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‘Not Cruelty but Piety’: Circumscribing European Crusading Violence

Susanna A. Throop

Traditionally the crusading movement has been distinguished from other forms of Christian violence motivated or justified in religious terms. In the western world, innumerable books and articles discuss ‘the crusades’ or ‘the crusading movement’ as discrete entities. The crusades, so the narrative goes, began firmly in 1096 when an armed, penitential expedition set out to Jerusalem in response to the 1095 appeal of Pope Urban II, and ended less conclusively at some point before the onset of modernity. Meanwhile, in a broader global context and across a wider range of media, some continue to invoke the crusades as explanation for ongoing geopolitical conflict. These invocations, too, implicitly suggest that the historical phenomena designated the crusades can be contained by clearly marked boundaries, even if they maintain that the crusades have not yet ended.

If indeed the crusades could be neatly cordoned off, then assessing crusading violence would be a relatively straightforward exercise. One need only inquire as to the violence perpetrated during the crusades by participants. However, the idea that the crusades can be nicely delineated is a necessary but anachronistic fiction. The minute one tries to trace the purportedly clear boundaries separating the crusades from other elements of Latin Christian culture in the Middle Ages, one encounters two central difficulties. The first is the thorny problem of what defined a crusade from the perspective of contemporaries. Close on its heels is the second difficulty, namely which contemporary perspectives should be prioritized when attempting to make this definition. Do we primarily listen to popes or kings, critics or supporters, crusaders or those they fought? These difficulties are not unique to the study of the crusades and the problems

with attempting to fit the past into digestible analytical pieces are not new. The point for our current context is that without knowing ‘the crusades,’ how can one assess ‘crusading violence’?

Full careers have been devoted to defining the crusades, and this is not the place to resurrect the debate. Suffice it to say that the majority of crusade historians at this moment in time recognize something like the pluralist position first articulated by Jonathan Riley-Smith: crusades were identifiable to Latin Christian contemporaries on the basis of papal authorization, the taking of vows, the penitential nature of crusading warfare and resulting remission of sins, and certain other elements. Based on these criteria, crusades were fought not only against Muslim adversaries in the eastern Mediterranean, but also within Europe against purported heretics, pagan non-Christians, and political adversaries of the papacy.

From a pluralist perspective, not only was the geographical range of the crusades broad, but the chronological timeframe for crusading was nebulous. The so-called First Crusade (conventionally 1096-1099) can be relatively firmly fixed as a starting point—though even that is debated—but pinning down an end to the crusading movement is difficult if not impossible. The crusader states in the Levant ended in 1291, though the crusader kingdoms of Rhodes and Cyprus lasted until the sixteenth century. The final multinational military expedition authorized by a pope who granted remission of sins to participants was declared in 1572 against the Ottomans (and promptly fizzled out in 1573), yet there were resonant echoes of crusading (including the creation of a new military order, L’Institut Religieux et Militaire des Frères Armés du Sahara) as late as the nineteenth century. When seeking to define the crusades, then, even the pluralist position is admittedly imperfect.

Those imperfections intensify when it comes to thinking about crusading violence, because even papally-authorized crusades resulted in violence that was *not* authorized and yet

indubitably directly linked to crusading in the minds of the perpetrators and victims alike. The most obvious example is crusading violence against Jews, which accompanied the launch of major crusades in Europe from the First Crusade onward, despite the explicit disapproval of the papacy and, in several instances, secular rulers. And if we consider crusading to have been a cultural movement expressed through a variety of media and relationships, rather than a series of military expeditions that conformed to specific criteria, the lines between crusading violence and other medieval Christian violence—chivalric violence, violence against non-Christians and other non-conformists, wars considered justified and/or sacred even if not papally authorized—become faint indeed.

Nonetheless, it seems clear that for many of us at the present time, crusading still remains something that is recognized when seen, in large part because the evidence strongly suggests that medieval contemporaries recognized crusades when seen. The lines separating crusading from the rest of Latin Christian culture may be virtually invisible at the edges, and yet, the implicit consensus was and remains, there was some central core to crusading that was distinct. What was that central core? At the risk of stating the obvious, both violence and Christianity must have been part of it. To examine crusading as a spiritual or penitential activity without acknowledging its intrinsic violence, or alternatively to view it as violence merely cloaked in religion, would be at best inaccurate and at worst a historical injustice. Whatever its spiritual characteristics, crusading was explicitly violent; whatever the violence involved, crusading was also explicitly Christian.

Yet we cannot conclude that the central core of crusading was ‘violence by Christians against non-Christians,’ both because such violence occurred well outside crusading (however defined) and because crusading violence was at times directed at self-proclaimed Christians. The

constant of crusading violence was the Christian identity of the perpetrators, rather than the identity of their opponents. We also cannot say that the central core of crusading was simply ‘Christian violence’; that would be too broad, encompassing virtually any violent act performed by a professed Christian. We are left to discover what distinguishes the nature of crusading violence. That, then, is the task of this chapter: what, if anything, was crusading violence, above and beyond Christian violence?

This chapter will first explain why crusading violence cannot be distinguished on the basis of its practices or its brutality. Similarly, while it is tempting to construct an elaborate picture of intertwining and complex conceptualizations, or ideas of crusade, as a means of understanding crusading violence, that approach is also insupportable. In contrast, I will argue that crusading violence can be identified in a simpler set of ideas. In summary, crusading violence was spiritually beneficial for the individual and the Christian community, was directed at the ‘enemies of Christ,’ and took the form of organized and purportedly authorized endeavors.

Before turning to this argument, however, let us consider the alternatives. To begin, on the whole, we cannot distinguish crusading violence by its practices. Christian warfare was fully Christianized before the First Crusade, and while the crusading movement adopted many rituals and symbols for its own use—most notably the cross—it is hard to claim that it was distinctive in so doing, or that its claims to such rituals or symbols obliterated all others. To give one example, and at the risk of simplifying the point, there were Christian wars prominently accompanied by crosses before 1096 and Christian wars that were not crusades prominently accompanied by crosses after.

Similarly, while it is unquestionably true that European warfare—and violent practices more broadly—were affected by crusading, it is difficult to identify the ‘crusading-ness’ of

crusading in these evolving practices. This is true in the first place because of the diversity of crusading warfare. Crusaders adapted their violence in different ways in different locations at different times: crusading in the Levant led European armies to adapt their cavalry tactics; crusading in northern Europe led to a unique seasonal routine of so-called perpetual crusades; in the later Middle Ages crusading was increasingly undertaken by leagues, i.e. multinational alliances of secular powers authorized by the papacy. None of these examples apply to crusading violence as a whole, across the entire period and geographical range of crusading. Secondly, we cannot identify the central core of crusading in evolving practices of violence because these practices were happily used by practitioners of violence regardless of whether they (or anyone else) considered themselves to be crusading.

Nor on the whole did the nature of crusading violence reside in its brutality or extremity. Admittedly there were a few notable examples of crusading violence that exceeded the norms of the time. Even allowing for rhetorical exaggeration, the sack of Jerusalem by the First Crusaders in 1099 was a disturbing example of wholesale slaughter. Similarly, many episodes in the Albigensian Crusades and the Baltic Crusades were grim and unrestrained by the standards of the day. Yet taken as a whole, while crusading violence may look distinctly brutal to modern eyes, by the standards of European warfare in its time it was not inordinately so. Savagery was not a consistently distinctive feature of crusading violence.

The conceptualizations of crusading—the ideas that underpinned the crusading movement and arguably lay at its central core—bring us closer to the nature of crusading violence. Contemporaries, so the argument might proceed, conceived crusading violence to be not merely a just activity, but indeed a penitential and spiritually meritorious activity. It was a form of *imitatio Christi*, the imitation of Christ, the highest Christian spiritual ideal in medieval

Europe. It was an act of Christian love and also of godly vengeance. It tapped into apocalyptic concerns and belief in the miraculous. Crucially, it was authorized by the pope himself, and was directed at those deemed by the pope (and thus, it was contended, by God) to be enemies of God and the Christian Church. Arguably, we could locate crusading violence in this complex network of ideas.

Unfortunately there are three challenges that can be put forward against this argument in its totality. The first and most obvious is simply that members of the laity—from men-at-arms to kings—laid claim to some of the same conceptual frameworks for their own acts of violence, whether or not they were papally authorized. Indeed, well before the First Crusade Christian violence had a long history of related conceptualizations. Furthermore, as Katherine Smith has eloquently demonstrated, Christian spiritual practices had a long history of violent imagery and rhetoric.¹ On neither side—actual Christian violence nor rhetorical Christian violence—did the First Crusade emerge from a vacuum, as I discuss further below.

The second challenge is almost equally obvious and has already been noted: not all crusading violence—if we mean violence committed by crusaders—was in fact authorized by the pope and directed at those considered legitimate enemies of the Christian Church. The examples of such unauthorized crusader violence run from the massacres of European Jews in 1096 through the assaults on the Christian cities of Zara and Constantinople in 1202 and 1204, and on forward.

The third and final challenge strikes at the very emphasis on conceptualization contained in such a definition of crusader violence. Undoubtedly conceptual frameworks for crusading

¹ Katherine Allen Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2011).

came into being over time, as writers crafted narratives of the crusades, artists of all kinds celebrated and commemorated them, legal scholars and theologians applied themselves to their justification, and the papal see consolidated its own position and procedures. Yet are we to believe that this framework was fully formed and neatly slotted into place in 1096—or, alternatively, that the early crusades somehow did not include crusading violence, because this framework was not yet as cohesive as it would be later on? Furthermore, should we conclude that all crusaders—all those who performed crusading violence—were aware of and on board with the fine details of these conceptualizations? Surely not.

We must seek, then, a simpler conceptual framework that can be recognized from the First Crusade onwards in all kinds of crusading violence, whether authorized or not. To this end, my argument here is that, first, crusading violence was understood to be ‘not cruelty but piety,’² to use the words of Saint Jerome. Crusading violence was considered to be spiritually beneficial for the individual and directed against the enemies of Christ, and thus beneficial for the Christian community and distinguishable from other kinds of violence considered to be cruelty. Furthermore—and this is what most clearly distinguishes crusading violence from other forms of Christian violence described in this volume—crusading violence took the form of organized group endeavors that participants and their contemporaries considered to be or successfully represented as approved by the papacy.

To begin, crusading violence was accompanied by the belief that this violence was spiritually beneficial for the individual agent. For this to make sense, we must recognize that the Latin Christian tradition viewed violence as ethically neutral. Violence took its ethical coloring

² Saint Jerome, Epistola 109 (Ad Riparium), in *S. Eusebii Hieronymi Opera*, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 55.2 (Vindobanae: F. Tempsky, 1912), 354.

from context, most notably from the intentions of its perpetrators. Thus, well before the First Crusade, 'Christian violence' was most definitely not an oxymoron, as it sometimes appears to modern eyes, nor was it simply a necessary evil. Given the right agent, with the right intentions, violence could be a Christian good.

In theoretical terms, to be violent with the right intentions meant above all to act from Christian love. This emphasis on loving intentions was a pillar of medieval ideologies of Christian violence from the Church Fathers through the early Middle Ages, and was further advocated by eleventh- and twelfth-century theorists like Ivo of Chartres, Anselm of Lucca, and Gratian. In more pragmatic terms, to be violent with the right intentions meant to be violent, in the words of John France, 'to maintain Christian society and its stability.'³ As France notes, this Christian violence included both violence in war and violence against criminals.⁴

The traditional narrative of the origins of crusading ideas would leap from Augustine's thoughts on just war to the papacies of Gregory VII (r. 1073-1085) and Urban II (r. 1088-1099). According to this narrative, Latin Christianity moved from just war to holy war to crusade, largely thanks to the words and deeds of the eleventh-century papacy. However, without seeking to deny the significance of the eleventh century, it's important to recognize that there was a well-established trend of Christian violence encouraged and participated in by the Latin church well before then. We can witness this trend in any number of contexts, including Carolingian

³ John France, 'Christianity, Violence, and the Origins of Crusading: À Propos of a Recent Study,' *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 80.2 (2002), 594.

⁴ France, 'Christianity, Violence, and the Origins of Crusading,' 598.

violence, violence committed within Europe by particularly assertive bishops,⁵ and violence against Muslims in the Mediterranean advocated and actively participated in by popes from the late eighth century onwards.⁶ There was clearly a belief that such violence merited spiritual reward well before the First Crusade; to give one example, Pope Leo IV (r. 847-855) promised the Franks that those who died while fighting on behalf of the Christian faith would surely receive eternal life.⁷

By the eleventh century, this established trend was strengthened by the church reform movement and popes sympathetic to its aims, most notably Gregory VII. He claimed ultimate authority over all Christian society, including kings and emperors, and articulated more forcefully than his predecessors the belief that this authority conferred upon the papal see the right to wage war and reward those who fought for him (i.e., for the cause of the Latin church) with spiritual benefits. To give one example, he assured those who fought against his adversary, Emperor Henry IV (r. 1084-1105), that they were fighting on behalf of Saints Peter and Paul, and as a result, would receive blessings on earth as well as remission of sins.⁸

It was during the papacy of Pope Urban II that Latin Christian culture moved towards the idea of penitential warfare. To fight a penitential war is to fight with the knowledge that one's violence is not just in accordance with God's will and merits reward—those ideas were already

⁵ Examples can be found in David S. Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War, c. 300-1215* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003) and also in France, 'Christianity, Violence, and the Origins of Crusading,' 596.

⁶ John Gilchrist, 'The Papacy and the War Against the "Saracens,"' *The International History Review* 10 (1988), 174-97.

⁷ Leo IV, Epistola (Ad exercitum Francorum), *Patrologia Latina* 115, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: 1852), 656-7.

⁸ Gregory VII, Epistola (Ad omnes Christianos), *Patrologia Latina* 148, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: 1853), 329.

well-established—but moreover constitutes in and of itself an act of penance. One's violence is thus a pious act that helps repay God for one's debt of sin and thus limits the amount of 'repayment' required from one after death.

Once again, it is important to distinguish the theoretical from the pragmatic. Even during the First Crusade penitential warfare was taken to mean different things. Most notably, some represented it as a sort of instant entrance pass into heaven or automatic grant of martyrdom status. Later popes and theorists adjusted and adapted the idea, most notably shifting away from, back towards, and then again away from the idea of crusading as penance that earned remission of sins. Meanwhile broader European culture continued to interpret such theories in different ways. However, what did remain intact for centuries and constant throughout the culture was the idea that contributing to crusading violence—both through personal acts of violence *and* through financial support for these acts—was spiritually beneficial for the individual.

Was it really crusading *violence* that was seen as spiritually beneficial, though? Perhaps it was the suffering undergone by the crusaders that was so beneficial, rather than the acts of violence they committed. Undoubtedly Christian suffering, not least the suffering experienced during a long and dangerous pilgrimage to the Holy Land, had long been viewed as spiritually meritorious, and it is indisputable that this was part of why crusading was viewed as spiritually beneficial. Indeed, one of the most constant crusading themes was also one of the most pervasive spiritual themes of the Middle Ages—that of the *imitatio Christi*, or imitation of Christ. To follow Christ and his example, to carry one's own cross, was to imitate Christ, and this constituted the very highest spiritual ideal for Latin Christians in the Middle Ages.

Unsurprisingly, then, it was incorporated into crusading from the beginning. For example, the

very earliest account of the First Crusade, the *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, began with an explanation for the First Crusade rooted in the *imitatio Christi*:

When now that time approached which the Lord Jesus daily points out to the faithful, especially saying in the Gospel, ‘Anyone who wants to follow me, should deny himself and bear his cross and follow me,’ a great movement was undertaken through all the regions of Gaul, [with the purpose] that if anyone wanted to follow God zealously, with a pure heart and mind, and wished to bear the cross after him faithfully, [that one] would not be unwilling to quickly take up the way to the Holy Sepulcher.⁹

In the *Gesta francorum*, then, the ideal of *imitatio Christi* was not simply part of crusading ideology, it was its source. (The *Gesta francorum* is unique in this emphasis; other accounts of the First Crusade attribute a great deal more agency to Pope Urban II and emphasize a broader range of ideas.) From the First Crusade onwards, the *imitatio Christi* continued to play a major and ongoing role across crusading media (and thus across a wide variety of different audiences) and throughout the geographical range of crusading.

However, crusading constituted the *imitatio Christi* for two reasons: suffering and victory. Crusaders imitated Christ’s suffering through the hardships they endured while on crusade (including death) and the sacrifices they made in order to crusade. But they also imitated—or tried to imitate—Christ’s victory over sin and death on the cross. That victory was perceived and described clearly and consistently as a military triumph, and Christ victorious as a successful military leader who defeated his adversaries. As discussed earlier, this rhetoric was

⁹ *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, ed. Rosalind Hill, *The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1962), 1.

not unique to crusading, but it certainly was emphasized in crusading sources, even some of the earliest. To give just one example, a verse depiction of the First Crusade described the crusaders imitating Christ through suffering *and* fighting:

...hanging from a shining cross

Christ advances, victory yields to Christ.

The cross which sustains was our cure:

Therefore with equal right those who wish to imitate Christ

Bow their heads and endure vicissitudes.

They fight safely who fight beneath such a leader [*dux*];

To those who will fight, the good leader [*dux*] will give reward.¹⁰

The crusaders did endure hardship, but they also fought, and they fought for a Christ who led them in war (as a *dux*) to victory. Likewise, one of the more intriguing prose narratives of the First Crusade drew an elaborate parallel between the crucifixion of Christ and the crusade. In a vision, Christ declared a hierarchy among the crusaders; those who stood at the front line and were not afraid were most worthy and, indeed, were like Christ crucified, while those farther back in the ranks were less worthy, and those who hid like cowards at home were like the Jews and Pontius Pilate.¹¹ The equation between committing acts of violence and imitating Christ could hardly be clearer.

¹⁰ *The Historia Vie Hierosolimitane of Gilo of Paris and a Second, Anonymous Author*, ed. C. W. Grocock and J. E. Siberry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 68-70, ll. 24-30.

¹¹ Raymond of Aguilers, *Liber*, ed. John H. and Laurita L. Hill, *Documents relatifs a l'histoire des croisades 9* (Paris: L'académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 1969), 113-14.

For modern readers, it may be tempting to read the constant parallels drawn in many different media between crusading violence and Christ's Passion as post hoc airbrushing or outright self-delusion, but to do so is to ignore the historical evidence. Crusaders—those who participated directly and those who supported the cause—imitated Christ through suffering *and* through violence. Indeed, going further, even to stress a distinction between Christian suffering and Christian violence may be anachronistic. One could read in both examples just given that suffering *was* violence (and vice-versa). In any event, crusading violence was not incidental to the endeavor, nor did it need excuse in the eyes of Latin contemporaries; it was not a necessary evil but a positive good.

Arguably the clearest example of crusading's central link between violence and individual spiritual benefit is the creation and perpetuation of the military orders. The first and most famous military order, that of the Knights of the Temple (or Templars), was founded in Jerusalem in the aftermath of the First Crusade conquest of the city in 1099; it was formally recognized by the Latin church in 1129 at the Council of Troyes. The order combined key aspects of life within a religious order—chastity, individual poverty, obedience, and a commitment to spiritual conflict with the forces of evil—with a commitment to physical violence on behalf of God, the Latin church, and fellow Christians.

Although regarded with both early support and early skepticism, the concept of a 'military order' rapidly became popular. Another religious order in the Levant, that of the Hospital of St. John (the Hospitallers), militarized from the 1120s onwards. The Templars founded houses back in Europe to supply the Levant with funds and fighters. Other military orders were created and played key roles in different European locales, often (though not always) within a crusading framework. In the Iberian peninsula a great number of local orders under

royal direction made possible the Iberian *Reconquista*, in northern Europe the Sword-Brothers of Livonia and the Teutonic Knights oversaw crusades and Germanic colonization, and in northern Europe and the Mediterranean military orders even formed ‘order-states’—Prussia, Rhodes, and Malta. While we have to be careful not to conflate the military orders and the crusades—one could be a crusader without being a member of a military order—the two phenomenon were linked closely in both ideological and practical terms. Crucially for our purposes here, the military orders, like the crusades, explicitly linked the individual spiritual advantages of joining a religious order with a mandate for violence.

Members of the military orders were not only concerned with the fate of their own souls; they also worried about the fate of Christendom. This urges us to recognize that crusading violence was not only considered spiritually beneficial for the individual agent. In addition, it was to some degree considered beneficial for the broader Christian community. This was true in part because of a non-specific, broadly conceived connection between individual piety and community favor in the eyes of God. As a result of this connection, victory on crusade signaled divine favor, while failure indicated the opposite. From the later twelfth century onwards, this divine favor or condemnation was believed to apply to all of Christendom, not just those who participated in a given crusade.

Yet it was also true because of the community function ascribed to crusading violence. Crusading violence served to combat wrongful violence and punish those who had done wrong, and in so doing, it promoted the good of the Christian community. This was in line with the emphasis on violence to protect the Christian community widespread in the earlier Middle Ages and already discussed above. It is worth repeating that for contemporaries, this function of crusading violence did *not* contradict the imperative to commit violence as an expression of

Christian love. Christian love for the individual could motivate one to violence; as Ivo of Chartres expressed it in 1094, to seek to ‘push [another] away from the bad and pull him to the good’ was an act of love, not persecution.¹² Furthermore, however, Christian love for the community and for God’s will could also motivate one to violence. As Anselm of Lucca expressed it in his treatise *De caritate*, also in the eleventh century,

...just as Moses the lawgiver by divine inspiration allowed to the people of God an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and so forth to repress the ungodliness of the peoples, so we will and applaud that princes should exercise vengeance against the enemies of the truth according to zeal, to a purpose of divine love and the duty of godliness.¹³

Christian violence could not only be an expression of love for its target; it could also be an expression of love for the Christian community. Lest we believe these ideas were confined to the intellectual world of theorists, we should remember that Bruno of Cologne’s violence against others in his community was defended on the same lines: ‘it is only by doing these things that the guardian and teacher of the faithful brings to them the rare gift of peace and saves them from the darkness in which there is no light.’¹⁴

There are a number of textual examples to show how these general ideas about Christian violence and its benefits for the Christian community found fertile ground in the crusading movement, but perhaps the best choice for our purposes is from the account of the 1147 conquest

¹² Ivo of Chartres, *Panormia* VIII.46, *Patrologia Latina* 161, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: 1853), 00.

¹³ Anselm of Lucca, *De caritate* (cited and trans. Cowdrey, ‘Christianity and the Morality of Warfare,’ 179).

¹⁴ Ruotger, *Vita Sancti Brunonis*, *Patrologia Latina* 134, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: 1853), 937-77 (cited and trans. France, ‘Christianity, Violence, and the Origins of Crusading,’ 596).

of Lisbon during the Second Crusade. According to this account, a rousing and lengthy sermon was preached by the Bishop of Oporto to the crusaders urging them to fight. In the represented words of the Bishop of Oporto,

‘But now, with God inspiring you, you bear arms with which murderers and plunders should be wounded, the devious controlled, the adulterers punished, the impious lost from the earth, the parricides not allowed to live, nor the songs of impiety [allowed] to go forth....Deeds of this kind are the duty of vengeance which good men carry in good spirit...*It is not cruelty but piety for God.*’¹⁵

Crusading violence, then, was not-cruel and instead directed against the cruel; it was pious and directed against the impious; and it functioned to benefit the broader community by cleansing it of wrongdoers.

The quotation from Jerome and its reference to cruelty deserves closer scrutiny. As Daniel Baraz has explained, the Latin West is indebted to imperial Rome for a discourse on cruelty that was less pronounced in Christian Rome and almost invisible in the early Middle Ages. In contrast, he notes, the twelfth century saw the start of strongly renewed cultural attention to cruelty that ramped up into the early modern period, specifically as a characteristic that justified violence against perceived threats primarily inside, but also outside, Christian society.¹⁶

¹⁵ *De expugnatione Lyxbonensi*, ed. Charles Wendell David, with foreword and bibliography by Jonathan Phillips (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 80; italics indicate the quote from Saint Jerome’s letter (see n. 2 above).

¹⁶ Daniel Baraz, *Medieval Cruelty: Changing Perceptions, Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

It is hardly surprising that in the central and later Middle Ages, Jerome's ideas returned with force to promote pious violence against the impious, who were so often identified as the cruel. In the fourth and fifth centuries Jerome had been, Baraz explains, 'creating one of the most potent apologies for violence during the Middle Ages.'¹⁷ For Jerome, just as an individual limb might be harmed in order to protect the health of the body, so might an individual person be harmed in order to protect the health of *Christianitas*. Such violence should not be deemed cruel, no matter how painful or severe, but rather pious. These ideas were clearly relevant for the crusading movement.

Who were the 'cruel,' the 'impious,' the targets of crusading violence? If we want to leave room for all those who did in actual fact endure crusading violence, then we must limit ourselves to saying that crusading violence was directed at those purported to be the 'enemies of Christ.' This was the language repeated over and over to describe crusading targets, including Muslims, Jews, heretics, and adversaries of the papacy. Critical readers will rightly note that 'purported to be' is rather open to interpretation. 'Purported to be' by the pope or by a random individual Christian? Similarly, they might query, is not 'enemies of Christ' a rather broad formulation? The response must be yes to both questions. But the great range of historical evidence makes it impossible to claim that crusading violence was *only* directed at targets approved by the papacy or targets actually attacking or threatening to attack Christian society. It is likewise impossible to claim that *all* crusading violence was even believed to be so directed—by the papacy, or by the majority of Latin Christians, or even by the majority of crusaders in a given expedition. After all, the Fourth Crusade alone furnishes a vivid example of an expedition containing plenty of crusading violence that was hotly debated by the crusaders themselves.

¹⁷ Baraz, *Medieval Cruelty*, 17.

What is clear is that around the Mediterranean and across the centuries, the various targets of crusading violence were consistently depicted as the enemies of Christ. As enemies of Christ—whether Muslims, Jews, heretics, pagans, or political opponents of the papacy—they were assumed to be actively working against the will of God and the good of Christian society. Thus Christendom benefitted from crusading violence; it was protected from threat and/or assault. And of course, as already noted, to the extent that individual piety was linked to the overall spiritual well-being of Christendom, crusading was also spiritually beneficial for the broader Christian community.

There are additional conceptual themes that support the point that crusading violence brought spiritual benefits to crusaders and Christendom alike. For example, the ideas that crusading was an act of Christian vengeance, an apocalyptic undertaking, or one awash with the miraculous all relate to and elaborate the main theme: the spiritual benefits of crusading violence. That said, dissecting all these related themes in depth is not necessary to appreciate the central point. Furthermore, to do so runs the risk of creating the impression that crusading violence conformed to an intricate pattern of conceptualizations, always and across the board.

Last but not least, though, we do need to recognize the communal nature of crusading violence. As already noted, not all crusading violence was actually authorized by the papacy, or even by any recognized authority, ecclesiastical or not. But indisputably crusading violence was undertaken by groups of Christians, not by individuals, even when the rhetoric used nodded to judicial punishment more than warfare and even though, admittedly, individual crusaders took individual vows. These groups were organized and logistically complex, either to a great extent, as with the grand *passagia* to the Levant, or to a lesser extent, as with smaller or more local endeavors. They were frequently, though not always, multinational; even when crusading

became a phenomenon dominated by leagues of states in the later Middle Ages and early modern period, these leagues maintained an emphasis on alliance across political borders. And it seems indisputable that these groups considered (or at least successfully convinced others that) their violence was appropriately authorized, whether or not all of their contemporaries or modern historians would agree with them.

I have argued here that crusading violence was Christian violence that was considered spiritually beneficial for the individual, beneficial for the Christian community, and directed against the perceived enemies of Christ. Furthermore, this crusading violence was communal; it was undertaken by groups who believed (or at least convincingly represented that) their endeavors were authorized. This understanding of crusading violence is narrower than undifferentiated ‘Christian violence.’ At the same time, it is broader than many might like. If correct, then crusading violence was not bound within the confines of any given expedition or series of expeditions, not targeted at one particular group, nor necessarily restrained by submission to a higher authority, papal or secular. Additionally, crusading violence was not solely a product of crusading; it tapped into established ideas about Christian violence that predated 1095. Likewise, crusading violence was fully compatible with, and presumably often accompanied or was conflated with, other forms of Christian violence, such as those described in other chapters in this volume. After all, crusading violence empowered rather than restrained its agents, and its agents in turn empowered it. Whether or not we can circumscribe the crusades in other ways, in terms of their *violence*, the line between the crusades and the rest of medieval Latin culture is little more than the very faintest pencil mark, poised for erasure.

[5817 words]