



Fall 1999

# Christianity and War in the Early Middle Ages: A Brief Survey

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***Christianity and War in the  
Early Middle Ages:  
A brief survey***

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Honors Senior Thesis  
Dr. Diehl



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**By Diego Bartholomew  
Advised by Peter Diehl PhD.**

## **Introduction**

War is one of the most gruesome acts in which human society can engage.

Therefore, it should be no surprise that almost every culture has found some means of rationalizing its participation in it. Some societies have codified these rationalizations into vast law codes which define how and when the nation may go to war. Other societies, however, had an outlook on war that, although never codified, was yet prevalent throughout the social fabric of that particular society. This attitude towards war is no less stringent than the laws that were written down by other societies. During the Middle Ages, both written and unwritten approaches to war merged through the Germanic migrations into the Roman Empire and the subsequent interactions between the peoples.

From the end of the Roman Empire to the beginning of the Crusades, the relationship between law and war in the Christian Church and in Western Europe underwent significant change. Over time, the pacifism of such writers as Tertullian and Origen would slowly be modified to fit the needs of the time. As Christianity became intertwined with the Empire, the theories changed with it. Pacifism would be seen as an ideal, but as with all ideals there would be a realization that sometimes pacifism could not be the answer. In addition, with the collapse of the Roman Empire, and even a bit before that, the central authority that people expected to come from the Emperor was gone and people were now fighting for expressly regional reasons. With the collapse of the central authority, there was a corresponding reduction in the enforcement of laws, including those pertaining to warfare. Christianity always believed that peace was good, but as time went by it became increasingly obvious that either Christians would have to fight for

their existence or be lost to time and anarchy. Soon it became a duty for some Christians to go to war, but only under certain criteria. This might have been overlooked numerous times, but it was still important that Christian Church never stressed wars, but neither did it preach pacifism. Eventually the Church no longer needed to defend itself as much from outside attacks but by that time, it was deeply interwoven with politics. Thus when Europe started to reach beyond itself there were Christians present and through this the Church became embroiled in even more wars.

The Crusades mark a turning point in Western society: no longer was it turned in on itself, but it started to look elsewhere to expand. Although throughout the early Middle Ages there was endemic fighting throughout Europe, there remained some people who read the old works and still sought to understand them, and through these people the theory of war passed. These theories were different from the constant violence of the times and operated as a science with rules both about when a war could start (*ius ad bellum*) and about how it was to be conducted (*ius in bello*). To understand one of the fundamental aspects of the Crusades, the impact of Christianity's concepts of war, one must look to see how the different ideas of just war slowly melded and changed to legitimize the conquest of another region on religious grounds.

## Chapter 1: Earlier Traditions

In studying war theory in the early Middle Ages one must first look at the antecedents to see where the major concepts came from. Since ideas do not form in a vacuum, it is important to analyze the views of those who influenced the Middle Ages. The four main streams of thought that led into the Middle Ages were the Hebraic tradition, the Romans, the Early Christians and the Germanic Tribes. Within the theories of these four main groups lie the seeds of the tradition of war theory in the early Middle Ages.

### Hebraic

The Old Testament, which encompasses a collection of the Hebrew holy books, has many references to warfare and rules for its conduct by God's chosen people. The God of the Old Testament takes an active part in the pursuit of war by the Hebrews, to the point of fighting with them on the battlefield and leading them to victory over His enemies. Due to the ambiguities in the New Testament about warfare, many of the medieval theorists and theologians looked to the Old Testament for help when trying to defend Christian warfare. The very fact that the Old Testament is part of the Bible provides a direct link to the war theories of the ancient Hebrews, for the word of God flowed through them to the Christians.

Deuteronomy, Chapter 20, focuses on the rules for war, saying, "the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory."<sup>1</sup> Miller refers to this as *Synergism* between the divine warriors and God, which

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 20:4.

in the Old Testament is the path to victory.<sup>2</sup> This passage shows how the belief transferred into the Christian doctrine of a God who fights alongside His faithful rather than merely condoning their actions. This phrase appears throughout Deuteronomy, and again later in the Bible, but here in particular it is found with a code of behavior in battle, a code that not only sanctions genocide, but also commands it as God's holy will. God commands through Moses that:

However, in the cities of the nations that God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them- the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites- As the Lord your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshipping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the Bible condones genocide justified it in the eyes of the medieval commentators in a way that current commentators would find hard to believe. There would never be a question about whether or not genocide was licit; God had already spoken on the issue. In addition, the concept that the Christian God fought both for and alongside of His faithful would repeatedly reappear throughout the Middle Ages, with its greatest proponents being some of those people who preached the Crusades. Finally, this chapter of the Bible also gives the lands of the Levant to God's chosen people, which would give impetus to the use of this passage when raising support for the Crusades.<sup>4</sup>

Another interesting aspect of the Hebraic law is the license for the Hebrews to kill members of their own family in the name of God. During the trial in the wilderness with the Golden Calf, Moses ordered, with God's full approval, that the faithful Israelites, the

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<sup>2</sup> Patrick D. Miller, Jr. The Divine Warrior in Early Israel, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 156. Synergism is when both human and divine fight together for a common goal. Miller believes that to the Israelites "Yahweh was general of both the earthly and the heavenly hosts."

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 20:16-18.



Levites in particular, should “go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor,” and anyone else who turned away from the true God and started worshiping idols and false gods.<sup>5</sup> Using this example as precedent, one should kill loved ones because they are doing, or have done, something wrong in the sight of God. In the hands of people trying to justify civil wars this is a powerful argument, and one in which potential becomes duty. Since all medieval commentators on the Bible used the Old Testament, it is not farfetched to think that it influenced thoughts on what to do with heretics.

The Hebrews did not recognize many of the rules that other states put on their own conduct in a state of war. Political assassination, assuming it worked, was glorified as a possible means of dealing with one’s enemies.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the Israelites were expected to make use of treachery, including lying, in order to win a war in which no quarter was given.<sup>7</sup> These aspects of war were antithetical to the concepts of war of the Germanic peoples, and therefore would not have had as much of an impact on Western Europe; they can be seen however in Ambrose, Augustine and Gratian, all of whom wished war to be over as quickly as possible, regardless of the tactics. This explains some of the tension about tactics between the Crusaders and the Byzantines; the East had many influences on their theories of war, just as the West did, which led both to have contrary systems which came into conflict.

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<sup>4</sup> Christians had a belief that, “God had rejected the Jews as a chosen people and in favor of the Christians, who now saw themselves as the new Israelites.” Malcolm Barber, The Two Cities: Medieval Europe, 1050-1320, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57.

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 32:27. The NIV Study Bible emphasizes the fact that the Levites were both the house descended from Levi and a priesthood, which meant that this section could also be used for the defense of warrior clerics.

<sup>6</sup> Walther Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, trans. J.A. Baker (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 323.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Finally, there were the actions of Mattathias and his son Judas Maccabeus in 168 BC when they began a guerrilla uprising against the Seleucid Empire, called the Maccabean revolt.<sup>8</sup> The fact that they became renowned for fighting a just war against horrible oppressors, at least in the eyes of the Jews, led to the Christians in the Middle Ages looking at the Maccabeans as role models of how to fight a just war. On at least one occasion, the Maccabeans suffered a great loss because they would not fight on the Sabbath: this led people to begin relaxing the rules for fighting on the Sabbath to allow defensive battles on holy days.<sup>9</sup> In the eleventh century, people would be compared to the Maccabeans when fighting for a just cause and the Maccabean revolt would be used to justify the nature of the Crusades.<sup>10</sup>

One medieval commentator, Maimonides (1135-1204), divided Hebrew war traditions into: 1) religious wars which were commanded by God, 2) defensive wars which were licit for all men who do not have outstanding religious duties, and 3) optional wars which were fought on the behalf of kings and for the extension of Israel.<sup>11</sup> Also, as a near contemporary to the Crusaders, he shows that many of the ideas found in the written works of the supporters of the Crusades were mirrored by other scholars of the Old Testament.

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<sup>8</sup> NIV study bible, n1317, n1496.

<sup>9</sup> Roland H. Bainton, Christian Attitudes towards War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 43. Hereafter referred to as Bainton.

<sup>10</sup> And Carl Erdmann, The Origin of the Idea of Crusade, trans. Marshall W. Baldwin and Walter Goffart, (Surrey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 74. Bishop Wazo of Liège was compared as a warrior, by his biographer, to Judas Maccabees. Bainton, 52.

<sup>11</sup> Maimonides is significant because of his influence on European philosophers, such as Aquinas, and because he “stands pre-eminent among Jewish philosophers and liberal thinkers.” Friedrich Heer, The Medieval World: 1100-1350, trans. Janet Sondheimer (New York: The New American Library, 1963), 314. Also, as a near contemporary to the Crusaders, he shows that many of the ideas found in the supporter’s of the Crusades written works are mirrored by other philosophers. Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions, ed. John Kelsay and James Turner Johnson, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 9.

The word *lex* (law) would come to mean the Old Testament in many writings revolving around the concept of heresy, and the actions that the Christian church should take, including violence.<sup>12</sup> Hebrew law could be applied to offensive wars against other states and against community members who were not acting in an orthodox manner. The Christians would later use some of these facts to shore up arguments for war. Since the New Testament lacked references to if, or when, war should be waged, the Old Testament filled in gaps in the creation of doctrine.

## **Roman**

The Roman people had defined limits to their warfare, and much of the language and logic used in the Middle Ages to define a just war came from Roman practices. Although the practice had originally started with priests taking auguries to see whether or not the gods would be angered over a war, as time went by the Roman Republic, and then Empire, expanded the logic behind wars.<sup>13</sup> The concept of not angering the gods by fighting a war was never truly abandoned, and one of the things the Romans prided themselves on was the fact that they honored all gods.

The Romans' view of war was analogous to their view of interpersonal relationships. Therefore, just as humans had the right to defend themselves, so every state had the right to defend itself. Medieval Romanists, not needing to reconcile Christian doctrine to Roman theory, would pick up this strand of thought and they would

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Diehl, "Heretical Attacks on the Legitimacy of the Law" (unpublished), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Tenney Frank, Roman Imperialism, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), 9.

all see this aspect of the justification of war in much the same way, but their Christian counterparts would not for a long time.<sup>14</sup>

At the base of the Roman Republic's view of war were the *fetiales*, a college of priests intrinsic to the process of declaring war. According to Plutarch, writing at the end of the first century AD, when Numa created the priesthood they:

being keepers of the peace -- or so I interpret it -- and deriving their name from their function, put an end to strife by using arbitration. They did not allow the state to go to war before every hope of a just settlement had been exhausted. And in fact Greeks call it peace when the two sides make use of discussion rather than violence when settling differences. Often the Roman *fetiales* would go in person to the aggressive party, seeking to persuade them to listen to reason. If the aggressors disregarded the appeal, then the *fetiales* called the gods to witness and, having made many dreadful imprecations against themselves and their fatherland if their proceedings were not just, they proclaimed war against them. When the *fetiales* refused their consent and forbade war, it was not lawful for a Roman soldier or king to take up arms. From the *fetiales* the leader had to receive the sign for beginning the war, and only if it were a just war. And then it was the leader's duty to see the most advantageous course.<sup>15</sup>

The *fetiales* issued the *repetitio rerum* to demand the return of property taken by the foreign power, and then if nothing was forthcoming in thirty-three days they declared any war fought to be just.<sup>16</sup> Also, as one can see in Plutarch's writings, any legalistic need for the Romans could be assuaged by a process in which true methodical procedure prevented any question of Roman wrongdoing in the eyes of the gods. The nature of the *fetiales* shows that peace was the ideal state of the Roman Republic because the oaths of

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<sup>14</sup> Frederick H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 41. He also points out the canon lawyers of the time were knowledgeable about Roman law and that they too drew on it.

<sup>15</sup> Life of Numa, Trans. Dr Johnson (Unpublished), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Russell, 6. In addition, Frank comments that this "semipolitical" priesthood "supervised the rites of declaring war and the swearing of treaties, and which formed, as it were, a court of the first instance in such questions of international disputes as the proper treatment of envoys and the execution of extradition." Frank, 8.

destruction for repudiation were sworn to Jupiter.<sup>17</sup> However as time went by, the *fetiales* slowly moved into the background as the Republic turned into an empire and became more autocratic. As the Roman Republic became the Roman Empire, the autocratic nature of the Emperor subsumed the role of deciding which wars were just.

Even the gradual decline of the *fetiales* as a major priesthood did not mean that religion was no longer part of declaring war. When the Republic ended and the Empire began, Augustus, and all Emperors after him, assumed the title *pontifex maximus*, which made him the head of the Roman religion. The holder of this position was, according to Plutarch, supposed to be the:

“interpreter and spokesman, or rather the expounder, of sacred ritual. Not only is he in charge of public rites, but also oversaw those offering private sacrifice, kept individuals for transgressing the traditional rules, and instructed them as to what a person needed to do to honor or supplicate the gods... [as well as being] in charge of the sacred maidens known as Vestals.”<sup>18</sup>

All of this allowed him to speak for the wishes of the gods, and because of this ability he could claim that he ruled by their desire. Thus, the Emperor could declare war and it would be *de facto* just because he as the mouthpiece for the gods had declared it just. Therefore, even though the position of the *fetiales* had been superseded, the Romans always made sure the gods’ wishes were obeyed, something that later Christian writers would appreciate.

Beyond the procedural aspects, there were also criteria which became exceedingly important to the inheritors of Roman culture. The great Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero defined three main conditions for *ius ad bellum* in several of his

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<sup>17</sup> Frank, 8

<sup>18</sup> Plutarch, 9.

books: the recovery of lost goods; defense; and the punishment of evil-doing.<sup>19</sup> All of these reasons make Rome the victim of something another state did, because even for the last reason a Roman would say that they were going to war because it was in their interest for the gods not to be aggravated. At least one of these three conditions must be met for a war to be legitimate, because otherwise the gods would be angered and cast an evil eye on the Romans. These strands of thought would all be picked up later by different theorists who were trying to find legitimacy for war.<sup>20</sup> The concept of gods, or in Christian theology one God, being either pleased or displeased by the actions of the state was a crucial strand in all of the different theories. The Roman ability to assimilate everything into the system allowed the theories of every state they conquered or assimilated to be attached to the main core of belief, even if the outward appearances changed. To the Romans, war was a legal matter and therefore, to their way of thinking it had rules about whether or not each party was in the right.

All parts of a war were legalistic to the Romans. Even the Roman term *pax* was related to the verb *pangere*, which is also a legal term.<sup>21</sup> *Pangere* means to make a pact or a contract. Thus, one can see that for the Romans peace meant a condition which was governed by a contract between at least two groups. *Pangere* was not limited to a state though. In fact, it was more commonly used in dealings between individuals. This shows that interstate relations for the Romans were similar to interpersonal

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<sup>19</sup> Cicero, *De Officiis* I, II, 36: Nullum bellum esse iustum nisi quod aut rebus repetitis geratur aut denunciatum ante sit et interdictum. *De Republica*, II, 23, 35: Illa iniusta bella sunt, quae sunt sine causa suscepta. Nam extra ulciscendi aut propulsandorum hostium causam bellum geri nullum potest... Nullum bellum iustum habetur nisi denunciatum, nisi indictum, nisi repetitis rebus. *Ibid.* III, 23, 34: Nullum bellum suscipi a civitate optima nisi aut pro fide aut pro salute. *Ibid.* II 23, 25: Noster autem populus sociis defendis terrarum iam omnium potitus est. *De Republica*, II, 23, 35. Russell, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Russell, 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

relationships.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the term *repetitis rebus* is commonly used in a technical meaning of regaining something that has been lost.<sup>23</sup> Justice was the primary reason for going to war and therefore, when the war was finished, a treaty stipulating what peace would hold for the two states would follow. The Romans' sense of procedure and justice would transfer to the Middle Ages; and later writers such as Augustine, Gratian and others would all notice these themes.

### Early Christian

The Roman writer Celsus, writing in the 170s AD, addressed Christians: "If all men were to do the same as you, then there would be nothing to prevent the king from being left in utter solitude and desertion, and the forces of the empire would fall into the hands of the wildest and most lawless barbarians."<sup>24</sup> There is a great deal of evidence that many of the earliest Christians were pacifists who held that fighting, or any other form of bloodshed, was wrong. Theologians of the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire had slightly different attitudes on war. However, an emphasis on love pervaded in all versions of the theory, though exactly how this figured into their theory might vary between authors. Christians also believed that they fought a spiritual war against evil, in the same manner that the Roman Empire fought to preserve the *Pax Romana*. The idea of the *Militia Christi*, a pacifistic expression of the battle against evil, was a direct attempt to try to turn what was considered evil to a more beneficial use.<sup>25</sup> To

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>24</sup> Contra Celsum, VIII, 68- 69. The Christians who responded to this attack pointed out the logical fallacy with this statement, but the arguments that surround it are less important than the underlying concepts.

<sup>25</sup> Stanely Windass, "The Early Christian Attitude to War," *The Irish Theological Quarterly* (1962 Vol 29), 242-243.

early Christians, peace also symbolized God's approval because peace is the ultimate success and goal in the Old Testament and in Roman practices.<sup>26</sup>

The Christians in the East thought that Christians should not fight in the Imperial army for four main reasons: 1) idolatry, 2) the persecution of Christians by the army, 3) that soldiers faced too many temptations, and finally, 4) that Christians should not shed the blood of others.<sup>27</sup> The idolatry the authors speak of is that of the cult of the deified emperor, which was mandatory for men serving in the army. The other three reasons are self-explanatory. The odd thing is that the most solid evidence of pre-Constantinian Christian soldiers is also to be found in the East. The Thundering Legion, which contained a significant portion of Christians, came from Armenia and was on active duty at the same time that Celsus wrote, so an inconsistency does appear to be present in the practice, if not "doctrine," of the early Church.<sup>28</sup> All of this controversy in the East could be because Christianity came from the Levant and then spread in the East much quicker. The sheer fact that there were more Christians in the East could have led to there being greater diversity among the Christians present.

In the West, the See of Rome seems to have been more relaxed in its attitude towards violence and bloodshed.<sup>29</sup> This more relaxed view led to fewer debates about Christians in war. Later, this area would have more to do with the formation of just war

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<sup>26</sup> The Church The Gospel and War, Ed. Rufus M. Jones, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), 90-91. He points out such that peace was more than merely a synonym for prosperity as in the Old Testament along with the fact that to the Romans *pax* had only meant a treaty or agreement.

<sup>27</sup> Just War and Jihad, 8 and 9. Bainton, 74 and 77.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.



theories in the West. This is a direct contrast to North Africa, however, where there was constant debate and action on the issue.<sup>30</sup>

According to Bainton one can make a geographical map of where the different views were held, and it appears that the pacifists were more common in the center of the Roman Empire, while Christians on the fringes tended not to believe that there was a great debate.<sup>31</sup> As time went by and Christianity started to become a more popular religion, the attitudes towards war shifted as well. Before Constantine's assumption of the purple, there were already Christians in the army. Although they could in no way be considered a majority, it is hard to imagine that he could have used Christian symbolism and risen to so high a position without there being some Christians present.

There is some argument against Bainton's contention that the early Christians were more pacifistic than later ones. Ryan asserts that Bainton was

unduly impressed by the denunciations of bloodshed and warfare to be found in certain Christian writers, while they pass over the fact that no conciliar decree against service had appeared. At a time when councils had so much power in shaping Church policy this absence explains whatever vacillation there was among Christian spokesmen.<sup>32</sup>

The fact that no council dealt with the issue of Christian military service is of paramount importance to Ryan because one would assume that if it was a widespread problem there would be some decision about it in some council's decrees. In addition, the lack of a conciliar decree matters because one would expect that, if Christian military service was

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<sup>30</sup> Roland H. Bainton, Christendom: A Short History of Christianity and its Impact on Western Civilization, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964), 96. In particular the Donatists were the instigators of many conflicts over theology. Although Bainton does also comment that this rift in theology had to do with the fact that there were three main strata to North African society: the Latin Aristocrats, the Punic and the Berbers. It was the latter two which joined forces against the Roman Church because it was a form of sedition. They had become Christians when Rome was persecuting them, and then continued on with the branch that was not approved of by Rome. Hereafter referred to as Christendom.

<sup>31</sup> Bainton, 69.

<sup>32</sup> Ryan, 31.

considered a widespread problem, then one of the councils would have made a law about it. Thus, there is some argument whether the early Christians were more pacifistic than their heirs were, or if such a perception is based on a vocal minority. As Rome began to fall, the Romans would slowly turn to the Christian Church as their protector, which would force the Church to either evolve, or become irrelevant. Also, the Christians in the Empire were forced to deal with an influx of a new people.

### **Germanic**

Organized for war at all levels of their society, when the Germanic peoples migrated into the Roman Empire they brought with them many of their original views on warfare. Thus, the effect of the Germanic view of warfare on the determination of medieval war theory cannot be marginalized. Since the upper class in the majority of the regions of Western Europe became Germanic in the 400s AD, their impact on the hierarchy of both the Church and the nations bore the mark of their past.

Germanic culture before the Middle Ages revolved around war and personal bravery. Writing in the 90s AD, Tacitus, commented that “a large body of retainers cannot be kept together except by means of violence and war.”<sup>33</sup> Tacitus saw how necessary war was to the culture of the Germanic people and how all consuming it was in their society.

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<sup>33</sup> Tacitus wrote extensively about the Germanic people, but he was not a modern ethnographer and thus he does not have the same objective view of his subjects. Much of what he writes is focused back at the Romans of his time as an instructive tract about how to live. Still he is an invaluable source about Germanic customs at the end of the first century. Crawford-Clawsey writes that, “Tacitus was the first to describe the institution [*comitatus*] systematically,” and that, “evidence of it also appears in the writings of other ancient and Dark Age historians.” Mary Crawford-Clawsey. “The *Comitatus* and the Lord-Vassal Relationship in the Medieval Epic.” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1982), 2. And Tacitus, *Germania*, trans. S.A Handford (New York: Penguin Group, 1970) chapter 14.

Additionally, the Germanic peoples had a similar view to the Hebrews about their gods following them into battle and fought beside their chosen warriors in the form of the idols that the Germanic people carried with them.<sup>34</sup> The belief that their gods fought in their battles would make them more credulous when hearing that the Christian God did the same. Also, this history of conflict could add to Germanic priests', bishops' and theologians' desire to look more at the God of the Old Testament than peace-loving God of the New Testament.

Warfare in the society of the Germanic peoples was endemic and not only their propensity for war, but also their style of war, was adapted into their new kingdoms in the husk of the Roman Empire. The concept of *ius in bello* was also greatly influenced by their notions. The notion of the *comitatus*, the warrior/kin society, translated into the knight of the Middle Ages, where the vassal and the lord both had equal responsibilities and loyalty. Their ideas on the role of individuals in relation to his or her kin was also unique to the Germanic peoples. As they "could not rely upon the protection and assistance of a bureaucratic empire when they were threatened with attack or famine, it was incumbent upon each man and woman of the community to adhere to the fundamental sociobiological principle."<sup>35</sup> Thus, there was a culture in which personal bravery was valued, coupled with a strong society in which both the lord and follower had obligations. This would lead to the concept of chivalry which would emerge slowly during the course of the Middle Ages.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Chapter 7.

<sup>35</sup> James C. Russell, The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) pg. 120. Hereafter referred to as The Germanization.

## Into the Middle Ages

These four theories came together during the Middle Ages as different groups moved into the Roman Empire and Christianity spread throughout it. The legal system that the Germanic Kingdoms inherited from the Romans was greatly influenced by the Roman tradition, but for the past few decades the Christian Church had been the state religion and Christian ideas had been moving into the legal codes. The Germanic peoples brought with them their own views and traditions on warfare, and as they became Christianized and Romanized some of their cultural baggage transferred into the other systems.

The Roman legal system was the stock on to which all of the theories and notions were grafted as each group was slowly incorporated into various parts of the Empire. Therefore, it should be of no surprise that Roman ideas remain in the laws that we have with us today. These notions shifted and changed throughout the Middle Ages as the warlike Germanic peoples learned laws relating to their violence, and the pacifistic ideal of the early Christians slowly metamorphosed into the over-all concept that war might not only be legitimate, but mandatory for all good Christians with the strength to fight.

An important side note that is a good example of the overlap of Christianity into the secular world is Vegetius' De Re Militari, which was a very important source for military knowledge and tactics in the Middle Ages.<sup>36</sup> In Goffart's opinion, "the De Re Militari is a profoundly novel book [since] it is the first treatise on warfare to be explicitly Christian; it deliberately focuses upon infantry in an age when cavalry had long

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<sup>36</sup> Walter Goffart, Rome's Fall and After, (London: The Hambledon Press, 1989), 45. He analyzes when Vegetius was writing and his conclusion was that he wrote during the reign of Valentinian III. This puts him almost a hundred years after Constantine and shows that Christianity had influenced society, but had been influenced in return.

been central to Roman armed forces; and it is most exclusively concerned with defensive matters.”<sup>37</sup> He goes on to show how Vegetius is really making an argument, and then a plan, for restoring Rome to the power that she once held. Vegetius commented that “who desired peace, prepares for war,” which makes one think that he saw, like his Roman predecessors, that peace was the desired goal.<sup>38</sup> Goffart contends that Vegetius believed that God was not going to defend people, just as he did not defend animals, but he would be happy with them defending themselves.<sup>39</sup> Thus, although he did not set out to comment on Christianity and war, he inadvertently did so. Vegetius is an excellent example of a man for whom Christianity and war were intimately linked and his writings would carry this view of war into the Middle Ages.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

<sup>38</sup> J.M. Wallace Hadrill, Early Medieval History, (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975), 20.

<sup>39</sup> Goffart., 74.

## **Chapter 2: From Constantine to Alfred the Great**

With the accession of Constantine as the Emperor of the Roman Empire many of the basic aspects of Western Europe began to change. Slowly Christianity became the state religion and it in turn proceeded to change to adapt to its new role. As time went on the Roman Empire fell in the West, but its glory and the Church continued to influence much of what happened. In the following centuries people continued to try to dictate when violence was glorified and when it was aberrant.

### **Constantine**

When Constantine assumed the purple the Christians in the Roman Empire now had one of their own on the throne, which marked a clear change for the Christian Church.<sup>40</sup> Since he was at least pro-Christian during his reign, Constantine changed many of the laws about the status of Christians in the Empire, and at the same time he decreased the amount of idolatrous rituals necessary for officers in the army to perform, while leaving enough to appease the still pagan majority.<sup>41</sup> His success led to an acceptance of Christians in society, and took away many of the Christians' problems with military life. His reduction of idolatry, coupled with the fact that he stopped persecution of Christians, meant that two of the main reasons that Christians could not serve in the army were gone. Since the temptations of the soldier's life were never really a big issue, only two reasons were left. Soldiers' lifestyles could be preached against since they were personal sins, but the final reason, the shedding of another's blood, remained controversial, since unlike the others it was inherent to the job, not the society or the

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<sup>40</sup> Bainton, 85.

person. As tolerance and acceptance of Christianity grew in the Roman empire the fact that the Roman Empire and the Church were set up in similar manners, bishoprics closely equating to provinces, provided for there to be two pillars of Christian Roman law in Western Europe.<sup>42</sup>

The fact that Constantine was a Christian Emperor who had won the Imperial throne through military force was not lost on the commentators of his time. Because he defended Christianity and was very active in its preservation and propagation, even though he would be baptized on his deathbed by an Arian, many theologians of the time saw a religious conflict mirrored by the secular world, and therefore felt that strong action was licit in both. Finally, since he was going to stay on the Imperial throne and maintain his favor for Christianity, the Church was forced to deal with being the state religion rather than being free from identification with the state. Ambrose and Augustine, as will be examined, both saw war against heretics to be licit and the Roman Empire as God's instrument in the spread of Christianity. All of the rest of the Church Fathers agreed with this to varying degrees and defended the use of force to defend the Church, even if they personally felt that the use of force was a sin.

### **Ambrose**

Ambrose was one of the first of the major western Christian theologians who thought that Christians could, and possibly should, fight in the Imperial army. The Archbishop of Milan, St. Ambrose argued that Christ's message of the love for one's

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<sup>41</sup> Christendom, 92.

<sup>42</sup> Bainton defines the Church Fathers as, "the major Christian writers up to about A.D. 600." Christendom, 67. Richards narrows the list down to the "Big Four Latin Fathers:" Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine and

neighbor necessitated the defense of fellow Christians who were coming to harm. For example, if a Christian should witness an attack on a person, he was then obligated to come to that person's defense. However, Christ had also died for the perpetrator, and therefore one should seek to drive the assailant off rather than to kill him, although sometimes the latter was necessary.<sup>43</sup>

It is interesting to note that, according to Bainton, Ambrose's *On the Duties of the Clergy* was really just "a reworking of Cicero's *De Officiis*, taking over the concept of the just war in which the suppliant was to be spared and good faith observed with the enemy."<sup>44</sup> The rewriting of Cicero's book shows the impact that Roman thought had on Christian theorists, and also the esteem that Christians in the Roman Empire had even for pagan Roman traditions. This concept was not to be taken on by all Christians, for St. Ambrose, although he served as a praetorian prefect prior to becoming a bishop, thought that priests should be more focused on spiritual battles, rather than on physical matters.<sup>45</sup> St. Ambrose was quite specific in his view that a priest should not be a "merchant, magistrate or militiaman."<sup>46</sup> Thus, Ambrose was not too radical in his beliefs; he did not counsel that all Christians should fight, but he was radical enough to counsel lay people to do so.

His thoughts on the matter might be due to the fact that he had been a warrior earlier in his life, and therefore saw less wrong with that occupation than people who had never had to deal much with the military. Also, as he commented in his works, he did not like the idea that the Germanic peoples were breaching the borders, and therefore felt that

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Gregory. Jeffery Richards, *Consul of God: The Life and Times of Gregory the Great*, (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 263. Incidentally, he leaves out Jerome.

<sup>43</sup> Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy*, 1.41.211. From *Just War and Jihad*, 28 n21.

<sup>44</sup> Bainton, 90.



the Roman Empire should fight against these interlopers. As he commented in *De Fide Christiana*, he believed the main reason the borders were so weak was that the heresy of Arianism was prominent among the Visigoths, against whom the Romans were fighting.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, Ambrose's three main points were these: Christians could fight for defensive reasons; people with priestly duties should not; and heresy was not to be tolerated. Although he never actively countenanced the persecution of heretics, they were by no means true Christians, and therefore people never should have expected them to guard the border.

### **Augustine**

Augustine is considered by many to be the father of Christian just war theory. Although he was not the first one to suggest the ability for Christians to participate in battle and argue for the potential goodness of it, he was the first to clearly articulate a theory. Augustine took a great deal of his theories of Christian warfare from his mentor, Ambrose but carried the same concepts in different directions, or extends them further. This may be partly because Christianity, had gone in less than a century, from being a persecuted religion to being the state religion of the Roman Empire. As a Roman citizen, he also took a good deal from Roman law and mirrored Cicero in his formula that just wars avenge injuries, yet he extends the legalist's view. To Roman legal theory he added

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>46</sup> *Early and Medieval Christianity*, 47.

<sup>47</sup> Russell, 14. *De Fide Christiana*, ii, 16, 136-43.

the concept that God plays some role in warfare and therefore that love, God's love, should also play a role in warfare.<sup>48</sup>

In The City of God, Augustine remarked that, "it is the wrongdoing of the opposing party which compels the wise man to wage just wars."<sup>49</sup> In saying this Augustine effectively made the argument for wars which attempt to rectify the wrongdoing of another person. Augustine proposed a version of just war similar to Cicero's, but based on theological arguments. Like his mentor, Ambrose, he believed that it was a Christian's duty to fight in some wars, and that sometimes war was a necessary evil to prevent greater evils. For Augustine, peace should always be the ultimate goal of any military undertaking. He comments that Christians should:

Think, then, of this first of all, when you are arming for the battle, that even your bodily strength is a gift of God; for, considering this, you will not employ the gift of God against God... Peace should be the object of your desire: war should be waged only as a necessity, and waged only that God may by it deliver men from the necessity and preserve them in peace. For peace is not sought in order to the kindling of war, but war is waged only that peace may be obtained.<sup>50</sup>

In stating first that God gives strength and then that this strength should be used only in just wars, for the pursuit of peace, Augustine draws a direct line from God to peace through war. Augustine gives legitimacy to war by citing God's involvement and limiting God's favor to only those wars which are waged for the purpose of peace. At the same time, though, Augustine believes that wars should be won as quickly as possible even if the victor should win by ambush or some other trick.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Philippe Contamine, War in the Middle Ages, trans. Michael Jones, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 264-265.

<sup>49</sup> St. Augustine, The City of God, trans. Marcus Dods, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1950), XIX.7

<sup>50</sup> Epistle, 189, 6. Cited by Herbert A. Deane, The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 159.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 310 n18.

In addition, Augustine defends wars that punish states for the injury they do to other states.<sup>52</sup> In such a case the war would be offensive, and therefore only just if the other state “refuses to make reparations for wrongs committed by its citizens, or if it fails to return property that has been wrongly stolen.”<sup>53</sup> Wars that are just for this reason should be undertaken to regain these objects, or punish the offender, but should not go any further. This almost legal view of war is very similar to the Roman view, especially in the concept of restitution, which is not surprising since Augustine was a Roman citizen writing in the Roman Empire. Yet, Augustine did not believe that the Romans always followed their own rules and believed that the Romans should have “erected a monument to a goddess named *Aliena* –foreign injustice – because they had made such good use of her.”<sup>54</sup> Genocide, which features prominently in some of the Old Testament passages, for Augustine seems to be the highest degree of just retribution, but one which is not always called for.

Another leap that Augustine makes is to pardon of all wrongdoing associated with their shedding of blood soldiers who fight in a war declared by their rightful leaders. All of the blame of war, especially in an unjust war, is placed firmly on the shoulders of the leaders. According to Augustine, a soldier who acts on his own initiative to determine that a war is unjust is guilty of treason to his lord and of acting outside his position.<sup>55</sup>

In the end, all of Augustine’s theories come back to love. Love must be kept in the heart, or the act is wrong, even if it would otherwise be just and necessary. It is still love of neighbor which makes a man defend his house and property, and the same love

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<sup>52</sup> “*iusta autem bella ea definiri solent quae ulciscuntur*” or “Those wars are normally called just which avenge injuries.” Quaest. in Hept., VI, 10, translated by Deane, 311 n20.

<sup>53</sup> Deane, 160.

forces him to defend someone else even to the point of killing the offender, although such drastic steps are rarely needed. Deane's view is that Augustine felt that, as long as one fought with love in one's heart, it is impossible to fight for other reasons such as avarice and hate.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, in the end Rome was doomed due to the way that it expanded and continued to turn inward on itself, always driven by people's lust for power.

### **Gregory the Great**

Gregory the Great was even less inclined to use violence as a solution than St. Augustine was. He believed that the New Testament did not sanction personal violence and that good Christians should not, in theory, commit violent acts against their fellow Christians. As Richards points out, Gregory "sought to fulfil his obligations both to *Romanitas* and *Christianitas* by seeking a peace treaty between the Empire and the Lombards and, on the other hand, by encouraging the conversion of the Lombards to Catholicism."<sup>57</sup> The idea behind this was that rather than continuing to fight he would sue for peace, and then try to convert the Lombards. This is in keeping with his basic philosophy on how to deal with pagans when trying to convert them. Although the Lombards were heretics, one could imagine that he would be trying to bring them back into the fold through peaceable means while defending himself and Rome. He wrote in his epistles that:

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<sup>54</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, Augustine and the Limits of Politics, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 106.

<sup>55</sup> Dean., 163.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 165. Deane contends that this was especially shown by the fact that Augustine was constantly talking about punishment, not about revenge or profit. Deane believes that the punishment was justified "not only because it protects the innocent but also because it prevents the offender from continuing to misuse his liberty and from adding further crimes to his previous offenses."

<sup>57</sup> Richards, 181.

Those who differ from the Christian religion must be won to the unity of the faith by gentleness, by kindness, by admonition, by exhortation, lest we repel by threats and ill treatment those who might have been attracted to the faith by the charm of instruction and the anticipated fear of the coming judge. It is more desirable that they should assemble with kindly feelings to hear from you the word of God than that they should tremble at the immoderate exercise of your severity.<sup>58</sup>

This type of preaching is in direct opposition with the style of conversion that would eventually convert the Saxons and be attempted on any number of other groups. One must keep in mind that this style of thought never fully disappeared from the minds of the theologians of the Middle Ages and that Gregory has been highly influential in different parts of Christendom since his death. It was through Gregory that many of Augustine's writings were transmitted into the Middle Ages, but they were looked at very little during the early Middle Ages, although his thoughts were never fully dismissed, especially in the north.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time that he was studying the writings of St. Augustine, by necessity he was actively participating in wars himself, a move that would be pivotal to later generations.<sup>60</sup> He constantly railed against heretics and felt that wars against them were not only licit, but to be desired. Gregory might have thought that gaining converts was important and that wars were not the proper means to gain converts, but he also thought that defending those already gained was important. He advocated wars at the behest of

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<sup>58</sup> Gregory, *ep* i. 34.

<sup>59</sup> Richards argues that, "the medieval dominance of Augustine's ideas derived from their Gregorian manifestation and prevailed through the Gregorian transmission." *Richards*, 264. Gregory was almost completely forgotten in Rome until the ninth century, but he was remembered and venerated in England. Richards points out that, "Peter Llewellyn has only found four spontaneous references to Gregory in Roman sources between his death and the ninth century." *Ibid.*, 260. While people might not have commented upon his writings for a long time, his actions and writings must have influenced later generations of Popes before the ninth century.

<sup>60</sup> Although many other bishops were being forced into acting in a military manner, the fact that he was also the Pope made him much more conspicuous.

God and thought that pagans and heretics had to be defeated or they would take over Christian lands.<sup>61</sup>

Gregory established the Papacy's leadership in the extension of Christendom, and his writings would be especially important to Charlemagne's empire. It was through Gregory that Augustine's writings, especially the City of God, were transmitted to the Middle Ages. He is pivotal both for his prohibition against using the sword to convert and his thoughts regarding the use of the sword for defense.

Gregory made a statement that would be of great interest to later generations when he personally organized and led the defense of Rome. In becoming active in the secular life of Rome he set a precedent that members of the clergy could take part in the defense of their parishes and sees.<sup>62</sup> This would be very important to the clerics who gained temporal power when the rest of the Roman Empire collapsed around them. The fact that the Pope had acted against the Lombards to defend Rome would lead others to assume a role of leadership in their own areas.

### **Isidore of Seville**

Isidore's concept of just war harks back to the Roman views on just war as a formally declared position. He took a very literal approach that a just war was one that was formally declared and in which no victor was left out of the spoils. His version of the Roman views is even simpler than the views of the later Roman Republican legalists like Cicero. Through him, the bases of the Roman just war theories, such as formal declaration, were passed on to the Middle Ages. An interesting thing about Isidore's

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<sup>61</sup> Russell, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Roger Collins, Early Medieval Europe: 300-1000, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 216-217.

writings is the fact that they were mostly compilations of earlier writings. It is possible that Isidore was trying to restore what he saw as the correct view of the Roman Empire to what he saw as a debasement of something great.<sup>63</sup> Gratian, in his Decretum, would later cite Isidore as a major source for Roman law on the justness of a war. In particular, he would cite from Isidore the ability of a nation to defend itself during an invasion based on natural laws.<sup>64</sup>

### **Clovis and the Merovingians**

Clovis fought long and hard with the Visigoths and Saxons and many of the results of his reign can be seen in the writing of Gregory of Tours. Clovis himself had long resisted the pleading of his wife to become a Christian, but eventually he converted and was baptized.<sup>65</sup> As the first convert of the Merovingian dynasty he was hailed by many of the bishops and other clergy of the Kingdom of the Franks, including the biographer of his dynasty, as a great king and a true Christian, even though he was constantly at war.<sup>66</sup> Because of his constant wars of expansion, he necessitated a major change in Christian views of just war. His military prowess also and good deeds did not just impress Gregory though. In the Liber Historiae Francorum he was referred to as the 'New Constantine,' an appellation which would also be used to refer to Charlemagne at

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<sup>63</sup> Just War and Jihad, I, 27.

<sup>64</sup> Decretum, I, ch7. Trans. The Treatise on Laws, "Natural Law is common to all nation because it exists everywhere through natural instinct, not because of any enactment. For example: the union of men and women... and the repelling of violence by force." All of this Gratian took from Isidore's Etymologies, V, iv.

<sup>65</sup> He converted in a battle when he needed a victory, but Gregory gives Clovis' wife credit.

<sup>66</sup> Crane Brinton, A History of Western Morals, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959), 178. Brinton believes that it was because Clovis converted to Orthodoxy rather than heresy that Gregory believes him to be a good man. He thinks that, because violence was so endemic in society, Gregory was desensitized to the violence going on all around him and so did not condemn the violence that Clovis committed. He relates Gregory's acceptance of violence to a belief in the fact that the world was going to enter into a new time of a Christian era.

the height of his powers, shortly before his baptism and after his skill has been confirmed.<sup>67</sup> Hence, we can see a continuation of thought in the form of a Christian leader who led the Christians against their opponents.

The Franks were known, and titled, “for the ferocity of their customs,” and for the general warfare in their society, as has already been mentioned.<sup>68</sup> In comparison to other Germanic leaders, such as Theoderic in Ravenna, Clovis has been called a “barbarous war lord.”<sup>69</sup> Therefore, it is not hard to imagine that he would continue to change the previously pacifistic, and at the very least defensive, view of just war. The picture of Clovis as a barbarian, however, conflicts with some of his contemporary sources, like Gregory, who see him as the saving light from the Christian Church, and therefore a very devout man, at least after his conversion. Many, though, focused more on the fact that he decided to believe in orthodox Christianity rather than convert to the Arian heresy. Gregory admits to Clovis’ brutality, including when Clovis split a man’s head with his axe when arguing about the division of treasure, but he still holds that Clovis was one of the greatest kings of the Kingdom of the Franks.<sup>70</sup> The issue of when a war is just in the Merovingian times therefore is quite murky, as the Church, which seemed to be of mixed opinion prior to the Germanic migrations, appears to have switched to a more bloodthirsty view of war as the ultimate test of God’s favor.

In Gregory’s The History of the Franks he perpetually declares that the wars that Clovis started and won were pleasing in the sight of God after Clovis converted to Christianity. As Gregory says, after his victory over the Ripuarians, “day in and day out

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<sup>67</sup> Liber Historiae Francorum, translated by Bernard S. Bachrach (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1973), 46.

<sup>68</sup> Contamine, 13.

<sup>69</sup> Collins, 103-104.



God submitted the enemies of Clovis to his dominion and increased his power, for he walked before Him with an upright heart and did what was pleasing in His sight.”<sup>71</sup> This shows that, at least to the Franks, Clovis was waging just wars of conquest. Continually fighting wars was perfectly fine for a Christian to do. Interestingly enough, this might be the influence of the Germanic beliefs of what a god’s duties were because of how Gregory describes the conversion of Clovis. Since it was a battlefield conversion with Clovis praying to God on the spot and then receiving victory in the battle, he might be just transferring the beliefs he held in gods that operated on the battlefield to the Christian God.<sup>72</sup> He thought that the Christian God was more powerful than the old gods, but that this did not invalidate the old gods.

All of this may be symptomatic of the interactions between the early Germanic peoples' culture and the Christian religion. Erdmann points out that:

...The entrance of the Germans into Christian history had created an entirely new situation. War was the life-style of the Germanic peoples who increasingly formed the most important element in the church’s constituency. The moral precepts that accompanied them from their pagan past were completely oriented toward war, focusing on heroism, famous deeds on the part of the leader, loyalty on the parts of the followers, revenge for those killed, courage unto death, contempt for a comfortable life at home... Characteristically, the stories of the conversion of the Frank Clovis and of the Lombard Romuald represent God’s guidance of the fortunes of battle as the decisive element in the turning to Christianity.<sup>73</sup>

Since war was so firmly entrenched, the Christian leaders viewed wars as just if they were won, because that showed that God was on the side of the winners. At the same

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<sup>70</sup> Gregory of Tours, The History of the Franks, trans. Lewis Thorpe, (New York: Penguin Books, 1974), II, 27, 140.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., II, 42. This is exceedingly similar to the comment that is made about David in the Bible. After David captures Jerusalem (II Sam. 5: 10) “David waxed greater and greater; for Jehovah, the God of hosts, was with him.” See Benedict, 16.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., II, 31.

time, if a war was lost it was the fault of the Christians who waged the battle, because God was punishing them. God therefore can only win. This line of thought goes back into the Old Testament where God punishes the Israelites by sending armies of heathens to teach them a lesson.<sup>74</sup> Thus, a melding of the Germanic beliefs and Christianity appears to be occurring where Christianity is subsuming the beliefs whole.

As time went by the Merovingians were more or less pious, but they always continued to fight. Thus, war for Christians under the Merovingians swung to the opposite pole, where war was now considered normal and victory in battle a sign of God's pleasure. The rigorous Christian concepts and theories of a just war were eclipsed by this simpler way to tell if God was pleased with a war. As the state of learning decreased in northern Gaul, Roman law took a similar downturn and therefore so did theoretical arguments about the legality of certain standpoints. Any idea of pacifism for people beyond the clerics was lost, along with concepts such as a just defensive war. This state of affairs would continue until the Carolingian Renaissance when the texts of the Church Fathers would again be studied.

This decline in learning, and a greater propensity in society towards violence, also led clerics to take up the sword in greater numbers. The bishops were each *defensor civitatis* and therefore had to deal with mundane matters such as warfare.<sup>75</sup> Contamine points out that, "some clerics bore arms, struck out, killed and mixed without shame with men of blood."<sup>76</sup> All of this points to clerics taking a more serious role in running secular affairs. However, along with this, the endemic nature of warfare in the Merovingian

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<sup>73</sup> Carl Erdmann, The Origin of the Idea of Crusade, trans. Marshall W. Baldwin and Walter Goffart, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 19-20.

<sup>74</sup> For example, the Assyrian invasions in II Kings.

period points to the fact that the study of war as a legal practice was temporarily lost; people did not have time for the niceties of jurisprudence.

### Sub Roman Britain

In 410, the Romans left Britain, “and never since has a Roman ruled in Britain.”<sup>77</sup> In their wake, it was left to the Britanno-Roman rulers to fill in the gaps and defend their own homes against their foes. This period is murky because during such times of upheaval, record keeping tends to fall by the wayside. However, the first person to start writing about the past in any coherent fashion was Gildas. Bachrach focuses on him to shed light on the constitutional dealings in the time after the Romans left as he shows what kingship’s relationship to war was, at least from a monk’s standpoint.<sup>78</sup>

In relation to war Gildas seemed to think that, “all unjust wars are not civil wars, but all civil wars are unjust.”<sup>79</sup> There seems to have a concrete theory on war because he was not against all wars, but thought that some wars were wrong. Although the structure of Gildas’ just war theories were not enumerated in his texts, a general outline can be gained from the way that he wrote about his surroundings. Gildas makes an example of King Aurelius who did not care for the *pax patriae* and continually started *bella civilia*.<sup>80</sup> The fact that peace is desirable and that civil war is considered very wrong shows that the concepts of a just war in the sense of late antiquity had not fully died out in all parts of

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<sup>75</sup> Bishops had been pushed into this role even earlier. For example Gregory I had been forced to defend Rome from the Lombards. During the time of the Merovingians this became more commonplace however.

<sup>76</sup> Contamine, 269.

<sup>77</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, trans. and ed. Michael Swanton (New York: Routledge, 1998), 410.

<sup>78</sup> Bernard S. Bachrach, “Gildas, Vortigern and Constitutionality in Sub-Roman Britain” (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1993), 127. Hereafter called Bachrach.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 131. His rule is contrasted, as Bachrach shows, against the other kings and other kings commit the same sins, including Maglocunus.

the Empire, and that although Gregory of Tours might have been about to speak highly of Clovis despite his bad deeds, this did not necessarily correlate to all other parts of Europe. Yet at the same prosperity was equated with good rule, while disaster bespoke of sin.<sup>81</sup> Gildas, unlike many other commentators of his time, did not strictly judge a person by his personality. Rather, he could comment that a war was just, but the person who waged it was unjust, and even go so far as to accept the fact that the same person could fight in just and unjust wars.<sup>82</sup>

### **Bede and the Anglo-Saxons**

Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People is rife with wars between godly kings and heathen enemies, many of which have direct parallels in the Old Testament. This similarity to the Old Testament, both in literary form and in just cause, demonstrates how the values of the Hebrews were present in the Middle Ages in the form of lessons taken from the Old Testament. The Hebraic views were taken by the historian Bede to justify many of the things that happened with the coming of Christianity to England. In many ways this is understandable due to the need for kings, both in the Old Testament and in Bede's England, to act as war leaders.<sup>83</sup>

For example, when King Edwin of Northumbria, a Christian convert, won his victories it was because he was a Christian and doing God's work in the mortal world. The peace and prosperity that his wars brought to his people were signs of God's favor

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<sup>81</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, 103.

<sup>82</sup> An example of this was Maglocunus who murdered his wife, then stole the wife of his brother's son and murdered the latter. Yet he was able to fight in just wars and gain a reputation making successful wars on tyrants. Bachrach, 132-133.

<sup>83</sup> Judith McClure, "Bede's Old Testament Kings" in Ideal and Reality In Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 85.

upon the deeds of King Edwin. In fact, Edwin is promised just this when in a vision a man approached him and said:

...what reward will you give the man whoever he might be, who can deliver you from your troubles and persuade Redwall not to harm you or betray you to death at the hands of your enemies?' Edwin answered that he would give any reward in his power in return for such an outstanding service. Then the other went on: 'And what if he also promised, and not in vain, that you should become king, crush your enemies, and enjoy greater powers than any of your forebears, greater indeed than any king who has ever been among the English nation.'<sup>84</sup>

Bede's God is much more similar to the Old Testament God than to the God of the New Testament in this warlike nature. It can be surmised from the number of battles described by Bede, and the emphasis that he puts on some of them, that warfare was important to the Anglo-Saxon dynasties who had many threats to their power.<sup>85</sup> Thus, it was only natural that people living in such an environment would look to military success as a sign of divine favor.

At the same time as the Old Testament view of warfare was being continued as a defense of Christianity's involvement in war, there were still strong ties to the family that came from the Anglo-Saxons' Germanic roots. A sense of family unity still pervaded English society. The poem *Beowulf* written in the eighth or ninth century, and others, written about the same time, coupled with anecdotal evidence in Bede, all show the need for family and kinship. This cause for war would prevent English unity, and carry on some of the Germanic beliefs in the High Middle Ages.<sup>86</sup> This strand of Germanic defense of one's kin from outsiders would justify many battles in Anglo-Saxon England. Alongside this strong connection to one's family, Bede's works represented a sense of

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<sup>84</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, trans. rev. R.E. Latham (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) II, 12.

<sup>85</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, 27.

social responsibility. He writes about England as a whole and about the *Gens Anglorum* as a birthright that God had given the 'Barbarians' for the sins of the Britons.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, there was also a congruent strand of thought to the belief of Old Testament-style war, not mutually exclusive, which contended that fighting was wrong, and therefore warriors who killed others in battle should atone for their sins.<sup>88</sup> Bede himself believed that a warrior should do penance for killing a man in battle, a belief that was held in common in other parts of Europe as well.<sup>89</sup> Thus, alongside the belief that war was a divine matter, existed a belief that to kill is wrong as well. Also, peace was greatly to be desired as Bede wrote further about the great deeds of King Edwin, when he showed that the profit of his reign was peace. He wrote, "So peaceful was it in those parts of Britain under King Edwin's jurisdiction that the proverb still runs that a woman could carry her new-born babe across the island from sea to sea without any fear of harm."<sup>90</sup> Since Edwin is one of the kings that Bede most admires this is obviously something that was good. The fact that both of these beliefs, divine warfare and a desire for peace, could exist at the same time should not be a surprise because they are both fundamental aspects of the Christian religion.

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<sup>86</sup> Ideal and Reality In Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society, 117-119.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>88</sup> Contamine, 266-267. He supplies a Anglo-Saxon penitential from the seventh century in which there is penance for killing a Christian, but there is also a limited absolution for warriors "if an invasion of pagans overruns the country, lays churches to waste, and arouses Christian people to war." This is very similar to Roman just war theory where if one is attacked and/or defending one's country then physical force, even to the point of killing someone, is legitimate. Contamine comments that this is a deviation of Augustinian just war theory in that for Augustine a soldier is always in the right and all of the blame rests on the prince.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>90</sup> Bede, , II, 16.

## Beowulf and Other Poems

*Beowulf* represents a melding of the fundamental aspects of the Germanic culture and the Christianity that came to dominate England. Individual battle prowess and strength are coupled with praise for the strength of God into an epic poem that catalogues the deeds of a heroic person as he lives in the world, and eventually succumbs to it.<sup>91</sup> Curiously enough, *Beowulf* does give insight into the Anglo-Saxon monk who must have scribed its outlook on life and the nature of God's grace. One must also note that all of the biblical references are to the Old Testament, the part of the Bible where the most militant books are.

In *Beowulf*, the eponymous main character defeats his enemies with the strength of God, not his own. He is not a monk or saint though. He is a warrior through and through, who initially wins through violence which would appall Augustine, although in the end it is a tragic story. After beating Grendel, of the seed of Cain, the poet exults that, "with God's help this hero has compassed/ A deed our cunning could no way contrive," showing the strength of God, but also acknowledging the fact that Beowulf had something to do with the victory.<sup>92</sup> In addition, none of the humility that one would find in a conventional saint's life can be found in *Beowulf*. Although God is praised throughout, the poem revolves around the main character and through him His strength wins most of the battles. The conflict arises because Beowulf is a pre-Christian hero being forced into the Christian system. Thus, the poem depicts God as a facilitator rather than as an acting character.

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<sup>91</sup>J.B. Trapp, *Medieval English Literature*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 27.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

In the end, this poem does not represent all works of the period, as there are other saints' lives and ecclesiastical writings, but it does represent at least some of the views of the clergy. Since all of the literate people were members of the clergy, or had learned under them, the fact that *Beowulf* was written down and Christianized from earlier oral traditions demonstrates some of the effect that Germanic culture was having on Christian beliefs. In its emphasis on personal strength and bravery, *Beowulf* continues with a similar cultural view as Tacitus referred to in his *Germania*.

*The Dream of the Rood*, is another Christian/Anglo-Saxon poem with military overtones. In it Jesus Christ is depicted as a triumphant warrior who defeats death, the cross his faithful mount. It demonstrates Christian ethics being enmeshed with Germanic traditions in which a heroic warrior stands bravely against the odds. Although it could be taken to be in the same line as the idea of the *Militia Christi* was early in the first millenium, the fact that it focuses on Christ as a warrior, and also the fact that in it "our Savior rose/ by virtue of His great might as a help to men," shows a more martial aspect than the *militia* wanted to present.<sup>93</sup> It is because it focuses so much on Christ's personal valor and strength of arms that it pertains to English views on warfare.

*The Battle of Maldon* is another surviving poem about war in early England. It could not have been written before 991, the year that the battle took place, and it shows just how little, and how much, to at least one poet in England, views on war had changed. In it cowardice was shameful while the bravery of standing to fight against invaders was praised as worthy of true warriors.<sup>94</sup> There is no question of whether or not war was a

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.



good action in the poem. The focus is on the fact that the Danes were invading and that duty to their lord bade the *thegns* to defend themselves and their families against the foes.

Another example of the warrior spirit combining with the Christian mentality can be found in the Old-Saxon poem *Heliand*. It is the gospel story told in poetic form, and intended for recitation to an audience. The name itself is Old Saxon for savior or healer. Thus, it provides possibly the best example of Germanic influences because it is the story of Christ told from the Germanic perspective. The poem is less unambiguous than Bainton would suggest for although there was the celebration of the defense of the Lord, there is also a strong rebuke against those who would bear arms.<sup>95</sup> This poem celebrated the actions of Peter in defending his master, and shows the extent to which Germanic society had quickly influenced Christianity in the north. He is called a "wise man" and one of the "goodly disciples."<sup>96</sup> Throughout the section, it seems that Peter is doing a good deed in defending his Lord.

Yet at the same time, in the *Heliand*, Christ rebukes Peter even more saying:

But the All-Wielding Lord,  
The Father almighty, hath marked it otherwise:  
We are to bear all the bitterness, whatsoever these people bring to us,  
Nor shall we be angry nor rage 'gainst their strife:  
For he who doth practice the hatred of weapons,  
Who gladly partaketh in grim spear grudges ---  
He again is slain by the sword's edge,  
Doth die in his own blood. We must not destroy  
One whit with our deeds.<sup>97</sup>

Traditionally people have focused more on the rebuke Christ gave Peter for this action than the action itself, but here his actions are seen in light of the Germanic war code as a warrior defending his lord combined with the rebuke. It is the dichotomy of these two

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<sup>95</sup> Bainton, 103.

<sup>96</sup> *Heliand*, LVIII, 167.

aspects of the poem, like that of *The Dream of the Rood*, which shows that the Germanic warrior culture was entwined with Christian theology. In both, Christ was portrayed as a Germanic warrior-hero who defeated his opponents. In the *Heliand* Christ comments that:

If I truly cared,...  
to wage conflict against this crowd of the warriors,  
Then would I remind Him, the Glorious, the Almighty God,  
The Holy Father in the Kingdom of Heaven,  
That He send hither to Me a host of His angels,  
Wise in warfaring; these men could indeed not withstand such a host of  
warriors  
Stand against them, though gathered together in groups.<sup>98</sup>

Thus, Christ was portrayed as a war-leader in the Germanic sense. He was able to summon a great war band to himself and lead them to inevitable victory, just as every great war-leader should. Nevertheless, as the ideal was peace He would not do so. Between these two different aspects of the poem, the martial glory and the ideal of peace, one can see that warfare was a necessary part of ninth century culture, but that at the same time the ideal of peace remained.

### **Charlemagne and the Carolingians**

The reign of Charlemagne and his heirs has been called the Carolingian Renaissance.<sup>99</sup> Charlemagne saw himself as a defender of Christianity and as taking the place of the Roman Emperor as the defender of the Church. As the heirs of the Jewish monarchs of the Old Testament, the Franks and their kings were the chosen people of

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 167-168.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 167.

<sup>99</sup> Collins, 280-82. It was not a true Renaissance of grandiose proportions, but it was a revival of learning and a codification of all of the learning that had been saved from the fall of the Roman Empire. Collins

God.<sup>100</sup> Acting as the defender of the Church, as long as it worked with him, he supported it in every way he could. In accord with the rest of biblical thought of the day, he saw his conquests as evidence of divine favor, but more than that he saw conversion, even if by the sword, to be one of his callings. In his wars with the Saxons Charlemagne frequently held mass baptisms and tried to exterminate the native pagan religion. Yet, his style of warfare is theorized possibly to be less cruel and barbaric than the Merovingians' version in its conduct towards other Christians.<sup>101</sup>

The very nature of warfare had changed with Charlemagne and his creation of a central authority. The slavery of Christians, which had once been the fate of prisoners of war, was outlawed in the areas of Western Europe over which he had sway.<sup>102</sup> In addition, like the Anglo-Saxons to the north, there was also a penance added to participation in battle. For example, after the battle of Fontenoy, in 841, a penance of three days was instituted for all who had participated.<sup>103</sup> Since this was a battle in a civil war it should not be taken as an absolute benchmark of what would happen after every battle, but at the same time it is markedly different from what happened during the Merovingian fraternal struggles. Even if there was only a penance for fraternal battles this demonstrates that there were some forms of war that were not considered licit or good, and which were therefore deserving of penance.

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points out that through Charlemagne's conquests of the Lombard Kingdom and of the Northern Italian states, Northern Gaul gained a great deal of information that it had not had access to for many years.

<sup>100</sup> Rosamond McKitterick, *The Franking Kingdoms under the Carolingians: 751-987*, (New York: Longman, 1983), 195.

<sup>101</sup> Contamine, 265. He comments that this may have been an example of Augustinian values being placed with Germanic traditions.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 266. This was only for Christians and there was still a slave trade between through Jews to the Muslim world.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

The Carolingian Empire had non-Christian enemies on all sides: Saxons, Slavs, Muslims, Scandinavians, Avars, etc. These people were not Christians, or even worse, some were heretics. Therefore wars with them took on a religious tint and were construed in terms of good versus evil, the godly versus the heathens. As Einhard wrote, the Saxons were considered to be “given to devil worship and they are hostile to our religion.”<sup>104</sup> The fact that other nations were not Christian did not go unnoted, but most of the vehemence of anger was focused at the Saxons with whom the Franks fought for many more years in a war which was “more prolonged, more full of atrocities, or more demanding of effort.”<sup>105</sup>

Charlemagne and his descendents often felt that it was their responsibility to be active in both protecting the Church and extending its reach.<sup>106</sup> The Carolingian alliance with the Papacy, symbolized by Charlemagne having been officially crowned Emperor, strengthened this belief. The fact that he was referred to as the “New Constantine” about the time of his coronation meant the papacy viewed him as a defender of Christendom as well.<sup>107</sup> Thus, his title, coupled with his non-orthodox and pagan enemies on all sides, contributed to the influence of religion in his battles. Wars were justified by the fact that Charlemagne was Emperor and defender of Christendom. The very fact that he was fighting them, as defender of the Church, made them just.<sup>108</sup> Alcuin fully believed this, as can be seen when he wrote, in 794-795:

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<sup>104</sup> Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, Two Lives of Charlemagne, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 61.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Luitpold Wallach, Alcuin and Charlemagne: Studies in Carolingian History and Literature, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), 13. Not only for royal governance, but also for defending the Church.

<sup>107</sup> Collins, 408 n1. He was compared to Constantine I by Pope Hadrian I in 797, and there were parallels in the Lateran triclinium between Constantine I/ pope Sylvester and Charlemagne/ pope Leo III.

<sup>108</sup> Russell, 29.

That people is deemed blessed that has such a *rector* and *praedicator* as is Charlemagne who both (*et utrumque*) uses the sword of triumphal power (*gladius triumphalis potentiae*) and also the trumpet of catholic preaching (*catholicae praedicationis tuba*), who also, like his biblical prototype David, everywhere subdues the nations with his victorious sword (*victrici gladio undique gentes subiciens*) and who appears before the people as a *praedicator* of God's law. Under Charlemagne's shadow the Christian people possess security (*quiete populus requiescit christianus*), and everywhere appears formidable to the pagan nations (*et terribilis undique gentibus extat paganis*).<sup>109</sup>

This passage demonstrates how Charlemagne was being viewed, at least by his chief chronicler and friend, as a manifestation of God's will and uses the fact that he is wielding a "victorious sword" like the Biblical King David did to legitimize his actions.

Later in a different letter Alcuin went even farther and wrote, in 799:

May God help Charlemagne everywhere to subdue through the triumph of his *terror* the hostile nations (*ut triumpho terroris vestri inimicos undique subiciat*) and to subdue (*subiciat*) the wildest spirits to the Christians' faith. The authority of Charlemagne's *potestas* proves him to be *rex*; and his persevering diligence in spreading the divine grace of God makes him a *praedicator*.<sup>110</sup>

This all shows the coupling of the sword and the cross that took place during the reign of Charlemagne, especially around the time that he was crowned Emperor. After his coronation the grandeur that symbolized his earlier triumphs became even greater as Alcuin wrote that:

Divine grace (*divina gratia*) has exulted and honored the emperor's incomparable sublimity through those two gifts [power and wisdom] (*his duobus muneribus*) by spreading the terror of his power over all the peoples everywhere (*terrorem potentiae vestrae super omnes undique gentes inmittens*) so that those people may come to Charlemagne [or the Franks] in voluntary surrender whom war in earlier times could not subject to his rule (*ut voluntaria subiectione ad eos veniant quos prioribus bellicus labor temporibus sibi subdere non potuit*) and so the people will live in peace (*quiete populus*).<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Wallach, 15 from Alcuin's letter to Charlemagne Epist 41.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. Epistle 178.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. Epistle 257.

It is in this letter and others written at about this time that the primary goal of war becomes peace, and a godly peace at that. It is through God that wars are won and through wars that peace is gained, so as God desires peace he must support wars which gain it. At least that seems to be the theory that was developed by Charlemagne's chroniclers.

Probably of more importance to later generations was the fact that Charlemagne carried the banner of Rome into battle, and might have had a banner from Jerusalem as well.<sup>112</sup> Poets glorified it and people wrote about Charlemagne as the perfect Christian king who would again rise to lead the faithful against the infidels in the Holy Lands.<sup>113</sup> The banner given to Charlemagne would gain importance as the Imperial banner and signify the attachment of the Imperial strength to God.<sup>114</sup>

In Charlemagne's Empire, the state was Christianized to a degree that it never had been before under the Merovingians or Charlemagne's ancestors. The secular and the ecclesiastical nobility became more tightly fused because bishops and abbots began to hold secular title as well as their ecclesiastical standing. As the clergy became more enmeshed in secular society, they began to be forced to make choices about how far the prohibition against bloodshed deterred their actions on the battlefield defending their charges.<sup>115</sup> Charlemagne fused both groups under his leadership. Charlemagne thought, as recorded by Alcuin:

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<sup>112</sup> Erdmann, 299.

<sup>113</sup> The Song of Roland, trans. Robert Harrison, (New York: Mentor, 1970), 3093-95. And Erdmann, 298-299.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>115</sup> Carolingian Civilization: A Reader, ed. Paul Edward Dutton, (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1996), , 61-69. In Charlemagne's capitulary to the *missi* he has them check up on both the secular nobles and the clerics in his realm. He also defines what is right for both to do in these "law" codes, along with more mundane things like murderers and robbers.

Mine it is to defend on all sides the holy Church of Christ from pagan incursion and the infidel devastation abroad. And within to add strength to the Catholic faith by a clear statement and an acceptance of it. Yours it is, raising your hands to God like Moses, to aid our arms in order that by your intercession... the Christian people may everywhere be always victorious over their enemies.<sup>116</sup>

This shows that in Charlemagne's view both aspects of his realm were to do what they do best to support his Empire, and that each had its own place within his realm. Rather than forcing the bishops into defending their own areas independently, he organized both spheres of influence so that they both supported his regime, as in his opinion they were both merely aspects.

This Christianization of Carolingian society can further be seen in the rules for the Saxons where Christianity plays a large part in the laws. In these capitularies Church and state went hand in hand and similarly wars reflected this in the belief that to defend Christianity was to defend one's way of life. The fact that the Church was actively supported by the Carolingian state can be seen in the order of the Capitulary on the Saxon territories: "1. It was pleasing to all that the churches of Christ, which are now being built in Saxony and consecrated to God, should not have less, but greater and more illustrious honor, than the temples of the idols had had."<sup>117</sup> The next 22 points all have to do with the Church's involvement in the newly conquered lands.<sup>118</sup> This demonstrates how closely wed the Church was to the Carolingians. War was not seen as a high point in Carolingian society; it was seen as what must be done so that the Church would survive and prosper. Even after the Empire broke up, the idea that the goal of a kingdom is peace remained intrinsically rooted. Peace is the endpoint of war.

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<sup>116</sup> David Knowles with Dimitri Obolensky, The Christian Centuries: The Middle Ages, Vol. II, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972), 74.

<sup>117</sup> Dutton, 58.

In the wake of Charlemagne's death, and invasions from all sides, the Church became more embroiled in the politics of war. Even as the Empire collapsed and the Church seemed to lose its ability for direct involvement in secular matters, two papal statements stood out as being precursors to the Crusades. Both promoted forgiveness of sins to those who fought in battles against heathens. The first was by Pope Leo IV who promised a reward for those who were slain fighting "for the truth of the faith, for the preservation of their country, and the defense of Christians."<sup>119</sup> A reward like this is different from those that have gone before because the redemption comes from not remission of sins, but from the active participation on the battlefield of the saved. Similarly, Pope John VIII, when addressing the bishops of the realm of Louis II, gave a full indulgence for fighting heathens. These two papal statements show that not only was war against the heathens just, but it was also to be desired by God.

As time went on, the Carolingians fell victim to the same law that had done in the Merovingians, the Germanic custom of dividing lands between all of one's children. The centralized nation that Charlemagne had built dissolved as heirs battled heirs. Every action that was attempted to stop the raiders proved to be ineffectual and this led to the destruction of many things being destroyed, including the basilicas of St. Peter and Paul in Rome in 846.<sup>120</sup> The Popes then tried to use the lure of the title of Emperor to bring the Carolingians to their defense, but the Carolingians were in too weakened a state to help the Papacy.

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-61.

<sup>119</sup> <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/leo4-ind850.htm>

<sup>120</sup> Collins, 321 and 338.



## Alfred the Great

Just as Gildas had framed the wars between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons as a war between Christians and pagans, so Asser framed the wars between the Saxons and the Danes.<sup>121</sup> The third great chronicler of the history of Britain, Asser writes about Alfred the Great's conflict with the Danes in religious terms. Yet there is a great difference. Asser saw the battle not as the punishment of sins like Gildas had, but rather in terms of the constant battle between 'good' and 'evil.' For Asser, if the Christians won, which they appear to do after great losses, then it was a test of the strength of God's people. In fact many of the writings of the period focus on this conflict in such terms and show the influence of Christianity in the nature of warfare in both the view of the conflict and the repercussions of it. Christianity is the cement for an alliance against a common foe.<sup>122</sup>

The Christianity of the defenders seemed to be of paramount importance to Asser in his Life of King Alfred. He rarely called the Anglo-Saxons anything but the Christians, especially when they were in conflict with the Danes.<sup>123</sup> Instead Asser constantly referred to them as "Christians" and seems to see this as the major outstanding factor in their conflict with the enemy. He further divided the sides into black and white categories when he refers to the Danes as pagans, which leads to the conflict being seen

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<sup>121</sup> Alfred P. Smyth, King Alfred the Great (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Smyth goes into detail about why he thinks that Asser should be completely discarded as a source for Alfred's reign. He cites many reasons, such as inconsistencies and flaws in the writing, why the text is of almost no use to someone trying to construct King Alfred's reign. But at the same time there are those, such as Keynes and Lapidge who think that Asser an invaluable tool in the research of Alfred's reign.

<sup>122</sup> Alfred the Great: Asser's life of King Alfred and other Contemporary Sources, Trans. and ed. Keynes and Lapidge (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 43.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

as a religious war.<sup>124</sup> Other documents of the same period also build on this motif, but never to the same extent as Asser's writings.<sup>125</sup>

Not only did he conceive of the wars between West Saxons and the Danes as religious, but Asser also believed that God took an active role in them. According to Asser, in 878, the "Christians" were besieged, but:

long before they were liable to suffer want in any way, [they] were divinely inspired and, judging it much better to gain either death or victory, burst out unexpectedly at dawn against the Vikings and, by virtue of their aggressiveness, from the very outset they overwhelmed the enemy in large part, together with their king, a few escaping by flight to the ships.<sup>126</sup>

This is but one example of the God inspiring His warriors to victory against the Danes. Through Him, the warriors knew when to attack and take their victory, even though they had lost the engagement up until that point. God seems to take care of the Christians in Asser's account so that the outcome of the battle with the Danes is not a forgone conclusion.

Thus, one can see that Christianity was not seen as an obstacle to warfare, but as an intrinsic part which partially determined sides and outcome. Christianity, rather than being an impediment to war, is seen as a part of it. Nevertheless, at the same time as religious aspect to the warfare there was also a great deal of Christians fighting Christians in the history of England. It was only after the Danes had invaded and shown themselves as a threat that the religious ideology began to be incorporated. Prior to that their had

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<sup>124</sup> Keynes and Lapridge chose to "translate *pagani* as 'Vikings' throughout, in the belief that it identifies them more clearly." Ibid., 230-231, n 12. They do agree however that the concept of dividing the Anglo-Saxons and Danes to gain a Christians versus pagans motif to be an attempt at showing it as religious warfare.

<sup>125</sup> The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles only make such a division for the years 893 and 896. Both of these references could be in regards to multiple groups assembled under one banner being called Christians as their most distinctive feature.

<sup>126</sup> Keynes and Lapridge, 84.

been some religious aspects, but for the most part it had been merely Christian kingdom fighting Christian kingdom.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> C. Warren Hollister, The Making of England 55Bc to 1399, (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996), 54-55. The Northumbrians, then the Mercians, and finally the West Saxons all fought and conquered Christian states.

### Chapter 3: Eleventh and Twelfth Century Developments

At the end of the tenth century, things began to change. People started to try to design a system by which wars could be determined to be right or wrong. The Church took the lead in defining the role of war in society and attempted to regulate it, or at least its excesses. In the beginning, the movement began as a reaction against all violence, but slowly it transformed to become a highly structured system of when a war was considered to just and when it was unjust.

#### The Peace and Truce of God

As time went by there began to be a change of heart in the ranks of the clergy about whether or not a war was a good thing. Following this, it began to take a role in others' conduct of war. Slowly there spread from southern France a popular movement for peace between Christians. Over the course of half a century the Peace of God movement traveled from the Charroux/ Narbonne region to engulf all of Gaul.<sup>128</sup> The Synod of Charroux, in 989 or 990, was the first time that all of the Church's stances on war were formally codified. It decreed that,

When evil doers had sprung up like weeds, and wicked men ravaged the vineyard of the lord like thorn bushes and briars choking the harvest, the abbots and bishops and other holy men decided to call a council at which *praeda* would be forbidden, what had been taken unjustly restored to the church, and other blemishes on the face of the holy church of God scraped away with the sharp blade of anathema.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Georges Duby, The Chivalrous Society, Translated by Cynthia Postan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 123.

<sup>129</sup> R.I. Moore "Heresy, Repression and Social Change in the Age of Gregorian Reform" in Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl, Christendom and its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution and Rebellion, 1000-1500, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 28.

As this depicts, the Church had taken the cognitive step of formally outlawing people who practiced such things. The two main ideas which were to be the core of the Church's theorizing on warfare were the Peace of God and the Truce of God. The Peace of God was the concept that certain people, because of their class, could not or should not, be harmed in the course of raiding or warfare. The Truce of God was a limit on when wars could be fought.<sup>130</sup> Neither took away from the warriors the ability to fight or said that it was wrong, as both movements merely put limits on when it would be right to carry out such activities. The ideal was peace but the movements accepted the validity of the vocation of knight and of the necessity for people to defend society.<sup>131</sup> People considered excommunication to be the primary way to punish someone who had broken the Truce. Even at the end of the eleventh century, excommunication was not abandoned. The Archbishop of Cologne proclaimed at the end of the eleventh century:

If anyone attempts to oppose this pious institution and is unwilling to promise peace to God with the others or to observe it, no priest in our diocese shall presume to say a mass for him or shall take care of his salvation; if he is sick, no Christian shall dare to visit him; on his death bed he shall not receive the Eucharist, unless he repents. The supreme authority of the peace promised to God and commonly extolled by all will be so great that it will be observed not only in our times, but forever among our posterity because if anyone shall presume to infringe, destroy or violate it, either now or ages hence, at the end of the world, he is irrevocably excommunicated by us.<sup>132</sup>

This proclamation shows the determination that went into belief about the Truce of God, and the fact that the person is "irrevocably excommunicated" shows that the Church was not planning on being very lenient when it came to people who broke the Truce. Yet, doctrine and practice are not always the same and the Church could not always have

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<sup>130</sup> Erdman, 60.

<sup>131</sup> Duby, 128.

<sup>132</sup> The Medieval World: 300-1300, ed. Norman Cantor, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), 179.

reacted this strongly. In addition, the clause of repentance gives Church authorities a chance to be lenient or not act at all.

When looking at this church inspired popular movement it is important to keep in mind that there were two main aspects of the movement: the spiritual and the temporal. On one level, the church was advocating moral values to the world in the form of an ideal Christian peace, but on the other hand, it was the direct involvement of the Church in the heart of secular affairs.<sup>133</sup> Through such actions, the Church became entwined with the political edifice of Western Europe.

Therefore, this peaceful step is considered by Riley-Smith, and Erdmann, to be one of the main stepping stones to the Crusades because the Peace and the Truce were only enforceable by military action, which led to the Church becoming more embroiled in warfare.<sup>134</sup> That is not to say that the declarations of the councils which endorsed the Peace of God were law, or made the things denounced illegal.<sup>135</sup> Rather, the only way to keep people from blatantly disregarding the edicts, and their own oaths, was violence. Thus, in trying to keep the Peace, the Church ended up fighting more often. In fighting to keep the Peace, the Church ended up tying itself to war in ways that would have profound impact when the Church decided to preach the Crusades.

For example, as early as 990, the Church was organizing armies to 'convince' knights to swear to the strictures.<sup>136</sup> The Church was gaining its freedom from the secular princes and beginning to have an authority that could be backed up by force if

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<sup>133</sup> Duby, 124.

<sup>134</sup> Jonathan Riley Smith, The Crusades: A Short History, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 14 and Erdmann, 62.

<sup>135</sup> Moore, 29.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

necessary. The force was theoretically directed at people who broke the Church's laws, but it was still force being directed by the Church for its own gain.<sup>137</sup>

As time went by, the leaders of the Church even brought in God's will to justify the reasons for battle. As in the Old Testament, men were going into battle believing that they were fighting for what God wanted and that He was fighting with them.<sup>138</sup> Men fought with zeal because they fought for God and eternal life rather than earthly gain. In a way their rewards were to last forever if God approved of what they were doing. So one of the greatest movements for peace armed the Church for the Crusades. But telling the warriors of western Europe that they would be sinful if they fought Christians the movements paved the way for the Crusades as an outlet for violence.<sup>139</sup> Holy war had arisen in the name of love, focused on peace, but ready for battle; and none could control it.<sup>140</sup>

At the same time, there were those people who did not believe that the Church should ever take part in war, such as Fulbert of Chartres.<sup>141</sup> Writing at the beginning of the eleventh century, he wrote against bishops or any other church officials that bore arms, or started wars. He used Saint Martin as an example to demonstrate how a warrior who accepts Christ should act and behave, since Saint Martin had rejected the military upon conversion. While he was writing, he had a foil in his contemporary, Bernard of Augers, who thought that cowardice was undesirable and that war was just if waged against Christians who had gone astray.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Christendom, 178.

<sup>138</sup> Erdman, 64.

<sup>139</sup> Duby, 132.

<sup>140</sup> Riley-Smith, 17.

## The Reform Movement

After the Papacy had fallen away from the ideals of the Church for a century and a half, a reform movement began.<sup>143</sup> Illustrated by several movements that came into being around this time, such as the Peace of God, the Truce of God, the *Pataria*, and the bestowing of papal banners, the Church started to take a direct hand in the matters of war. Kings had increasingly looked to the bishops of their realm to maintain troops, and thus the matter had gained canonical significance. This was started in the Frankish Kingdom under the Charles Martel, and with its hand forced the Church reluctantly took the lead in defending its possessions and became more militant. In doing so, however, it became beholden to the local kings.<sup>144</sup> The Church did not stop there though, as time went by it started to place itself at the top of some feudal relationships. This reached its fullest expression in the Imperial church system of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The Reform Papacy rejected the idea of any secular lords having rights over the Church, especially in matters such as investiture, and therefore began campaigning against lay investiture. However in Germany, lay investiture remained and thrived, and would be one of the major contentions between the reform Papacy and the Holy Roman Emperors.<sup>145</sup> The Papacy during the investiture contest developed a more militant stance because it needed something to defend it against the overwhelming might of the Holy Roman Empire. Thus, the Church began to have multiple reasons to be involved with theory on the just conduct of war.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Erdmann, 77.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>143</sup> Collins, 334. Collins argues that some of the extremes may be exaggerated, but still agrees that it was not a period when ideals were being maintained.

<sup>144</sup> John Beeler, *Warfare in Feudal Europe: 730-1200*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 12

<sup>145</sup> Beeler, 219.

<sup>146</sup> Barber, 90.



## Pataria

The movement in Milan called the *Pataria* was among the earliest times the knighthood and the clergy were united for ecclesiastical matters. More importantly, the warriors were subordinate to the clergy and were acting to correct problems in the ecclesiastical sphere. There was a belief that force was an acceptable means of stopping the clergy from participating in sinful acts, such as getting married and continuing simoniac practices. This was especially true at the highest level of the Milanese dioceses in the form of the Archbishop. Beyond this though, the *Pataria* was also a social movement in which a level of lower nobles were attempting to wrest control of Milan away from the highest class, of whom the Archbishop had always been a member.<sup>147</sup> Consequently, there were both religious and secular matters at stake during the movement. The reform party in the Papacy, realizing this but not instigating it, backed the movement whole-heartedly. The *Pataria* was a focus of much of the commentary both for and against swords being wielded for religious purposes.

One of the first leaders of the *Pataria*, Arialdo, supposedly commented that, "Christians should bear the sword for nothing other than the defense of the faith."<sup>148</sup> However, the defense of the faith included punishment for those who strayed from the faith or practiced the faith wrongly. Throughout the beginnings of the movement Arialdo and Landulf, both priests, led their followers in skirmishes in the streets.<sup>149</sup> This set a precedent for clerics involving themselves in combat for purposes of religion.

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<sup>147</sup> Erdmann, 140-141.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

Another important aspect of the *Pataria* was some of the things that the papacy did to support their effort. The Reform party did not start the *Pataria*, but recognized an excellent opportunity when they saw it and therefore both supported the *Pataria* and tried to use their actions to further the party platform. Pope Alexander II made a gift of a banner to the leader of the *Pataria*, a knight named Erlembald, in 1070. Arnulf, a chronicler for the opposing party, wrote:

Erlembald prides himself on having received from Rome itself the war-flag of St. Peter (*bellicum sancti Petri vexillum*) [to raise] against all his opponents. It is fastened to a lance and is thus displayed as a symbol of homicide. Yet it is sacrilegious to think that Peter would ever have had another banner (*vexillum*) than the one that the Lord speaks of in the Gospel: Whoever wishes to follow Me, let him deny himself and take up the cross.<sup>150</sup>

This shows both that the symbolism of the banner being granted by the Papacy for the purpose of being used in battle was not lost on people, and that it was not liked by some. It is interesting to note that the *Pataria* were involved in fighting against Church foes and the conflict had aspects of being a holy war from the start. In such a setting the symbolism must have set a precedent of the Papacy taking an active role in militarily keeping the flock in line by military means.

A supporter of the Archbishop's party and writer, Arnulf, argues against the idea of the Papacy granting war banners because he believed that the coupling of the cross and the war flag was new, unprecedented and morally wrong, which shows how warlike the Church had become.<sup>151</sup> However, the movement never became heretical, in a technical sense, and was completely backed by the Papacy.<sup>152</sup> The Church was supporting the idea

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>152</sup> Knowles and Obolensky, 366. They stress that the *Pataria* was completely different than the heresies which arose at the same time, although they too had a goal of making the Clergy stop simoniacal practices.

that it could in fact be involved in conflict and still have a moral advantage since they believed that “‘Liberty of the Church’ meant not only freedom from outside lay intervention but, more positively, submission to the highest lordship possible, which could be seen only as the Papacy.”<sup>153</sup> The Church was trying to gain the highest position in Europe, and it was not afraid to use force when it deemed necessary.

### **Papal Banners**

Part of the strengthening of the Papacy was the practice of granting of papal banners to represent the favor of the Papacy for one side or the other in a conflict. The majority were granted during the reign of Henry IV for the use in the investiture contest that was going on between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire about whether lay investiture, the investiture of priests by secular lords of the estate, was legitimate or not.<sup>154</sup> The investiture contest can be seen as an important step for the Papacy, because it symbolized the place of the Papacy in society and, more importantly, whether or not the Papacy would be the supreme authority in Christendom.<sup>155</sup>

Prior to the investiture contest, the best known papal banner was given to William the Conqueror before he set out to make his claim to the throne of England. The reason for the gift was that Stigand, the current Archbishop of Canterbury, was given the *pallium* by an anti-Pope and had never sought another *pallium* from a rightfully ordained Pope. But another aspect of the granting of the papal banner was that the Popes might have seen it in feudal terms, that of a lord taking on a vassal and giving said vassal a token of the

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<sup>153</sup> Gerd Tellenbach, Church, State, and Christian Society at the time of the Investiture Contest, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1940) 127-6.

<sup>154</sup> Barber, 86-88, 96.

<sup>155</sup> Bainton, 174.

relationship.<sup>156</sup> It is clear that William did not see it that way, and neither did his descendents, but the Papacy gained some propaganda because either way, the banner was obviously a symbol of the Papacy's involvement in secular matters of war, which some might say was one of the first examples of a Crusading mentality.<sup>157</sup>

Other banners had been given to Charlemagne long ago, which has already been explored, the *Patarina*, and to the Normans in Italy. The granting of the Banner to the Normans Richard of Aversa and Robert Guiscard; and making them into vassals of the Papacy through the enfeoffment of Capua and Apulia was another matter of great importance. In 1059, at the synod of Melfi Pope Nicholas II confirmed these men to their fiefs, notwithstanding the fact that they had already established themselves as the rulers of their lands.<sup>158</sup> Their relationship was feudal in nature, but a bit different from the ordinary feudal oath. The normal stipulation of a certain number of days of military service was replaced to fit the needs of a papacy without a standing army. The Normans swore:

To the Holy Roman Church, and to you, I shall render assistance to the limit of my powers, against all men, to preserve and to acquire the regalia and possessions of St. Peter, and I shall assist you in keeping the papacy secure and honorable.<sup>159</sup>

The oath goes on to define the roles of both parties' including payments. When the Popes invested the Normans they gave them banners just as the Emperors of the Holy Roman

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<sup>156</sup> Erdmann, 189.

<sup>157</sup> Knowles and Obolensky, 214. They argue that the Norman invasion of England was one of the first times that a military operation was blessed by the papacy for the expressed purpose of conquering an area from heretics, pagans or invaders. In addition, they cite the *reconquista* as a similar forerunner of the "seven crusades."

<sup>158</sup> Holmes, 199.

<sup>159</sup> Erdmann, 129. The oath of 1080 when Robert swore fealty to Pope Gregory VII and was crowned King of Sicily, Duke of Apulia, and Prince of Capua, according to Erdmann, was a renewal of the original oath. Erdmann points out that sometimes the oaths of 1061 (Richard) and 1080 (Robert) are sometimes considered to be the original oaths, but gives convincing evidence that it was really just a renewal of the

Empire had.<sup>160</sup> The banner was again being used as a symbol of the papacy's involvement in secular military matters.

The Normans did not necessarily completely agree with the limits of the oaths because they all to one degree or another diverted from them. All of the Normans maintained in their diplomas that they held their fiefs from God or due to divine favor, but never from the Pope or Curia.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore, the fact that they had established their lands before the confirmation of the Pope or Emperor meant that they and the Popes had very different outlooks on the nature of the oaths, just as William I had very different plans for his fealty to the Papacy.

## Gregory VII

One of the most influential of all Popes in regard to the Church and war was Gregory VII, Cardinal Hildebrand before he was raised to the pontificate. All members of the Reform movement were named after him, being called Gregorians by modern historians.<sup>162</sup> He had been a leading official under the preceding Popes, and had been in charge of the running of the Papal states, a job which required a fair amount of dealing with defense.<sup>163</sup> It was he who convinced Erlembald to take up the cause of the *Pataria*, and then kept him in money throughout his tenure as leader of the *Pataria*.<sup>164</sup>

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previous oaths that Richard and Robert had given. Also, see I.S. Robinson, The Papacy 1073-1198: Continuity and Innovation, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 373.

<sup>160</sup> Erdmann, 190. For a in-depth analyses of the political maneuvering between the Popes, Emperors and Normans see Erdmann 190-193 and Robinson 367-397.

<sup>161</sup> Robinson, 372.

<sup>162</sup> Bainton, 173.

<sup>163</sup> Erdmann, 153.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

He was known, disparagingly by some, to keep mercenaries in his employ and to use them when and where he felt them most needed.<sup>165</sup> As has already been discussed he also maintained feudal lordship over some of the other lords in Italy, including Robert Guiscard.<sup>166</sup> It is interesting how militarily active he was because he was the heart of the Reform Movement and with it the entrance of the Church into the field of military politics.

Along with his goals in Europe, he was the first person in the eleventh century to believe that an army should go to Byzantium to fight against the Turks.<sup>167</sup> In 1074 he decided that he should lead the attack himself (*dux et pontifex*), and that they would go to the Holy Land and free Jerusalem from the infidels.<sup>168</sup>

Since most of Gregory's attention lay in Rome, he did not focus military thoughts purely towards Jerusalem. When King Philip I of France, began oppressing the Church in the eyes of the Papacy, by stealing from it and leveling churches, Gregory started an aggressive letter writing campaign to gain support from the French nobility.<sup>169</sup> In one letter to Hugh, the abbot of Cluny, he posited that: "When the princes no longer bother to defend the life of the clergy, then we must do so, using both hands for the right and to put down the fury of the godless."<sup>170</sup> This shows that Gregory believed that the Church could and should sanction violence if it was for a good cause. Gregory was trying to have the Papacy take on the duties of a real state, and since real states go to war, the Pope started to make plans for its eventuality in his rhetoric.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-129.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 166 and Riley-Smith, 2.

<sup>169</sup> Erdmann, 162.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>171</sup> Russell, 35.

In 1078, Gregory went farther than he ever had before when dealing with Henry IV. Gregory blessed the followers of Rudolf, Henry's rival, saying, "So that Rudolf might rule and protect Germany, we grant to all of his followers absolution from all their sins."<sup>172</sup> Although Erdmann is not sure whether or not this is an actual indulgence, he comments that Gregory took a bold step in proclaiming this because it cheapened the moral platform of the reformers. All of the people who wrote about the absolution commented that it was wrong for Christians to be killing Christians in the name of Christ.<sup>173</sup>

Aside from wanting knights and lords to fight for the Church (*milites Christi*), however, Gregory did not believe that war was a good thing and thought that no secular war could be just.<sup>174</sup> He argued that fighting is a naturally sinful way of life and that, unless soldiers put away their weapons, they were living in sin.<sup>175</sup> Nevertheless, although war was sinful, fighting in the name of the Church on the advice of bishops was blessed. He saw knights both as a way to defend himself against secular rulers, such as Henry, and as a way to stop heretics.<sup>176</sup> For Gregory, war sanctioned by the Church was not only just, it was holy.

Gregory was very controversial, but he had a great impact on future Popes. His brand of statesman-like dealings with the rest of Europe would be imitated by many of the Popes to follow him. Although he never actually carried out an offensive war, his

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<sup>172</sup> Erdmann, 172.

<sup>173</sup> Two of the people who commented are Wenrich of Trier said almost exactly this, and Benzo of Alba of "bemoaned that the Gregorian bishops in northern Italy gave penances that consisted only in renouncing Henry." *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>174</sup> Barber, 35 and Russell, 34.

<sup>175</sup> Russell, 215. Russell explains that the injunction against penance was because if the warrior maintained his weapons he showed intent to commit the same crimes again, and since one can only do penance if one is truly sorry and desires to atone for the sin, keeping the weapons invalidates the contrition.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

policies were an indication of where the Papacy was going to lead the Church in the coming decades. He, more than anyone else before him, advocated the inclusion of the Church in secular politics, including preparation for war. He never once mentioned an injunction against clerics bearing arms, and in fact obtained an oath from a bishop that if the Pope requested the bishop must defend the Church “by armed service (*per saecularem militiam*).”<sup>177</sup> Gregory never went beyond standard convention, whatever his rhetoric may say, but he did synthesize moral and ethical view points on war into a structure that was beneficial to the Papacy.<sup>178</sup>

## Urban II

Urban’s predecessor, Gregory’s heir, Victor III, had wavered between fighting in Europe and fighting against the encroachments of the Muslims. He retook Rome, which had been lost to an anti-Pope during the end of Gregory’s reign, and continued to support Christian warfare through preaching and the granting of Papal Banners.<sup>179</sup> But his reign was too short for him to decisively make the step towards calling for a Crusade.

Urban had learned from Gregory’s and Victor’s actions what the response would be to calls for crusades inside or outside the Church, so he began his career quietly securing his position through bribes.<sup>180</sup> Through it all he never once denied what Gregory or Victor had done, and therefore he was able to pick up their cause when he was secure enough. His goals were slightly different though.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Erdmann, 179.

<sup>178</sup> Erdmann, 180-181.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 306-307.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 309-313. This included bribing the heretical captain who had been guarding the Lateran palace into handing the palace over.

<sup>181</sup> Riley-Smith credits Urban II as the person who defined the nature of the Crusade by the way that he crafted his sermons in various places.



Like Gregory he wanted to marshal the strength of Europe against the infidels, but unlike him Urban did not want to involve the Papacy directly in the war.<sup>182</sup> Unlike Gregory who wanted to lead all of the strength of Europe to the East, Urban wanted the warriors who went to be under the direction of the Papacy, but not under its direct leadership. For example, when he wanted a bishopric which had fallen into Muslim hands in Spain reestablished he did not mount an expedition himself, rather he sent a letter to the leaders in the region and admonished, and begged, them to restore the city of Tarragona and promised the same indulgences that they would gain for going to the Holy Land.<sup>183</sup> Therefore, when he preached the First Crusade he did so not as the leader, but as the instigator and guide.

Urban did not look at the Crusade he was preaching as an offensive war against the infidels, rather he looked at it as coming to the defense of the Eastern Church, because the Muslims had taken so much territory since their inception. His concept was that the Eastern Church was in trouble due to the invasions of the Turks, and therefore it needed the help of the Western Christians.<sup>184</sup> Yet, when he added the notion that the Crusade was really an armed pilgrimage to Jerusalem, for liberating it from the heathens the entire nature of the Crusade changes.<sup>185</sup> The concept of an armed pilgrim was a new idea, and was first proclaimed at the Council of Clermont.<sup>186</sup> Slowly Urban's idea of defending Christianity merged with Gregory's idea of liberating lost territory (Jerusalem) and both of these reasons for war were used. Like Gregory he tried to merge the idea of

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<sup>182</sup> Erdmann, 308.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 315 and 317.

<sup>184</sup> Riley-Smith, 1. There was an embassy from the Emperor of the East, Alexius, present to ask for help against the Turks. He cites this as the *causa belli*, which was the impetus for the war, whereas Erdmann thinks that the thought had been present for a while.

<sup>185</sup> Erdmann, 331. Riley-Smith thinks that both goals were present and full accounted for. Riley-Smith, 6.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

peace among Christians with the concept that all of the strength and power could, and should, be turned against the peoples that were encroaching on Christian territory. Therefore, the Crusades were not as novel as they first appear since they were founded on intrinsic concepts of the Christian just war theory.

### **The Song of Roland and the Chansons de Geste**

The Song of Roland has one main point: “the pagan cause is wrong, the Christian right.”<sup>187</sup> The piece originated, most likely, in the twelfth century and showed the popular beliefs of the time concerning Christianity and war. Indeed, since the poem relies on an oral tradition, in order to become and remain popular it must have struck a deep chord with many people.<sup>188</sup> Therefore, as one of the most popular *chansons de geste*, The Song of Roland, represents sources that demonstrate the views of the average Christian about the Church’s involvement in warfare.

The Germanic elements in The Song are obvious. Jones’ analyses discusses links to the Germanic society depicted in Tacitus’ Germania.<sup>189</sup> He finds there are many connections between the two with regard to the warrior’s need for loyalty, courage, honor, and a link between the lord and his followers which is strengthened by the giving of treasure. Thus, one can see that while the Germanic beliefs might not have affected the upper-classes of the Church hierarchy, it had a great impact on the rest of society.

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<sup>187</sup> The Song of Roland, (1015). Line 1212 also has a similar statement.

<sup>188</sup> George Fenwick Jones, The Ethos of the Song of Roland, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1963), 2-4. Jones presents several arguments about how to interpret the Song of Roland, but then focuses on why all of them are wrong in some respects. He argues that, “The SR’s immediate and widespread popularity proves that it expressed the sentiments of the dominant social element of twelfth-century France; and its numerous translations and adaptations into other languages show that it appealed to other European nations as well.”

<sup>189</sup> Jones, 103-107.

Charlemagne represented, at the very least, what some people of the twelfth century believed was a good Christian king. In The Song, Charlemagne was the vassal of a God who is Lord of Hosts.<sup>190</sup> Roland on the other hand did not seem to act religious until he was about to die.<sup>191</sup> In fact, a comparison of Charlemagne and Roland's relationship in the poem is one where both are great warriors, but Roland was Charlemagne's vassal, just as Charlemagne was God's; Roland was not God's vassal. This dividing of loyalty shows that religion was divided the same way as society, where the king might be your lord's lord, but he was not your lord.

Then there was archbishop Turpin. He was a bishop, and yet he fought better than almost anyone else in the entire poem did. According to Jones, he represents a Germanic way of looking at holy orders.<sup>192</sup> Turpin brought troops for his campaign and then fought with them for his lord, and in doing so violated many of the official views on clerics committing bloodshed. In addition to fighting, he also absolved the soldiers saying, "Confess your sins and pray to God for mercy;/ to save your souls, I'll give you absolution./ If then you die, you'll all be holy martyrs/ and take your seats in highest paradise."<sup>193</sup> This is reminiscent of the absolutions given in the ninth century for fighting the heathens, and also in the eleventh and twelfth centuries for the Crusades.

All in all, The Song of Roland shows the idealized relations the commoners of the twelfth century wished of the Church and war. The violence and skill of churchmen shown in Turpin, and the belief that fighting could lead to heaven was the combination the commoners desired in The Song of Roland.

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 149. He argues that Archbishop Rainald of Dassel's actions in advancing with the Emperor on Frederick Barbarossa's campaigns are an example of the acceptance of a bishop like this.

## Gratian's Decretum

Circa 1140, Gratian wrote the Concordia Discordantium Canonum, better known as the Decretum. In it, he secured St. Augustine's place in Christian doctrinal just war theory.<sup>194</sup> Ever since its conception, the ideas in the Decretum have been the basis for, and defined the limits of, the just war debate. In compiling everything he could find and then trying to explain contradictions, Gratian wrote the definitive book of the twelfth century on canon law. One question that Gratian focused on was: 'Is war ever licit for Christians?' His answer was yes, but it was qualified in several different ways.<sup>195</sup> As has been already commented Gratian cited Isidore's theory of natural law in *Distinctio* I. Gratian's central piece on war, though, was *Causa* 23 where:

Certain bishops together with the people committed to them lapsed into heresy; they began to force their neighboring catholics into heresy with threats and torments. When this came to light, the Apostolic Father commanded the catholic bishops of the surrounding region, who had received civil jurisdiction from the Emperor, that they should defend the catholics from the heretics and that they should compel them to return to the faith in whatever ways they could. Having gathered their soldiers... the bishops began to fight against the heretics openly and through subterfuges. At last, when some had been given over to be killed, others despoiled of their churches' possessions and their own, and still other had been locked away in prison and dungeons, they returned, coerced, to the unity of the catholic faith.<sup>196</sup>

In focusing on war between Christians and heretics, he presented a form of war where it is Christians against non-Christians, which could be used in all of the Crusades. At the

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<sup>193</sup> Song of Roland, 1132-1135.

<sup>194</sup> Just War and Jihad, 14.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>196</sup> Translation in Peter Diehl, "The Papacy and Its Suppression of Heresy in Italy, 1150-1254" (unpublished) 69.

same time *Causa* 23 focuses on the state of matters in the late antiquity where most of the actual precedents came from.

Gratian did not believe that being a warrior was intrinsically sinful. But although it was not inherently sinful, it still had great risks for the person involved, because it led to homicide. By citing some of the writings of Gregory VII and Urban II, he allowed that warriors who fought on the orders of bishops fought, and killed, licitly.<sup>197</sup> All and all, he too believed Augustine's theory that love can cause people to fight and even to commit murder. This theory was the cornerstone of Gratian's theories on just war and everything he wrote on war followed from the premises that war was not an unqualified evil and that fighting did not always conflict with love.<sup>198</sup>

Drawing on past sources, he commented that peace was the ideal condition and that war could only be waged if peace was the desired outcome of the violence. Gratian gives several different views on what might constitute a just war. In the first case, he cited Cicero's societal criteria, through Isidore, that a just war was either to retrieve stolen goods, or to repel an enemy attack.<sup>199</sup> Secondly, he cited Augustine's belief that it was the avenging of injuries which made a war just.<sup>200</sup> Either way the concept is that of the war being just if it protects society, but wrong if it is over private matters. It is interesting to note here that almost all of these *causae belli* are directly related to the *ius ad bellum* of the Roman Republic and Empire, showing how much of influence being merged with the Roman state had affected Christianity's concepts of right and wrong.

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<sup>197</sup> Russell, 59.

<sup>198</sup> Diehl, 74.

<sup>199</sup> Russell, 62.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

In regards to whether a war was just, Gratian put in the story about the war between the Israelites and the Amorites. In it, the Amorites had not allowed the Israelites to cross their land and therefore the Israelites had waged a war and won. Russell believes this is in the Decretum where it is to show that this is a cause for a just war, and comments that the “‘right of innocent passage,’ through foreign territory,” is not used in the modern world.<sup>201</sup> But, although he is completely correct in this analysis, it does not go far enough to realize that one of the main defenses of the Crusades as a just war was that the Muslims had denied free passage to Christians on pilgrimage. Thus, like his introduction to *Causa* 23, the example that Gratian cited was completely current to the circumstances of his century, and in fact, the proponents of the Crusades used to legitimize violence.<sup>202</sup>

Gratian did not believe in the Truce of God, although he seems to have supported the Peace of God, because he thought that all Christians should do everything in their own power for defense. Otherwise, they would be tempting God, like Satan tried to get Christ to do on the cross.<sup>203</sup> He also did not agree with the banning of weapons in the Second Lateran Council, because he believed that wars should be won as quickly as possible, so that peace might be restored.<sup>204</sup>

Most importantly, Gratian wrote about the Church’s place in the theater of war. He cited Augustine and argued that in forcing the wicked onto a good path the Church

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<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>202</sup> Riley-Smith, 93.

<sup>203</sup> Russell, 70.

<sup>204</sup> Although practically unknown in the West, at least in France, the Second Lateran Council banned the use of crossbows, and regular bows as well. There was some argument as to whether this was merely against Christians, as Peter the Chanter believed; or in all wars, as Richard the Englishman, Raymond of Peñafort and Jean De Dieu believed. Contamine, 274. Either way, when Richard the Lion-heart returned he trained the French in the use of the crossbow and its use became widespread. Contamine, 72. Also, Russell, 71

was imitating God. Therefore, the Church had the moral authority to wage wars against God's enemies, an argument that would later be used to defend wars against non-Christians, including heretics.<sup>205</sup> At the same time, although the Church had the right to initiate war, it did not have the right to fight in them.<sup>206</sup> The Church only had the right to call people to their defense or ask people to kill heretics.<sup>207</sup> According to Gratian, bishops had the right to call up troops, and then lead them as long as battle was not joined. However, if battle was to be joined the bishop should retire and let secular leaders lead their troops into battle. Thus, Gratian met current practices, but at the same time did not extend the ability for bishops to lead troops as far as the rhetoric of the Papacy had gone.

Gratian used words that indicate that he saw warfare as a quasi-legal action that could be gauged as either right or wrong.<sup>208</sup> By placing it in this state, Gratian makes all theorists walk a delicate line between passionate battle and a complicated war theory. Gratian had taken the intricate texts of the Church from the past millenium and tried to weave them all together and form a coherent doctrine.

## **Decretists**

The decretists were the first to start analyzing, extending, and clarifying the Decretum. Since they were exegetists they focus on exactly what Gratian had said and did not focus on any other sources that might have shed light on their topic.<sup>209</sup> *Causa 23*

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>206</sup> As Russell points out this was far from the case at the time that Gratian wrote it, but Gratian held that Clerics had no business fighting in wars. *Ibid.*, 76-77.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

<sup>209</sup> Walter Ullmann, Law and Politics in the Middle Ages: An introduction to the Sources of Medieval Political Ideas, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 177.

was the focus of their arguments for and against ecclesiastical involvement in wars, in particular the Crusades.<sup>210</sup> Like the Decretum, the decretists did not write law, canon or secular, but their writings were highly influential on those people that did.<sup>211</sup> Also, like Gratian, they almost all used heresy as the jumping off point to discuss ecclesiastical warfare.<sup>212</sup>

The first major decretist was Rufinus in 1157. He tackled the problems of the Decretum in his Summa Decretorum, and was one of the first to try and make a succinct formula out of *Causa* 23. His formula relied on three pillars, all of which had to be present or the war was unjust: the commander must have proper authority, the soldiers must be good, and the opponents deserving of punishment. Then, and only then, was the war just.<sup>213</sup>

The Summa Parisiensis of the French school would agree with this theory, but the Summa Coloniensis of the Rhenish school would change the theory a bit.<sup>214</sup> It argued that human law was the reason that warfare was just, rather than canon law. It even went so far as to say that violence needed to be repelled by violence even in defense of the Church.<sup>215</sup> Some members of the Bolognese school also had their opinions about Rufinus' works. Following Rufinus' model, they saw that war could be just on no sides, one side, or both sides, but they extended the theory to include wars which could have been just, but were waged for the wrong reasons and were therefore unjust.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Diehl, 77.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>213</sup> Russell, 87.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.



All in all, the decretists did not find a clear formula for just war, moral or ethical, but ended up finding one that was judicial.<sup>217</sup> They were, however, able to consolidate all of the parts of the Decretum which dealt with warfare.<sup>218</sup> The Church was thoroughly involved with warfare. It was no longer even a question about whether or not the Church might have the right to order the use of violence; it was a question about its appropriateness. Although the Church was involved in wars, at the same time, one of Huguccio's rules for waging a just war was that clerical participation was illicit.<sup>219</sup> Many agreed with this, but one of the decretists, Rolando, allowed that clerics in minor orders could bear arms.<sup>220</sup> This stance did not last long as most other decretists attacked it, but its presence shows that there was still major debates going on. According to Russell, "Firmly entrenched in the Decretum was the conviction that it was necessary to defend the faith by every available means, a conviction that on occasion overrode the canonical prohibition," against clerics fighting.<sup>221</sup>

It was this belief that the Church could be in mortal danger from her enemies which prompted much of the writings of the decretists.<sup>222</sup> Thus, although clerics might be prohibited from taking an active involvement in war, the notion of a war started by the Church was not forsaken.<sup>223</sup> Christians could fight for God and be righteous for doing so if they were following the rules for a just war and, at the same time, fighting on the Church's behalf. Most of the responses to arguments against this came from the

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<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.

<sup>220</sup> Diehl, 78, n80.

<sup>221</sup> Russell, 108.

<sup>222</sup> Ullmann, 163-165. He believes that one of the reasons that canon law developed so much was because it had to do so in order to combat the heresies and the emergence of Roman laws.

<sup>223</sup> Russell, 112.

Crusades where the infidels were holding the Holy Land, an area thought to rightfully belong to Christendom.<sup>224</sup>

At the end of the decretists' time, the trend had gone from a more theoretical approach to warfare to justifying such actions as the Crusades.<sup>225</sup> They sanctioned the Christian wars and approved of Christian leaders being the instigators of wars, as long as it was for a just cause. But whereas Augustine had said that soldiers did not take upon themselves sin for acting in a unjust war, the decretists thought that all Christians who were ordered by a non-Christian prince to go to war against Christians should disobey such a leader.<sup>226</sup> While they thought that the Church needed to be able to declare war, they also reasoned that secular states could be involved in a just war, and in this contained the beginnings of such ideas as public authority and the legal status of the state.

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<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

## Conclusion

In Christian Attitudes Towards War and Peace, Bainton makes the argument that "[b]roadly speaking, three attitudes to war and peace were to appear in the Christian ethic: pacifism, the just war, and the crusade."<sup>227</sup> He goes on to argue that they occurred exactly in that order and argues that every time period has one of these three different paradigms as its major thought. Bainton glosses over the different features and aspects of the various times and fails to take into account evidence contrary to his point.

As one can see, Christianity's roots in the various cultures and its own embryonic state had a multitude of different thoughts on war and no single idea can be looked at as the ideal of the age. Even after the ascension of Constantine I one can not see a pure form that the people of that age followed. The fact that Christianity was becoming the state religion of the Roman Empire did not mean that there was any more of a consensus than there had been before. Bainton sees the Middle Ages as the time when all of the theories become fully developed, but at least in the early Middle Ages no one theme was completely dominant. There were proponents of all aspects of War from pacifists to warmongers.

In addition, the thought that the warlike attitudes of many of the knights in the Middle Ages came directly from their Germanic roots is only partially true. There is no doubt that Germanic culture influenced the development of the Germanic kingdoms which were the heirs of the Western Roman Empire, but there was a great deal of Roman influence as well. Christianity and Roman culture was taken up by and thrust upon the

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<sup>227</sup> Bainton, 14.

Germanic tribes and they were proud of that heritage as well as their own Indo-European culture.<sup>228</sup> Thus, the two cultures melded into something new.

Throughout the early Middle Ages war theory changed continuously. The much-touted ideal was pacifism, and yet both nobles and peasants constantly celebrated war heroes in their histories and literature. Beyond that, although pacifism might have been the goal for all good Christians there were threats to their lands. Both internal struggles and external pressures forced the matter as a necessity for survival. United behind various leaders such as Charlemagne, Christians felt that if they did not fight back then Christianity would be wiped from the face of the earth. Yet although there was constant conflict, no one paradigm completely overshadowed all of the others, there were those who spoke out against the bloodshed.

As the Crusades neared, things became even more complicated as individuals expressed these three paradigms, but none seemed to win out. The Crusades were not merely fighting "in a frenzy of religious righteousness against the enemies of God," but had logic behind them.<sup>229</sup> The Church was drawn into wars and started them because of the values that it proclaimed. The tension led to many different defenses of different positions on the matter. All of the different viewpoints on the rightness of war mixed together and no single view rose above the other two as the ideal of the age. Just as in previous ages politics, religion and situation all mixed to create something that defies simple categorization.

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<sup>228</sup> The Germanization, 117-118.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

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