, the Church introduced ceasefires and rules limiting the violent acts of war, such as "God's peace" which protected non-belligerents – women and children, clerics, peasants and travellers – against any attack in time of war. The knights' honour code became progressively more Christian. Significantly, the 11th century saw the introduction of a blessing of swords, a highly symbolic gesture. Thus, the new world view of feudalism inevitably affected spirituality: from then on Christians understood their relationship with Christ as being a feudal one. Hence, the places where Christ had lived came to be considered as *His* land. When His country was under attack, their vassal faithfulness demanded their coming to His aid to defend His wealth. Bonizo of Sutri, at the end of the 11th century, theorised that those who were outside the Church may not possess what belonged to the Church, and that Christians were bound to defend their inheritance.⁵

In the 12th century it was the Cistercians above all who took charge of the preaching of the Crusades. This Order recruited among adults who very often had already had some military training. They were at the very heart of the symbiosis between spirituality and the chivalrous spirit. Bernard of Clairvaux, who drew up the Rule of the Templars, wrote in his tract *De laude novae militiae* that a Christian knight did not commit a sin

⁴ "Accipe...hunc gladium, quo eicias omnes Christi adversarios ... auctoritate divina tibi tradita omni potestate totius imperii Francorum, ad firmissimam pacem omnium Christianorum." in Widukind von Corvey, *Res gestae Saxonicae – Die Sachsengeschichte*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1981, 106 (my translation).

⁵ "... quod qui extra ecclesiam sunt, nullo jure bona ecclesiae possunt possidere": in Friedrich-Wilhelm Wentzlaff-Eggebert, *Kreuzzugdichtung des Mittelalters. Studien zu ihrer geschichtlichen und dichterischen Wirklichkeit*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1960, 5.

when he killed an infidel, but on the contrary he avenged Christ which was all to his honour.⁶ At the end of the 12th century, Henry of Strasburg defined the Crusade as a proper vassal obligation, appealing to the sense of honour of the knights.⁷ Each vassal was rewarded for his service. According to the feudal logic of the law, God distributed fragments of salvation in the same way as the lord gave fiefdoms to his faithful retainers. Dipping into grace to attribute indulgences according to the merit of the servant appeared completely plausible, as will be discussed later. Let us remember for the moment that the initial question of whether a Christian had the *right* to take up arms had been transformed, during the Middle Ages, into quite another debate, regarding the circumstances in which a Christian had the *duty* to take up arms.

Chronology

The medieval climate of existential anguish created by apocalyptic effervescence was channelled by the reforms of the Church in the 10th and 11th centuries into religious fever, making eternal salvation in the hereafter appear as man's ultimate goal. When Byzantium called on Urban II for help against the Turks, all the ingredients were thus in place to launch the struggle.

The initiative for the Crusades came from Urban II himself, who preached about the first expedition at the Council of Clermont in 1095. Although the text of his speech is no longer extant, a number of chroniclers, like Foulque of Chartres, reported the tone of the message. Urban called for all other combats to cease in order to help the brethren in the faith against the infidels who were ravaging the Holy Places, promising remission of sins as a reward. He knew how to fire up the masses. The commitment not only of the nobles but also of the commoners surpassed all expectation. The military success of the first crusade accredited the theses which Urban II had expressed, and created a lasting stimulus in spite of the losses suffered later.

The later Popes delegated the order of preaching about the Holy Land campaign to papal legates, assisted by numerous preachers. Whereas the first crusade concerned only France and Italy, the second expanded the idea over the whole of Europe, as a result of Bernard of Clairvaux's efforts. Eugene III began this movement in 1145 with his Bull *Quantum*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷ Valmar Cramer, "Kreuzpredigt und Kreuzzugsgedanke von Bernard von Clairvaux bis Humbert von Romans", *Das Heilige Land in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, Heft, 17-20 (1939): 43-204. Quotation 90.

praedecessores nostri, which was sent to France and Italy; Bernard, named as papal legate for its publication, took the Bull to Germany and sent letters to the countries he could not get to. The expansion of the Cistercian order favoured the call to the Crusades, whilst Cistercian mystique gave it a deeper meaning.

Eugene III's Bull was structured in three parts⁸, the form the later pronouncements would adopt. The first part was a narrative describing the sufferings endured by Christians in the Holy Land and the dishonour which the loss of the Holy Places meant to Christendom. In the second part Eugene exhorted his readers by taking up the traditional reference to the Book of Maccabees. The final part defined the privileges given to Crusaders. There, he marked himself out from other theologians and supported a highly emphasised interpretation of the power of the keys. For Abelard, for example, God absolved souls from punishment in the next world, whilst priests only had influence over the punishment inflicted by the Church: salvation was between God and the faithful. For Eugene III, on the other hand, it was between the Church and the faithful. As for Bernard of Clairvaux, he sought to reconcile the two, claiming that the power to bind or loose invested in the priest only became efficacious through penitence. In the framework of a feudal conception of faith, the contrition of the believer worked like the homage due to a lord from his vassal.

Bernard of Clairvaux preached at Vézelay in 1146. The texts of his sermons were later expurgated of the references to the Crusades as they were reworked in order to serve as examples for other occasions, but his letters have remained more explicit.⁹ He added an important motif in comparison to Eugene III, that of the *tempus acceptabile*, the right time: according to him, the expedition to the Holy Land was a unique opportunity offered to sinners to gain salvation. The liberation of Jerusalem appeared almost secondary in comparison with the sanctification of the faithful. Consequently, the defeat of the second Crusade in 1148 led to a certain spiritual confusion: had God abandoned his own?

When Alexander III launched the third crusade in 1181, he argued that the defeats of the Christians in the Holy Land were the direct result of sin. This crusade was given the name of "the three kings" because of the

⁸ Penny J. Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades to the Holy Land, 1095-1270*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 24; Valmar Cramer, "Kreuzpredigt und Kreuzzugsgedanke von Bernard von Clairvaux bis Humbert von Romans", 46.

⁹ Beverly Mayne Kienzle (ed.), *The Sermon*, 272.

commitment of the rulers of England, France and Germany. After the fall of Jerusalem in 1187, Gregory VIII developed Bernard of Clairvaux's arguments for a *tempus acceptabile* in his Bull *Audita tremendi*, together with the reference to Mattathias. Equally, he emphasised the perennial character of Crusade. Henry of Alba, the great Cistercian preacher of this third expedition, developed this even further in his tract *De peregrinante civitate Dei*: here the earthly Jerusalem was lost because the Christians have lost the heavenly Jerusalem. He elaborated a complex symbolism of the Cross, at the same time an Ark of the Covenant and a ladder by means of which the believer may climb up to God.

Following Celestine III in 1195, Innocent III advocated the fourth Crusade. An energetic man, he was dismayed at the rout and the defeat which followed. In his Bull *Post miserabile* in 1198, and much more in *Quia major* in 1213, he strongly developed the idea of the crusade as a vassal duty; it was a Christian's obligation to free the Holy Land, and from then on, the idea of penitence remained secondary. This change of emphasis marked the preaching about the Crusades, and as a result, the Cistercians relinquished their pre-eminent role into the hands of new mendicant orders.

Innocent III's successor, Honorius III, completed the list of Bulls on the Crusades. He made use of the same vassal terminology and of the reference to Maccabees, but in his case penitence became a priority again. He introduced the example of Abraham, whom he called a "mystic", in order to appeal to crusaders to leave their countries and go to the land which was sanctified by the blood of Christ.¹⁰ Among the great preachers of this first third of the 13th century, Philip of Oxford, whose tract *Ordinacio de praedicatione S. Crucis in Anglia* (1214) illustrated the new way of preaching which was beginning to be heard in the 13th century in the framework of scholastic education, with numerous allegories and *exempla*. For Philip, the indulgence accorded to the crusaders appeared more as a condition than a reward for the commitment of the warrior: he must be freed from all the weight of sin which may weigh him down so that he may depart for war.

Jacques of Vitry is also known not only as a preacher of the cross and for his participation in the fifth Crusade, but also for his commitment to recognising the beguine movement, in particular by his personal intercession to Honorius III. He brought together two aspects of the ideological synthesis of the Crusades in his own person. Jacques of Vitry

¹⁰ "... in terram mystico exemplo Habre olim inclitam ac Christi sanguine consecratam". Quoted by Valmar Cramer, "Kreuzpredigt und Kreuzzugsgedanke von Bernard von Clairvaux bis Humbert von Romans", 113.

left an important body of sermons, several of which directly concern the crusaders' commitment:

The Lord has indeed suffered the loss of his patrimony and wants to test (his) friends and find out if you are his faithful vassals. He who holds a fief from a liege lord is rightfully deprived of his fief if he abandons him, when he is involved in a war and his inheritance is taken away from him. You hold your body and soul and all that you have from the highest emperor who has you summoned today to come to his aid in battle, even if you are not bound by feudal law. He offers you such great payment that you ought to rush willingly, namely the remission of all sins with regard to punishment and guilt, and in addition eternal life.¹¹

Jacques was very verbose about the spiritual benefits of the Crusades: for him, commitment to the war brought salvation not only to the combatant, but to his whole family. He also believed that this salvation was independent of the results of the combat, since the fact of enlisting was in itself sanctifying; this was an important proviso after the repeated defeats of the crusaders. Indeed, such military reverses had diminished the popular ardour for militant sermons calling to the Cross to such an extent that Jacques promised a reduction of 20 to 40 days in Purgatory for the mere fact of attending his preaching. He even argued against those who condemned armed combat by reference to the non-violence of the Gospels. It proved that they were ignorant of the real meaning of the Bible's teaching which, according to Jacques, was that armed combat was necessary and meritorious in the service of the Church.

After the diplomatic end of the sixth Crusade by Frederick II in 1229, a final wave of enlistment led to the last two expeditions in 1245 and 1270, in which Saint Louis participated. Among the preachers, Eudes of Châteauroux underlined the abolition of social status among the crusaders. Like Jacques of Vitry, he argued that combatants accumulated indulgences for their families. He used a new metaphor to express the passion with which the crusaders left their country to go to the Holy Land, comparing

¹¹ "Dominus quidem affligitur in patrimonii sui admissione et vult amicos probare et experiri si fideles eius vasalli estis. Qui enim a domino ligio tenent feodam, si desit illi dum impugnatur et hereditas sua illi aufertur, merito feodo privatur. Vos autem corpus et animam et quicquid habetis a summo imperatore tenetis, qui vos hodie citari facit, ut ei in prelio succuratis, et licet iure feodi non teneremini. Tanta et talia stipendia offert vobis quod sponte currere deberetis, remissionem cunctorum scilicet peccatorum quantum ad penam et culpam et insuper vitam eternam." in Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology. Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross*, 98 (translated by Maier).

them to deer which left their territories during the mating season.¹² Another significant preacher, Humbert of Romans, went further in generalising the idea of the Crusade, claiming that every Christian was obliged to participate in this effort in one way or another, since the Crusade was a particular form of devotion: taking up one's cross thus came to signify sanctification.

The Ideology of the Crusades

The extension of the concept of the Crusade had significant impact upon the new world view, interweaving two different ways of thinking, that of spirituality and that of combat. The intermingling of both religious and military thinking had started to occur well before the Crusades, and was a logical consequence of the struggle for power between the temporal and the spiritual. With the Church taking over larger parts of every area of society, the christianisation of the knights' honour code found its counterpart in the militarisation of spirituality. We have already evoked the role of the Cistercians who, benefiting from a knightly and courtly education, easily used the metaphors of this sphere to give meaning to their devotional acts.

The liturgical celebration of the Cross also inspired the heraldry of flags and banners and the Cross became the flag of spiritual power over the world. Thus, through feudal ideology, military prowess took on a spiritual significance as feudal faithfulness to God. In the Benedictine Rule, the *militia Christi* designated spiritual warfare in the believer's heart. The pun between *militia* and *malitia*, the evil of the human heart, was often taken up by the preachers of the Crusades. In contrast, liturgical songs accompanied pilgrims and crusaders on their departure. Secular writings, chronicles, *chansons de geste* and the full range of the poetry of the Crusades made use of liturgical vocabulary.

Among the great epics of the 12th century, the *Kaiserchronik* was marked by this spiritualisation of the idea of chivalry, and idealised the figure of the Emperor: Charlemagne was thus shown as the hero in the struggle against paganism, a humble and good hero, while pagans were portrayed as in league with the Devil. Whilst the French version of the *Chanson de Roland* was more insistent on the idea of national greatness, the German version by the priest Conrad showed a Charlemagne who was

¹² "sic et hodie bendicit Dominus illos, qui pro amore eius velut cervi spirituales lustra dimitunt propria, id est terram, in qua nati fuerunt et nutriti.", in Penny J. Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades*, 152.

Emperor of Christendom, fighting less for a military victory than for the conversion of pagan peoples. All the speeches in this poem were structured like sermons about the Crusades. Hartmann von der Aue, around 1200 described in his *Lied vom Glauben* (*Song of the Faith*) the virtues of the believer as those of the combatant: the *imitatio Christi* takes on the colours of a struggle where Christ himself carries the flag.

In the same way, the Benedictine Rule was linked with Cistercian spirituality which, in turn, influenced secular poetry. In the course of this evolution, the circle of those for whom it is destined has not ceased to grow. Whilst the Rule of Saint Benedict was addressed only to monks, the new devotion is for everyone. Everyone had had the opportunity to hear about the merits of the Crusades, not only in sermons but also in songs and recitations of poetry. Preachers began to address themselves to all: laity and monks, to people of every rank and every nationality.

Whereas until the 11th century sermons were destined essentially for monks, since the people mastered only the rudiments of an elementary Christian education, in the 12th century, as a result of the threat of heresy, of the schism within the Orthodox Church, and of the desire for reform in the Roman Church, an increase in preaching efforts led to the creation of new mendicant orders. Henceforth, any deviation from the strict line defined by the Roman Church was condemned. With the elaboration of the ideology of holy war, anything could become a crusade: the struggle against the Albigensians, against the Moors in Spain or against the pagan Slavs, or even against Christians who might oppose Rome, such as the Hohenstaufen.

Every country was implicated. The supra-national character of the religious orders, like that of the Roman Church in its entirety, contributed to making the appeal to holy war universal. Preachers crossed borders, combatants from various countries, speaking different languages, enlisted side by side in the same war. So, for example, English and French soldiers enlisted to reclaim Spain.¹³

Internal conflicts were called upon to cease, whilst the different countries' campaigns against external enemies were integrated in some way or another under the same banner of the Cross. Thus when Saint Bernard succeeded in winning the Emperor Conrad to his way of thinking in 1146, the latter was worried about his western borders. Suddenly the Diet of Frankfort decided, in the presence of Bernard, to defend the Empire against the Slavs. This war was thus considered as a necessary condition to make sure the Crusade went well. And quite logically,

¹³ Giles Constable, "The Second Crusade as seen by Contemporaries", *Tradition* 9 (1953): 213-279, 235.

soldiers were awarded the same indulgences as those who participated in the expedition to the Holy Land.¹⁴ The Crusade against the Slavs was a part of *the* Crusade.

Another example shows the extension of the concept: an Anglo-Flemish expedition set out to follow the coast of Europe and gain the Holy Land by sea. En route, they were called upon by the King of Portugal to help him take back Lisbon from the Moors. Bishop Peter of Oporto, speaking in Latin and translated by interpreters into various languages, made a speech recorded by the English chronicler Osborn to convince crusaders that the struggle against the Moors was an integral part of the Crusade.

In fact the majority of the chroniclers of the period did not speak of expeditions or of armies in the plural. It was *the* Christian army, in the singular, which was engaged in the combat against the infidels. This consciousness of belonging to a common entity was also found in secular literature. Thus Conrad underlined in the German version of the *Chanson de Roland* that they were “all of one heart ... they are all called children of God”.¹⁵ All were called. Those unable to fight were called to supply wealth to finance those who could; for war was a costly business, each knight had to be equipped and look after his own needs. Tithes were levied to help cover costs. And those who could neither fight nor contribute were called to pray and to accomplish acts of devotion and of asceticism to support the crusaders morally and spiritually. Special sermons were addressed to those who stayed at home; women, children and any person who was not able to fight. A social and psychological pressure was thus brought to bear on all across Europe from the poorest to the noblest, calling for moral reform and spiritual warfare. Popes, bishops and preachers called for unity, for the cessation of any conflict other than that of taking up the cross, and particularly during the third Crusade when incessant rivalries between the Kings of France and England risked delaying the departure.

Laity and religious, men and women, combatants and non-combatants, every social class and every country were concerned. Moreover, the constitution of prayer communities, which included the dead, and the notion of vicarious suffering, caused a new form of spirituality to emerge

¹⁴ Valmar Cramer, “Kreuzpredigt und Kreuzzugsgedanke von Bernard von Clairvaux bis Humbert von Romans”, 45.

¹⁵ Friedrich-Wilhelm Wentzlaff-Eggebert, *Kreuzzugdichtung des Mittelalters. Studien zu ihrer geschichtlichen und dichterischen Wirklichkeit*, 93.

which crossed every border, even that between the dead and the living.¹⁶ The non-combatants won over through special devotion the spiritual support of those fighting, whilst the combatants won salvation for their families.¹⁷ The generalisation of the vicarious sanctification of the living for the dead thus bound the whole of Christendom into one single community, beyond the borders of place and time.

Of course internal conflicts did not cease for all that. The political disagreements between various sovereigns are much to be blamed for the final failure of the Crusade project. But beyond this, and in spite of the struggles for power which continued to cross Europe, European unity was forged at the ideological level. It could be said that the Crusades played a central role in the crystallisation of the European ideal, if not *the* central role. The Western world view remained marked by the spirituality of this struggle.

Likewise, it is obvious that the preaching of the Cross did not transform all crusaders into saints. We know the stories of the terrible acts they committed on occasion. Pillage was the order of the day, and many economic and political motives were hidden behind the call to the Crusades. The German poet Walther von der Vogelweide denounced in very harsh terms the political ambitions of the papacy and the rapaciousness of the crusaders.¹⁸ Yet even for him, taking up the cross was the touchstone of the knight's true worth. A shared sense of belonging was forged in the crucible of fighting under the sign of the cross and remained for centuries a mark of the singular interweaving of the values of combat and sanctification. It is not insignificant that today the field of economics, with its own secular spirituality, uses such terms as advertising "strategy" and "conquering" markets.

Therefore no-one could earn his salvation without participating, in one way or another, in this general effort of the Crusades which was the very essence of the demonstration of the *novo devotio*. "Devotion" comes from "*devovoe*" which designated first of all the commitment made by a vow, in the context of a sacrifice. It was used early on in the military context of sacrificing one's life. Henceforward, this sacrifice on the one hand was perceived as a form of martyrdom, and on the other referred to the whole of the believer's life, his gift of himself in faith.

¹⁶ In the middle of the 11th century, Cluny inaugurated the festival of the dead: see J. Le Goff, *La Naissance du Purgatoire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1981, 170.

¹⁷ Penny J. Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades*, 137.

¹⁸ Friedrich-Wilhelm Wentzlaff-Eggebert, *Kreuzzugdichtung des Mittelalters. Studien zu ihrer geschichtlichen und dichterischen Wirklichkeit*, 236.

Later Antiquity questioned whether a Christian could be a soldier, a question to which Augustine replied by elaborating the notion of a just war. The Middle Ages went further, asking in what circumstances a Christian should take up arms. At the end of this process, the conclusion was that a Christian's very nature was to fight. To show to what degree this chivalrous spirituality pervades the whole of the thought patterns of an era, I should like to conclude with a text from a context as far removed as possible from military preoccupations. It comes from the pen of Mechthild of Magdeburg, who was the first to write in the German language about personal mystical experiences. She lived as a beguine in the middle of the 13th century. Since the preaching of Jacques of Vitry, beguines had lived a form of semi-religious life which was recognised but ill-defined. The beguines testified in their writings to what could be called a courtly spirituality. Mechthild enjoyed a certain renown in her context, and she was frequently asked for as an intercessor. In her third book, she compared the struggle against temptation to the exploits of a knight:

I interceded for a man, as I had been asked to do, that God should take away from him the desires of his body – even though they come without sin as long as they are not produced by ill-will. So our Lord said, “Be quiet! Would it please you if there were a knight, armed to the teeth and well trained and full of strength and skill, and who stayed without doing anything and neglected the honour of his lord and who lost the proper reward and the noble renown which comes from both, lord and knight, in the land? On the other hand: what would become of a man, who has not been trained for lack of armour, and who came to the tournament of a prince? He would quickly be put to death. This is why I must care for those who fall so easily. I make them fight like children so that they may win a garland of flowers as a reward. (III, XVIII).¹⁹

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¹⁹ Mechthild of Magdeburg, *La lumière fluente de la Divinité*, translated into French by Waltraud Verlaquet, Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2001, 97.