



Theorizing the Crusades: Identity, Institutions, and Religious War in Medieval Latin Christendom¹

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The “crusades”—a series of wars launched by the Latin Church between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries—pose a significant unresolved puzzle for International Relations Theory. The purpose of this article is to develop a historically sensitive yet theoretically governed account of the crusades that solves this puzzle. Empirically, the article draws heavily on a body of historiographical work that emphasizes the constitutive role of “religious” ideas and discourses in the evolution of the crusades. Theoretically, it adopts a constructivist approach, specifying the intersubjective factors that enabled the crusades to emerge as a significant instrument of papal “statecraft” and as a key element of medieval geopolitical relations. The article concludes with some reflections on the theoretical relevance of this account of the crusades for both medieval geopolitics and contemporary international relations.

The “crusades”—a series of wars launched by the Latin Church between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries—pose a significant unresolved puzzle for International Relations (IR) Theory. Realists have sought to explain these wars in terms of the structural logic of anarchy, arguing that the Church-sponsored military campaigns against its various enemies were little more than a particular instance of the timeless pursuit of power by self-interested actors seeking power and wealth. Similarly, historical materialists have sought the roots of these ecclesiastical wars in the “land-hunger” generated by new forms of property relations ushered in as a consequence of the “Feudal Revolution” of the late-tenth and early eleventh centuries.² Finally, constructivists have attempted to account for the crusades by specifying the pervading (religious) *mentalités* that made them both possible and meaningful. As I shall argue more fully later, however, the existing IR literature fails to provide a convincing account of the motive forces that propelled the *Church*—the one institution actually authorized to launch a crusade—to wage war against a variety of polities and social movements within and beyond Latin Christendom. This leaves us

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² The term “Feudal Revolution” refers to the progressive usurpation of royal power and authority by lesser lords associated with the terminal decline of the Carolingian Empire during the tenth century. By the early eleventh century, this process had transformed the Frankish West into a highly fragmented “feudal” society dominated by local lords who had arrogated all public power to themselves. This concept was first introduced in Duby 1980. For a flavor of the subsequent debates, see Bisson (1994, 1997), Barthélemy (1996, 2009), White (1996), Reuter (1997), and Wickham (1997).

with an intriguing puzzle: how *can* we account for one of the most distinctive elements of the “international relations” of later Medieval Latin Christendom? What were the motive forces behind these ecclesiastical wars? Were they material or ideational? Were they religious or mundane? In short, given the shortcomings of the extant literature, we are left with the following *problématique*: how should we theorize the crusades as a geopolitical phenomenon, and what are the implications of this phenomenon for IR theory?³

The purpose of this article is to develop a historically sensitive yet theoretically governed account of the crusades that solves this puzzle. It does this by drawing on a body of historiographical work that emphasizes the constitutive role of “religious” ideas and discourses in the evolution of the crusades. There are, of course, alternative bodies of research that explain the crusades as a function of “material” phenomena such as land scarcity and changing aristocratic property and family relations. These include works by specialist crusade historians such as Runciman (1951–1954) and Mayer (1972), as well as those of nonspecialists such as Bartlett (1993) and Bonnassie (1990), and political scientists such as Teschke (2003). In this article, however, I construct an account of the crusades exclusively out of the raw materials provided by what might be called the “religio-political” school of crusades historiography, rejecting (for evidentiary purposes, at least) the accounts advanced by the alternative “socio-political” school. I do this not because I am unreflexively drawn to a body of research that supports my argument (“selection bias”), but because it constitutes the current “state-of-the-art” in specialized crusades historiography (Housley 2006:626–627; see also Lock 2006:301–306). Over the past 30 years or so, specialist crusades historians—including such influential scholars as Dupront (1997), Madden (1999), Flori (2001), Riley-Smith ([1977], 2002a, 2005), Housley (2006, 2008), and Fonnesberg-Schmidt (2007)—have largely disconfirmed the (materialist) socio-political thesis that the crusades were driven by a pervasive land-hunger derived from the dynamics of feudalism and demographic pressures associated with the development of primogeniture. In its place, they have further developed the “religious” explanation—first articulated in the immediate postwar era by scholars such as Delaruelle (1955) and Alphandéry (1954–9)—demonstrating through meticulous empirical research that the motives of both the Church and the crusader were located not in the realm of material interests, but in the sphere of religious belief. On this now-standard historiographical view, the crusades were first and foremost an artifact of the religiously derived discourses that both constituted the agents that populated Medieval Latin Christendom and that imbued those agents with historically specific needs, values, and interests. While conceding that more mundane considerations were often at play, contemporary crusades scholarship concludes that the available empirical data simply do not support the claim that either the Church or the armed nobility were motivated primarily by material interests such as the pursuit of land or booty. In deciding to ground my study in this historiographical literature, I am thus following the guidelines provided by Lustick (1996), Thies (2002), Trachtenberg (2006), and others for engaging in historically informed political science scholarship.

I begin the article by reviewing the existing IR literature on the crusades, highlighting both its contributions and its lacunae. I then proceed to argue that the interests of the Latin Church were profoundly redefined in the eleventh century and that these redefined interests placed that institution in a structurally antagonistic relationship with a number of polities and social forces within and beyond Latin Christendom. Next, I argue that, even with the crystallization of this new identity, the ecclesiastical wars of the era ultimately required the construction of

³ Consistent with now-conventional usage, I use the term “geopolitics” as a shorthand to refer to all competitive/conflictual relations between units-of-rule. (Teschke 2003:12; Deudney 2007:288).

a new institution of war—the “crusade”—during the eleventh and twelfth centuries; for it was only with the development of this trans-local or “international” institution that the Church was discursively reconstituted as a legitimate war-making unit. I conclude by arguing that these developments both enabled and propelled the development of the final condition-of-possibility for the crusades: the Church’s institutional capacity for waging war against its enemies. Once these discursive and material conditions-of-possibility had crystallized, the crusade became a defining feature of medieval geopolitics; several centuries later, when these conditions no longer obtained, crusading passed from the historical scene. I bring the article to a close by reflecting on the theoretical relevance of this constructivist account of the crusades for both medieval geopolitics and contemporary international relations.

The Crusades in IR Theory

In 1992, Markus Fischer introduced the crusades as a subject of debate within contemporary IR by making the bold assertion that, contrary to the historicizing claims of John Ruggie (1983) and other “critical theorists,” the campaigns to the Holy Land launched by Pope Urban II in 1095 constituted a sort of “hard case” that supported neorealist claims regarding the transhistorical logic of conflict under conditions of anarchy. At the risk of oversimplification, Fischer argued that while medieval discourse (as reflected in moral doctrine, cosmological belief systems, etc.) did in fact emphasize functional cooperation and harmonious communal relations, the “actually existing” practices of the era were dominated by the sort of behaviors that realists claim have characterized all “international” systems: the self-regarding pursuit by actors of their own interests; the formation of alliances and spheres of influence; and the use of force to resolve conflicts. Fischer (1992:463) concluded that medieval “anarchic actors” (castellanies, lordships, counties, dukedoms, principalities, kingdoms—and even the Church) “behaved much like modern states” and that the structural logic of anarchy, then as now, induced political actors to engage in a range of practices intended to maximize security, power, and exclusive territorial control. Neither the “heteronomous” nature of the constituent units of the medieval world order nor the “communal” character of the dominant political discourses and norms of the era substantially mitigated the “structural logic of action under anarchy.” As Fischer (1992:463; my emphasis) put it, “feudal actors engaged in power politics *regardless of their attributes*.”

With respect to the crusades, Fischer (1992:438) argued simply that the campaigns to the Holy Land were little more than a particular instance of the timeless pursuit of power by self-interested actors seeking a “share of the spoils.” Whatever the rhetoric of Christian unity, the reality was that the crusades were ultimately fought by “alliances circumscribed by the exigencies of power” (Fischer 1992:443). For Fischer, the structural logic of action under anarchy not only informed the decisions to launch and participate in the original crusade to the Holy Land, it also shaped the decision to divide the newly conquered territories into petty principalities (rather than turn them over to the Church or the Empire). Ultimately, he concludes the self-regarding and inherently conflictual structural logic of action under anarchy was so strong that it decisively undermined the crusaders’ ability to defend the Holy Land; as he put it, the crusaders “failed to hold the East precisely because they could not square their particular interests with the universal idea that had inspired them” (Fischer 1992:438).

Fischer’s work has been roundly criticized in the decade-and-a-half since its publication, largely on the grounds of its “abuse of history,” its trivialization of “critical theory,” and its misunderstanding of nature of “discourses” and “norms” (Hall and Kratochwil 1993; Teschke 1997; Alkopher 2005). For the

purposes of this article, I would like to highlight three deficiencies related specifically to his brief treatment of the crusades—deficiencies that, in fact, characterize much of the IR literature dealing with this topic. First, Fischer placed undue emphasis on the motivations of individual *crusaders*, ignoring altogether the motives of the one institution actually authorized to launch a crusade—the Church. Second, he failed to account adequately for the distinctive administrative and war-making capabilities of the Latin Church—capabilities that set it apart from the Empire, kingdoms, and urban polities that defined the medieval geopolitical landscape. Finally, and perhaps not surprisingly given his structuralist and materialist theoretical commitments, Fischer was simply unable to grasp fully the motivations of individual crusaders. As Hall and Kratochwil point out, and as I shall argue somewhat more fully later, it was not the prospect of material spoils that motivated individual crusaders to “take the cross”; as the detailed empirical work of crusade historians over the last two decades has definitively demonstrated, crusaders often incurred huge debts to fulfill their vows and seldom had any expectation of substantial material reward (Hall and Kratochwil 1993). Rather, the prime motive of the individual crusader was the desire to take advantage of the Church’s promise to remit the sins of all those who fulfilled their crusade vows (or who died trying).

While several articles dealing with medieval geopolitics (Hall and Kratochwil 1993; Spruyt 1994; Teschke 1997) appeared in major IR journals in the years following publication of Fischer’s argument, none paid sustained attention to the *crusades* as a geopolitical phenomenon.⁴ In 2003, however, this changed with the publication of Teschke’s study of the relationship between social property relations and geopolitical systems. While the study’s primary purpose was the debunking of what Teschke called “the myth of 1648”, several chapters were devoted to analyzing medieval geopolitical relations. His main argument in this connection was twofold: first, that “the constitution, operation, and transformation of geopolitical orders are predicated on the changing identities of their constitutive units”; and, second, that “social property relations... primarily define the *constitution* and identity of these political units” (Teschke 2003:7). On this view, medieval geopolitical relations were largely a product of the contradictory strategies of social reproduction pursued by enserfed peasant producers on the one hand, and an exploitative nobility on the other.” These strategies determined the territorial and administrative properties of the medieval polity... and reveal the character of medieval geopolitics as a culture of war driven by systematic reinvestment in the means of coercion and (geo)political accumulation” (Teschke 2003:7). Against this backdrop, Teschke explained the crusades in terms of a confluence of two sets of material interests: those of the Church and those of the lay nobility. The interests of the former, Teschke argued, stemmed from the need to protect ecclesiastical land and treasure from increasing lordly encroachment in the aftermath of the feudal revolution. These interests led the clergy to pursue a number of strategies intended to pacify armed nobility, one of which entailed redirecting lordly violence “into external conquest.”⁵ The interests of the latter, derived from the fundamentals of feudal social property relations and the intensification of land-hunger following “the introduction of primogeniture that restricted noble access to the political means of appropriation,” revolved around the need to acquire wealth-generating land and peasants (Teschke 2003:9). As these two sets of interests converged in the eleventh century, they produced a number of expansionary geopolitical thrusts, one of

⁴ Hall (1997:605–609) did address the crusades, but only the First Crusade, and then only briefly and incidentally as a catalytic moment in the evolution of the institution of Christian chivalry.

⁵ Teschke (2003:103). The others included the Truce of God, the Peace of God, the doctrine of the Three Orders, and even the institution of chivalry.

which was a series of crusades to the Holy Land. Viewed in this way, the crusades were little more than a feudal land-grab—one with a palpable “religious veneer” to be sure, but a land-grab just the same (Teschke 2003:98).

While Teschke introduced an important socio-political dimension to the study of medieval geopolitics writ large, his analysis of the *crusades* simply cannot bear close scrutiny. With respect to the motives of the Church, the notion that the crusades were a stage in the consolidation of the peace movement—that is, that they were motivated by the desire of ecclesiastical officials to protect the material interests of the Church by redirecting lordly violence—while once popular, no longer enjoys much support among crusades historians (Flori 2003:1-23; Housley 2006:27-29). The standard view today, as we shall see, is that the Church’s motives have to be sought in the religiously derived values and interests of the post-Gregorian papacy—and especially in its core belief that the “reformed” Church had a duty to intervene actively in the world to promote justice (Morris 1989:79-108). With respect to his treatment of the motives of the crusaders, as Hall and Kratochwil argued in refuting Fischer’s realist materialism, there is little support in contemporary crusades historiography for the claim that the crusades were an artifact of land-hunger, demographic pressure, or desire for a “share of the spoils” (Hall and Kratochwil 1993; see also Hall 1997:606–607). Indeed, as noted earlier, the last two decades or so of specialized crusades research has definitively refuted the claim that the crusaders were land-hungry noble cadets or wealth-seeking colonialists. Taken together, these critiques reveal a serious weakness in Teschke’s conceptual framework and historical account; one that undermines both his analysis of the crusades and his conceptualization of the medieval geopolitical order more broadly.

Most recently, Tal Dingott Alkopher (2005) has published what is perhaps the most sustained and focused analysis of the crusades in the IR literature. Arguing from a constructivist perspective, Alkopher sets out to provide a constitutive explanation of the crusades by specifying the *mentalités* that made the crusades both possible and meaningful. As she puts it, the goal of her article is to make use of “a unique French literature focusing on the medieval, and specifically the crusaders’ *mentalité*, to expose deep structures of identities that informed, indeed, *constituted*, medieval practices in general and the crusades in particular” (Alkopher 2005:721). Focusing on Frederick II’s crusade of 1229, Alkopher analyzes a variety of different discursive themes or “focal points”—Holy War, Christian chivalry, Jerusalem, redemption, the Cross, and the apocalyptic monarchy—to demonstrate how Frederick’s decision to undertake his campaign to the Holy Land, inexplicable from a realist perspective, is both comprehensible and predictable when viewed through a constructivist lens.

Alkopher’s article constitutes an important contribution to the IR literature on medieval geopolitics for several reasons. It is the first sustained study of the crusades in the IR literature; it self-consciously undertakes to develop a constitutive (rather than causal) theory of the crusades; and it highlights some of the *mentalités collectives* that constituted crusading as a meaningful category of thought and action in the corporate imagination of the Latin Christian warrior nobility (including kings and emperors). Ultimately, however, her constructivist account of the crusades falls short of the mark. To begin with, she fails to theorize the *ecclesiastical* motives behind crusading; focusing almost exclusively on the motivations of individual crusaders (and especially Emperor Frederick II), she offers no real insight into the socially constructed identity and interests of the post-Gregorian reform papacy—the social force that both “invented” the crusades and subsequently wielded them as an instrument of “foreign” policy. Second, even though Alkopher (2005:725–726) talks about the “institutionalization” of the crusade, she fails to distinguish between, on the one hand, the broad

mentalités that made the crusades meaningful/appealing to *individual crusaders* and, on the other, the “social institution” that actually produced and reproduced both the “crusade” as a legitimate instrument of papal statecraft, and the “crusader” as a historically specific identity formation with an (entailed) portfolio of interests. Understanding the former, which established the conditions-of-possibility for *participation in a crusade*, is doubtless important; understanding the latter, which established the conditions-of-possibility for *the “crusade” itself* (as a category of thought and action within the collective imagination of both ecclesiastical officials and the laity), is crucial. Given these weaknesses, and despite her very real contributions to the constructivist IR literature on this topic, Alkopher ultimately fails to provide a satisfying constitutive explanation for the crusades to the Holy Land, let alone for crusades more generically or the deep “social (and religious) meanings that constitute war” (Alkopher 2005:715).

Theorizing the Crusades

In their own ways, both realist and historical materialist accounts of the crusades rely on a materialist conception of “interests.” On the one hand, while there are important differences among its classical, structural, and neoclassical variants, realism is to a great extent premised on the assumption that states’ primary interests—survival, power, security, wealth—are material and objective, analytically separable from (inter)subjective ideas, norms, and institutions (Burchill 2005:31-62). Reflecting this, Fischer argues that, whatever the rhetoric of Church officials and the lay warriors who actually did the fighting, the crusades were really motivated by nothing more than the (timeless) pursuit of power and wealth. On the other hand, and at the risk of eliding important differences among various subtraditions, marxist theories are also premised on the assumption that core interests are material and objective—in this case, derived not from the structures of anarchy, but from an agent’s location within a mode of production/exploitation. In Teschke’s political marxist account of the crusades, the crystallization of a new pattern of social property relations (banal lordship) in the aftermath of the feudal revolution gave rise to a class of predatory nobles whose primary interest lay in maximizing wealth through the acquisition of productive land. This “land-hunger,” coupled with the self-interested efforts of the Church to redirect lordly violence away from its own material possessions, in turn gave rise to a strategy of “political accumulation” focused on conquering and colonizing the Holy Land. In common with Fischer’s realist analysis, ultimately this account of Church and crusader motives is rooted in objectivist and materialist assumptions.

There are at least two problems with such accounts, however. First, as mentioned earlier, there are serious empirical challenges to the claim that the desire for material gain underpinned the crusades. Indeed, the current consensus among specialized crusade historians is that neither the Church nor the typical crusader was primarily motivated by such interests. This is supported by theoretical work that demonstrates that actors can be motivated by a range of interests—moral, axiological (norm-driven), etc.—that do not directly affect their material well-being (Boudon 2003). Second, and perhaps more importantly, there are significant conceptual challenges to the assumption that actors can in fact even have “objective” interests—that is, interests that are independent of human thought (Schmidt 2008:317–319). As constructivists and other reflectivists have long argued, interests are not analytically separable from ideas, but are the products of inherently social interpretive processes—processes that produce specific and meaningful understandings of what constitutes both an actor’s interests and threats to those interests. On this view, interests cannot merely be assumed; they must be specified through a careful examination of the

intersubjective and institutionalized forms of knowledge, consciousness, “common sense,” and identity that allow social actors to understand—and thus act in—the world.

Taken together, these critiques cast serious doubts on explanations of the crusades that are ontologically dependent on the material self-interests of the Church and the armed laity. But if objective, material interests cannot explain Latin Christendom’s centuries-long commitment to crusading, what can? Drawing heavily on constructivist theorizing regarding the “national interest” (see Burchill 2005), the case that I make in this section is that the answer to this question is to be found in the socially constructed institutional interests of the post-Gregorian Latin Church and the armed laity. My argument proceeds in two parts. In the first, I trace the (re)constitution of the core identity of the Latin Church during the eleventh century from a junior partner of the Carolingian empire to an independent and divinely inspired agent of spiritual renewal within the Christian commonwealth. The dynamics of identity construction are well attended in the constructivist literature, and need not be recapitulated here. Suffice it to say that in this section I provide what Reus-Smit (1996:217–220) calls a “unit-level” constructivist account of the eleventh-century reconstruction of the Church’s identity—one that emphasizes the way in which the reformers reworked the core elements of the Church’s fundamental “sense of self” in light of the changing material context of post-Carolingian Latin Christendom. In the second, I demonstrate how the interests entailed in this reconstructed identity placed the Church in a structurally antagonistic relationship with a range of other actors within and beyond the bounds of Latin Christendom, in the process establishing the fundamental conditions-of-possibility for the medieval ecclesiastical wars now known as the crusades. The relationship between identity and interests, of course, is also well established in the constructivist literature. In this section, I build on the core insight of this literature—that “identities are the basis of interests”—to demonstrate how the transformed identity of the post-Gregorian Church entailed within it a new set of ecclesiastical interests. Throughout, I use the shorthand “identity-interest complex” to refer to the specific institutional bundles of socially constructed identities and entailed interests (the Church, kingdoms, lordships, etc.) that populated the heteronomous “international system” of Latin Christendom.

The Socially Constructed Identity of the Latin Clergy

Although stratified horizontally (that is, into various classes) and vertically (that is, into regular clergy, secular clergy, and cathedral clergy), the Christian priesthood constituted a more or less unified social force with its own “sense of self” and its own portfolio of socially constructed identities, interests, and strategies of reproduction. As Perry Anderson (1974:36) argues, the animating logic of this social force was “not to be found in the realm of economic relations or social structures, where it has sometimes mistakenly been sought.” Rather, it was to be found in the “cultural realm”; that is, in the realm of the “identity-interest complex” that provided these officials with both an interpretive framework that allowed them to make sense of the world and a cultural script that specified how they should act in that world. This does not, of course, mean that the clergy did not have any material interests related to the pursuit of wealth and power. Instead, it is to make the point that the *constitutive* social logic of the clergy—as a distinctive social force both claiming and exercising a monopoly of power within the spiritual realm of Latin Christendom—is not reducible in any way to medieval social property relations or other strictly material factors related to the mode of production. Rather, it was a product of the “cultural sphere”; that is, of the socially constructed Christian identity-interest complex that provided

members of this social order with their distinctive cosmology, identity, and (entailed) interests.

The basic thread of this constitutive discourse, as first articulated by the Church Fathers, was one of building and perfecting what St. Augustine had called the City of God (*Civita Dei*): a potentially universal moral/spiritual community founded on Christian love and dedication to God. In this connection, the role of the Church, as the embodiment and vehicle of the Holy Spirit, was to “communicate God’s will and love” to humanity (Cantor 1994:79). This required not only extending the spatial limits of the community of Christian believers—to be achieved by evangelizing and Christianizing the peoples beyond the pale of the Christian world and continually expanding the *respublica Christiana* beyond its existing frontiers—but also working to create the conditions necessary for the Heavenly City to flourish within the borders of the Christian world (Kantorowicz 1957:194). Evangelization was thus the fundamental motivation for all Church action; extending the bounds of Christendom, it’s very *raison d’être*.

During the earlier Carolingian era, the Frankish Clergy had enacted this fundamental cultural script by entering into an alliance with the imperial monarchy—prospering enormously as a consequence of the resulting imperially supported program of ecclesiastical reform, renewal, and reorganization. With the demise of the Empire and the onset of the feudal revolution in the tenth century, however, the Latin Church entered into a period of moral and institutional decline. Simply put, with the loss of its royal benefactor and protector, the Church became enmeshed in the processes of violent social and political reordering unleashed by the Feudal Revolution: Church property was violently appropriated by secular lords; ecclesiastical benefices were transformed into a feudal fiefs; the bishops, abbots, and lesser clergy were incorporated into the emerging feudo-vassalic networks; and ecclesiastical governance became increasingly personalized, secularized, and decentralized. As a result, lay nobles—whose core interests were almost always more mundane than religious—came to exercise control over countless churches, monasteries, and bishoprics. Even the papacy fell under the influence of various aristocratic factions. The inevitable result of these developments was not only the loss of power, wealth, and prestige, but an ineluctable collapse of ecclesiastical discipline and an associated increase in various forms of corruption, immorality, and spiritual decay (Morris 1989:24–28).

Given the basic identity-interest complex of the Latin Christian clergy, periods of moral decline and institutional decay such as that associated with the fall of the Carolingian empire have almost invariably triggered a counter-movement intended to renew and revitalize the Church. In the eleventh century, this movement materialized as *reform monasticism*—a movement that emphasized obedience, chastity, moral purity, and the conduct (through the performance of an elaborate liturgy) of the spiritual equivalent of feudal warfare intended to defend the realm against natural and supernatural enemies alike.⁶ Powerfully shaped by the ideals and practices pioneered at the monastery founded by the Duke of Aquitaine at Cluny in 909AD, this social force was constituted through a narrative that constructed the reformers as architects of a restored *respublica Christiana*. Over the preceding centuries, according to this narrative, the Christian world had entered a period of potentially terminal decline: it had been diminished geographically as a result of conquest, fractured ecclesiastically as a result of schism, and undermined spiritually as a result of moral decay and corruption. Compounding this, the one institution charged by Christ with the pastoral care of the Christian commonwealth had also entered into period of decline, largely as a result of the moral corruption and decay that inevitably resulted from excessive entanglement in the affairs of the world. According to this narrative, the

⁶ For a brief overview, see Hall (1997:609–615); for a more detailed picture, see Morris (1989:11–134).

only way to reverse this process of terminal decline was first of all to purify the Clergy, and then to restore it to its rightful position of social and political leadership within the *respublica Christiana*. This was to be achieved primarily through the monasticization of the Clergy; that is, through the imposition of the essentially monastic ideals of personal piety, moral purity, and renewal of spiritual discipline that had proven so effective in earlier periods of reform. Instead of seeking to realize the monastic ideal by withdrawing from the world, however, these latter-day reformers thought it preferable to try to impart the ideal to the world through the Church. Against the backdrop of millennial uncertainty and a spiritual turmoil reminiscent of the fourth century, then, the Cluniac narrative and ideal provided a powerful cultural rallying point for all those dissatisfied with the state of both *ecclesia* and *mundus* in Latin Christendom. Simply put, it provided the constitutive discourse around which crystallized an element within the Latin Clergy whose members saw themselves as divinely inspired agents of moral and spiritual renewal within the Christian commonwealth.

By the middle of the eleventh century, this social force found itself dominant, if not yet hegemonic, within the Latin Clergy. Seizing this opportunity, popes Leo IX, (1048–1054), Nicholas II (1059–1061), and Alexander II (1061–1073) all took specific steps to address the ills they perceived to be at the heart of Latin Christendom's moral corruption and spiritual decay—especially the immoral practices of “simony” and clerical concubinage.⁷ With the accession of Gregory VII in 1073, however, this process of renewal and revitalization took a different tack: it evolved from being an essentially legal and hortatory effort—involving both the promulgation of canons proscribing these practices and a variety of efforts designed to delegitimize them—to one focused on transforming the papacy into a powerful institution capable of more effectively pursuing the socially constructed values and interests of the reform Clergy. Thus, in addition to his efforts to continue the work of his predecessors and extirpate simony and clerical concubinage, Gregory also took steps to assert control over the bishops and to strengthen the administrative apparatus of the papacy. This was the Gregorian or Papal Revolution of the eleventh century, a phenomenon perhaps best understood as an enactment of the basic constitutive script of the Latin Clergy in the distinctive conditions of post-Carolingian feudal Europe. Whereas in Carolingian times, the “rational” strategy for the clergy had been to play the role of junior partner in a political alliance with the monarchy, with the end of the empire and the spread of feudalism such a strategy was no longer viable; nor, given the perceived connection between growing lay interference and the decay of the Church, was it seen as desirable. Instead, the revitalization and purification of the Clergy—and the pursuit of its founding mission in the concrete historical conditions of the new feudal age—required the creation of a “papal monarchy” that was a powerful political institution in its own right. The Gregorian reforms advanced this goal by consolidating the reformers' control of the papacy, strengthening papal control over the Church and deepening the Church's control over the spiritual life of Latin Christendom.

The Interests of the Post-Gregorian Latin Church

By the later decades of the eleventh century, then, the reform elements of the clergy were not only firmly in control of the Latin Church but had developed many of the institutional mechanisms necessary for carrying out their program of moral and spiritual rejuvenation. But what, precisely, were the socially constructed values and interests that motivated and constrained the actions of this

⁷ “Simony” refers to the purchase of clerical office and the related practice of lay investiture of abbots and bishops.

social force? Deriving directly from their collective identity as spiritual reformers charged with restoring the decaying regime of justice within Christendom, the reformers articulated four basic interests or objectives. First, in response to the spiritual renewal that swept Latin Christendom in the eleventh century (itself partly a reaction to feudal violence and anarchy), they sought to reassert the Clergy's monopoly power over the spiritual domain by reforming and revitalizing the priesthood. This monopoly had been called into question in the eleventh century by a combination of rising lay piety and growing ecclesiastical corruption, both of which necessarily undermined the "natural" leadership role of the clergy in spiritual affairs. In response, Pope Gregory VII formulated and initiated a revolutionary program designed to re-establish the moral authority and spiritual hegemony of the Church. As noted earlier, the broad thrust of this program was the separation of the clergy from the laity. In practice, however, its key manifestations were campaigns against clerical concubinage and simony. Second, the medieval papacy developed a powerful interest in not only extricating the Church from the control of temporal authorities, but (more ambitiously) in actively asserting ecclesiastical supremacy over those authorities. The ideological roots of this variant of "political augustinianism," of course, can be traced back to both St. Augustine and Pope Gelasius I in the fourth and fifth centuries AD. In the eleventh century, however, Pope Gregory VII pressed with unprecedented vigor the case that within the *respublica Christiana*, "papal authority alone was universal and plenary, while all other powers... were particular and dependent," effectively committing the Church to a set of policies that irreconcilably contradicted the interests of both the secular authorities and its allies within the episcopate. Third, the Latin Clergy articulated as one of its central interests the goal of Christian unity (under papal leadership). On the one hand, this involved maintaining the doctrinal purity of the Latin Church in the face of social movements constituted around various heterodox beliefs and practices. On the other, it involved the reassertion of Latin hegemony over the Orthodox Church, which was held to be in rebellion against Rome. Finally, the reform Clergy came to believe that the liberated Church had a duty to intervene vigorously in the affairs of the lay world to ensure "justice" (Morris 1989:79-108).

With the accession of the reform faction in the eleventh century, then, a new portfolio of socially constructed interests and values began to motivate the actions of the papacy. But what, if anything, does all this have to do with the emergence of the crusade as an organic element of the geopolitical system of Medieval Latin Christendom? Simply put, the argument I am making here is that, as the newly hegemonic monastic-reform faction of the Latin Clergy began to pursue its socially constructed portfolio of interests, it quickly found itself locked in structural conflicts with a number of irreconcilably contradictory social forces over the nature and extent of the Christian commonwealth. These structural antagonisms materialized in four concrete dyads. First, the interests of the post-Gregorian Church clashed with those of the Empire. The reformers' efforts to liberate the Church from lay interference by abolishing the Emperor's right to appoint and command bishops threatened imperial access to the military, financial, and political resources of the bishops—resources that had become essential elements of the emperor's power base and the empire's administrative infrastructure. Similarly, efforts to liberate the Church by weakening imperial power in Italy threatened the Emperor's access to both the enormous wealth of these lands and the political resources they provided in his nearly continuous power struggle with the German dukes (Spruyt 1994:113-117). Finally, efforts to press the claim that the Church alone enjoyed plenary power within the *respublica Christiana* necessarily threatened the Emperor's own identity (and legal status) as the supreme temporal authority within Latin Christendom. While there were periods of relative peace, coexistence, and even alliance between Church

and Empire during the central middle ages, this basic structural antagonism ensured that episodes of conflict—like the Investiture Controversy (1046–1122)—would punctuate the history of the era.

Second, as they began to shape the actions of the Church, the interests and values of the newly hegemonic reform faction of the clergy generated irreconcilable conflicts between the papacy and social forces that, while Christian, espoused unauthorized religious doctrines (heresies). At the beginning of the period under consideration, “heresy” was not considered to be a pressing problem within Latin Christendom. The great heresies of the patristic period were known to Church officials, of course, but there had been no serious heretical movement since that time. Indeed, as late as the end of the eleventh century, the term was typically used to refer to the sin of simony rather than to unauthorized programs of belief or practice (Morris 1989:339–340). Perhaps ironically, however, the emergence of the reform movement within the Church was paralleled by the re-emergence of the existential “threat” of heresy (at least in the collective imagination of the Clergy). On the one hand, this was a perhaps inevitable by-product of intensified religious consciousness; the heightened sense of piety that characterized the era was accompanied by a heightened awareness of, and tendency to demonize, those who deviated from the orthodox teachings of the Church. On the other hand, the very cultural factors and social impulses that drove the reform movement to seek to purify the Church also generated more extreme religious movements that rejected the Church’s teachings (and authority) altogether. Partly as a result of the weakening of clerical authority associated with attacks on corrupt and simoniacal priests, partly as a result of the desire to live a more “apostolic life” based on New Testament teachings, and partly as a result of the improved level of clerical education (which allowed priests unmediated access to the scriptures), new forms of worship, preaching, and religious community began to proliferate. While some of these (such as the Beguines) were accommodated under the big tent of “reform,” others (such as the Cathars and Waldensians) were viewed as being inherently incompatible with the teachings and authority of the Church and were anathematized.

Third, the clergy was locked in a structural conflict with both the Muslim polities that governed in formerly Christian lands, and the Islamic faith itself. The roots of this conflict were to be found in the reformers’ core identity-interest complex, which framed Islam as a particularly obdurate form of heresy, and Muslim rule in formerly Christian lands as inherently “unjust”—on the grounds that it was predicated on the unlawful seizure of territory that was rightfully Christian and involved the persecution of Christians—and therefore in need of remedy. This was particularly true of the Holy Land, which was viewed as the cosmological center of the Christian world, but it was also true of Spain, Sicily, and other once-Christian lands occupied by Muslims. From the perspective of the constitutive narrative of the reform papacy, these injustices *demand*ed that steps be taken to recover territory that rightfully belonged to Christians and to punish those responsible for the unjust treatment of Christians in these illegally occupied lands. This placed them in an irreconcilably antagonistic relationship with those Islamic polities that occupied these once-Christian lands (and that, for reasons of their own core identity-interest complex, were violently opposed to returning them to Christian rule).

Finally, the clergy was enmeshed in a structural conflict with pagan polities that resisted evangelization. As we have seen, evangelizing the peoples beyond the pale of the Christian world and continually expanding the *respublica Christiana* beyond its existing frontiers was the underlying motivation for all Church action; building a truly universal Christian commonwealth, its very *raison d’être*. This placed the clergy in a structurally antagonistic relationship with all those

non-Christian polities that opposed evangelization or resisted incorporation into the Christian commonwealth.

The Institution of the "Crusade" and Its Constitutive Effects

The post-Gregorian Church, then, had socially constructed interests that placed it in structural conflict with a range of social forces within and beyond Latin Christendom. As late as the mid-eleventh century, however, the Church had neither the institutional means nor, to borrow Hall's (1997) language, the "moral authority" to employ armed force in pursuit of these interests. In order for these structural antagonisms to be converted into violent conflict between the Church and its adversaries, two further conditions-of-possibility would have to be met. First, the Church would have to be reconstituted as a legitimate war-making unit; that is, it would have to be transformed into a corporate entity with the widely accepted legitimate authority to employ violent force in pursuit of its interests. And, second, the armed nobility that provided the core of Latin Christendom's war-fighting capacity would have to be in some way reconstituted as "soldiers of Christ" (*milites Christi*) willing and able to fight on behalf of the Church and its interests. Both of these preconditions, I argue, were only met with the crystallization of the "institution" of the crusade in the late-eleventh and early twelfth centuries.⁸

What, then, was the nature of this institution? What were the raw materials out of which it was assembled? And how did it make possible the ecclesiastical wars of the medieval era? To begin with, the institution of the crusade was constructed in part at least out of the raw materials afforded by the cultural narrative of Christian "holy war" (*bellum sacrum*). As Carl Erdmann first argued in his 1935 monograph *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, the crusades were in fact the culmination of the historical evolution of the Christian institution of "holy war," which he defined as "any war that is regarded as a religious act or is in some way set in a direct relation to religion" (Erdmann [1935], 1977:3). According to Erdmann (Erdmann [1935], 1977:x), this institution evolved in three historical phases. First, in the fifth century, Augustine (d. 430) established its foundations by introducing the idea that the preservation of the unity of the Christian church constituted a just cause for war. Faced with the threat posed to the doctrinal and institutional unity of the Church by the Donatist movement, but also conscious of the doctrinal proscription against forced conversion, Augustine ultimately came to argue that (military) force could be used to restore to the true faith those believers who had fallen into doctrinal error (that is, heretics and schismatics). In effect, Augustine's scattered and inchoate writings on the topic of organized violence introduced two related but distinct discursive currents into the medieval institution of war: "just war" or war waged on temporal authority to combat injustice; and "holy war" or "war sanctioned by God [*bellum Deo auctore*] in which... one side fights for light, the other darkness; once side for Christ, the other the devil" (Erdmann [1935], 1977: 9-10; see also Flori 2001). Second, under Pope Gregory I (d. 604 AD), the moral purposes of such wars were expanded to include the forcible subjugation of pagans. In effect, Gregory introduced the doctrine of what Erdman called "indirect missionary war"; that is, war fought to subjugate pagans, not as a means to forcible conversion, but as "the basis for subsequent missionary activity that would be protected and promoted by state authority" (Erdmann [1935], 1977:10). Finally, the early reform popes—Leo IX, Alexander II, and Gregory VII—faced with significant translocal military

⁸ Where institutions are defined as "stable sets of norms, rules, and principles that serve two functions in shaping social relations: they constitute actors as knowledgeable social agents, and they regulate behavior" (Reus-Smit 1999:12).

threats emanating from the Islamic world, introduced the idea that war could legitimately be fought in defense of the Church and Christendom (Erdmann [1935], 1977:xx). They also initiated the practice of offering remission of sins as a reward for military service against the enemies of the Church (Erdmann [1935], 1977:xxiii). From this, Erdmann concluded, it was but a short evolutionary leap from *holy war* to the *crusade* to liberate the Holy Land, launched in 1095.

Needless to say, since first advanced over seven decades ago, the "Erdmann thesis" has been subject to intense scrutiny and vigorous debate. But while there may be little consensus in the extant historiographical literature on the degree to which the crusades were holy wars, for the purposes of this study, three conclusions seem warranted. First, it seems irrefutable that a rich and powerfully resonating discourse of holy war was part of the geopolitical imagination of Latin Christendom. Second, this discourse could be said to entail the following defining elements: holy wars were fought on God's authority; they were declared and directed by the Clergy; they were a means of defending the Church against its internal and external enemies; and, they were associated with spiritual rewards. Finally, there can be little doubt that the architects of the prototypical First Crusade were heavily influenced by the practices and discourses of holy war when imagining the campaign to liberate the Holy Land. In this respect, one need not accept Erdmann's claim that the crusades were *nothing more than* holy wars. It seems difficult to avoid the conclusion, however, that the institution of the crusade was (a) assembled at least in part out of cultural materials provided by the discourse of *bellum sacrum*, and (b) that it therefore necessarily had many of the characteristics of a Christian "holy war."

But if it is true that the institution of the "crusade" perpetuated the legacy of the older institution of holy war, it is also true that it shared more than a little genetic material with the preexisting discourse of *bellum justum* or "just war." Indeed, the institution of the "crusade" incorporates so many elements of that older discourse that some have argued that, in effect, it constituted little more than the "just war of the Church." What, then, were the key just war elements of the discourse of crusade? At the risk of eliding important differences within and between schools of canonical jurisprudence, the answer to this question can be summarized in the following terms. With respect to the issue of just cause, the canonists held that the Church could declare and direct a "just war" in response to certain injustices perpetrated by infidels. These injustices included attacks on the Christian commonwealth, infringements on the legal rights of Christians, and/or the illicit seizure of goods or property "lawfully and legitimately held by Christians in accordance with divine law and the *ius gentium*." The only real debate seems to have been whether, to qualify as such, an "injustice" required a (violent) act, or whether the mere denial of the Christian faith as defined by the Latin Clergy constituted an injury to divine law and/or the Church sufficient to justify war. In any case, proponents of both views argued that wars to recover lands lost to Muslims (especially the Holy Land), to punish and coerce heretics or to defend the Church and Christendom against enemies of the faith (*inimici ecclesiae*) unambiguously met the standards of just cause established in canon law. With respect to the issue of "legitimate authority," the canonists also defined the locus of war-making authority within a just war frame, arguing that while the Church was obviously vested with the authority to declare and direct a crusade, ultimately the pope (as the Vicar of Christ and thus enjoying a unique "plenitude of power") was the clerical official "most suited to exercise this authority" (Russell 1975:123). In this way, as Russell has argued, the somewhat vague concept of "holy war" was concretized in the crusade as the *just war* of the Latin Church (Russell 1975:124).

Finally, it is simply not possible to grasp fully the constitutive ideal of the “crusade” without tracing its connections to the established religious discourse of “penance” (Riley-Smith 2002b, 2005). As Bull (1993) demonstrates convincingly, lay piety had intensified dramatically throughout Latin Christendom in the aftermath of the Feudal Revolution, ultimately coming to constitute a key element of the constitutive narrative of the nobility. This new script of the “devout Christian,” however, was from the beginning in tension with both the older script of “noble warrior” and the actual quotidian *practices* of the lordly nobility (which, given the Christian ontological narrative, could only be framed as “sinful”). That these tensions generated considerable spiritual anxiety is well attested in the literature, as is the desire it induced in many nobles to atone for their sins by performing acts of penance (Riley-Smith [1977], 2002a:55–64). The Latin Christian penitential system, of course, had long offered noble (and other) sinners mechanisms for earning the remission of their sins: contrition, confession, acts of penance (fasting, pilgrimages to Rome or the Holy Land, the devout performance of meritorious works, etc.), and absolution all being part of an elaborate system for making satisfaction to God for transgressions against His law. It thus offered individual nobles a way of moderating the anxieties resulting from simultaneously enacting two constitutive scripts that were ultimately contradictory. But this penitential system was not without its limitations. Prior to the late-eleventh century, the Church typically required noble penitents to accept punishments (such as forswearing martial activities) that amounted to a denial of key aspects of their core identity as warriors—a requirement that generated powerful tensions and anxieties of its own. In the decades immediately preceding the First Crusade, however, a new form of penance evolved that offered members of the nobility a means of expiating their sins without denying their warrior identity: sanctified violence directed against infidels, apostates, and other enemies of the Church. Beginning with the pontificate of Gregory VII, the Church began to teach actively that “taking part in war of a certain kind could be an act of charity to which merit was attached and to assert that such an action could indeed be penitential” (Riley-Smith 2005:9). With this revolutionary innovation, “the act of fighting was put on the same meritorious plane as prayer, works of mercy, and fasting” (Riley-Smith [1977], 2002a:56).

How were these disparate intellectual and institutional elements brought together to form the radically new institution of the crusade? At the risk of oversimplification, this synthesis can be said to be the result of an extended process of experimentation and *bricolage* initiated by ecclesiastical officials in the eleventh century. The mounting military pressure experienced by Christendom during this period (Riley-Smith 2005:1–2), coupled with the growing sense that the occupation of formerly Christian lands by Muslims was inherently unjust, provided these officials with a powerful incentive to begin looking for ways to mobilize Christendom’s military capacity first to defend the *respublica Christiana* against further incursions and then to liberate those territories that had already been lost to Islam. The result was a series of so-called *précroisades*—instances of penitential warfare that prefigured the crusades proper—which included “wars of the Germans against the Slavs, the combats of the Normans in southern Italy and Sicily, the early campaigns of the Spanish *Reconquista*, and naval raids carried out by Italian sea-powers” (Housley 2006:31). The key catalytic event in the evolution of the crusade proper, however, appears to have been the embassy sent by the Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus to a council of Latin bishops at Piacenza in March 1095 (France 2005:23–63). Through this embassy, the Byzantines, hard-pressed by Turks advancing through Asia Minor toward Constantinople, asked the pope to encourage Western Christians to render military assistance to their Eastern coreligionists to stem the Turkish tide. Pope Urban II, long concerned about the Muslim threat to Christendom’s Eastern frontier (and hoping

to restore the unity of *respublica Christiana*), responded to this appeal by preaching a “war of liberation” (carefully framed to conform to the criteria of just cause and with the reformers’ core narrative of *libertas ecclesiae*) in which both Christians and the Christian Holy Places were to be freed from Muslim domination (Riley-Smith 2005:4-8). As an inducement to take part in this war, Urban offered remission of sins to those who completed their penitential (armed) “pilgrimage” to Jerusalem. The result: a massive military expedition to the east that not only liberated Jerusalem (1099), but established a series of Latin kingdoms in Syria and Palestine that were to persist for almost 200 years. While the success of this expedition was largely a function of fragmentation and internecine conflict within the Islamic world, it was viewed in Christendom as a “miraculous example of divine intervention and proof that the crusade really was what God wanted” (Riley-Smith [1977], 2002a:15). It thus proved to be a critical juncture in the evolution of the institution of the crusade—that is, a formative moment when a historically contingent cobbling together of elements of preexisting institutions for a specific purpose congealed into a new institution that, while evolving in a path-dependent way, would persist essentially unchanged for several centuries.

By the late-eleventh century, then, the institutions of holy war, just war, and penance had converged to constitute a new institution: the crusade. This institution framed the basic cultural understanding or constitutive ideal of what the thirteenth-century jurist Hostiensis (d. 1271) called “Roman War” (*bellum Romanum*)—that is, it constituted the crusade a meaningful category of thought and action within the collective imagination of Medieval Latin Christendom. For the purposes of this study, three elements of this new institution are centrally important. First, the new discourse constituted the crusade as a martial instrument for righting injustices and combating evil in the world. More specifically, it defined the crusades as a form of just war whose *moral purposes* were the liberation of Christians, the redress of legal injuries perpetrated against them, the restoration of heretics to the true faith, and the defense of Christendom and the Church from attack. Second, the crusade was constituted as an instrument of *ecclesiastical* statecraft. While secular powers could be (and typically were) mobilized to carry out any given crusade, authority for launching a *bellum Romanum* was reserved exclusively to the papacy. Finally, the crusades were constituted in the medieval imagination as an act of piety, penance, and Christian love (Riley-Smith 2002b:31–50). Ecclesiastical leaders and would-be crusaders alike had a common understanding of the crusades as both an instrument for building a more just world order, and as a mechanism for the remission of individual sin. To be sure, the institution of the crusade evolved significantly during the centuries following the First Crusade. Throughout the medieval era, however, it retained its basic character as a penitential war-pilgrimage authorized by the pope and directed against the enemies of the Church.

With the crystallization and institutionalization of the crusade in the late-eleventh and early twelfth centuries, two more of the key conditions-of-possibility for the ecclesiastical wars peculiar to the medieval era fell into place. First, the Church was decisively reconstituted in both law and the collective imagination of Latin Christendom as a geopolitical actor with a legitimate right to wage war. Prior to the eleventh century, the Latin Church had in effect been a subordinate partner to the Carolingian empire, lacking both the means and legitimate authority to wage war. From the mid-eleventh century onward, however, knowledgeable agents within and beyond the ecclesiastical hierarchy drew on existing cultural and institutional raw materials in an attempt to transform the Church into a legitimate war-making actor. Through a process of *bricolage* and synthesis, they subsequently created a new institution—embedded in canon law, theology, and culture—that not only specified the nature and conventions of crusading,

but that also decisively transformed the translocal normative and ideational structures that specified which types of unit were to be considered legitimate war-making actors within Latin Christendom. As a result, whereas prior to 1095, “princes” were the only actors authorized to wage public war (as opposed to private feuds), after 1095 “popes” were also universally recognized as enjoying that authority. Second, the institutionalization of the crusade served to reconstitute a significant portion of the armed nobility of Latin Christendom as “soldiers of Christ” willing and able to fight on behalf of the Church. Simply put, between the onset of the *précroisades* and the preaching of the First Crusade, a new identity-interest complex—the “crusader”—emerged within Latin Christendom. This was essentially a penitential war-pilgrim: a warrior who sought remission of sins through sanctified military service to the Church. His primary interest was not worldly enrichment or personal aggrandizement, but salvation; the primary means to this end was not prayer or fasting, but the performance of military service in the just wars of the Church. With the crystallization of this new identity-interest complex, a significant portion of the martial resources of Latin Christendom was placed at the disposal of the Church.

The Latin Church as a Distinctive War-Making Unit

As a result of all these developments, in the eleventh century the Latin Church emerged as a powerful—and distinctive—locus of control of military power within the medieval world order. At the most basic level, of course, the Church was a feudal landholder and was thus able to generate armed force in the same way as other feudal lordships and feudo-vassalic networks: either by summoning vassals to provide obligatory military service, or by accepting payment in lieu of service and hiring paid troops. Ecclesiastical landlords, however, tended to raise fighting forces in this manner only when obliged to do so by their temporal feudal overlords—not to fight on behalf of the Church. But during this era, the Latin Church was also increasingly able to generate military power for its own purposes. This it did in ways that reflected its unique constitutive social relations, institutional capacities and place in the collective imagination of the lay and clerical populations. Specifically, unlike temporal authorities, the post-Gregorian Church was able to mobilize secular nobles through its monopoly power within the spiritual domain of Latin Christendom. At a very general level, of course, this monopoly power was manifest as the “moral authority” of the Church to define “just causes” for war, to specify “enemies of the Church,” and to command the secular authorities to employ their material power resources in support of ecclesiastical interests (Hall 1997: 604–607; Alkopher 2005: 725–726). As Alkopher (2005:726) has pointed out, the Church’s ability to mobilize secular force was also a function of its ability to define the “common discourse, intersubjective meanings, and shared definitions of reality, which made [the crusades] imaginable,” and which made potential crusaders at least potentially responsive to the summons. More concretely, however, the Church’s ability to mobilize secular authorities depended on two socio-political mechanisms. The first involved the Church’s authority to punish secular authorities who failed either to answer the Church’s call to arms or to fulfill their crusader vows. In this respect, punishment typically included excommunication and the interdict. Perhaps more importantly, the Church was able to mobilize the secular powers in support of its interests through its monopoly power to remit sins in return for military service. As argued earlier, in the years following the Feudal Revolution, lay piety had intensified dramatically throughout Latin Christendom, ultimately coming to constitute a key element of the constitutive narrative of the nobility (Bull 1993). Obviously, however, the new script of “devout Christian” (with its entailed norms of humility, asceticism, Christian love, and public displays of piety) could

only ever coexist uneasily with the older script of “noble warrior” (with its associated norms of ambition and honor and its defining practices of violence and conspicuous consumption). As a result, the members of the nobility became “painfully aware of their own sinfulness and its terrible consequences, and deeply anxious to escape from them” (France 1999:205; Housley 2006:34). Against this backdrop, the Church was able to summon kings, princes, lords, and their knightly retinues to fight on behalf of its temporal and spiritual interests by providing a means of resolving this tension—that is, by offering members of the nobility a means to atone for their sins while actually enacting the script of “warrior” (if in support of carefully delimited religio-political objectives).

Finally, no picture of the distinctive nature of the Church as a locus of control of military force would be complete without a discussion of the military religious orders (Forey 1992; Demurger 2002; Luttrell and Pressouyre 2002). These were monastic institutions dominated by a class of lay brothers (not priests, who were barred by canon law from bearing arms and fighting) who were warriors dedicated to the defense of Christendom. In most respects, they differed little from the other monastic institutions that had become such a commonplace within the Church: they were organized into similar monastic communities, took similar vows, followed similar rules of life, performed the same holy office, were similarly exempt from the jurisdiction of secular powers and the episcopate, etc. Moreover, as with nonmilitary monastic orders, some (such as the Order of Santiago) were decidedly local/regional in scope and scale, while others (such as the Templars and the Hospitallers) were truly centralized, translocal Orders of the Church. Where they *did* differ was with respect to their mission/vocation and the way in which they served the Church. Simply put, the primary calling of the members of the military orders was twofold: to purify *themselves* through the pursuit of the monastic ideal and to purify the *world* by fighting the enemies of the *respublica Christiana*. As Contamine (1984:75) puts it, the members of these orders were both knights and monks, fighting a “double combat of flesh and spirit.” Not only were they dedicated to defeating the “enemies of the cross of Christ” and defending the rights of Christians within and beyond the political reach of the Christian commonwealth; they also believed that such a vocation was a devotional act of Christian love equivalent to the care of the poor and sick (Riley-Smith 2005:80). For members of these orders, warfare was not a cultural imperative (as it was for knights), nor a temporary act of devotion (as it was for crusaders); rather, “it was a devotional way of life” (Riley-Smith 2005:80). Typically well supported by wealthy patrons, highly disciplined, and enjoying a steady stream of recruits, these orders provided the Church with a reliable and effective source of military power that it could and did use to advance its interests within and beyond Latin Christendom. Needless to say, this mechanism for generating armed force was unique to the Church—nothing like the military religious orders existed within the secular realm.

To summarize, the post-Gregorian Church became a significant and distinctive locus of control of organized violence in Medieval Latin Christendom. To be sure, its mechanisms for generating military forces were imperfect and somewhat clumsy; while the Church did come to develop its own directly controlled military forces (the military religious orders), for the most part it was forced to mobilize the resources of the armed laity to fight on its behalf. These forces were not subject to strict hierarchical control and the ability of the papacy to direct these forces was always somewhat attenuated (Riley-Smith [1977], 2002a:50–52). However, in an era when “states” typically did not exercise either a clear monopoly over or strict control of the legitimate use of force, this was also true of the kingdoms and lesser principalities that comprised the Medieval Latin geopolitical system. The difference between these states and the Church in this connection, I would argue, was one of degree rather than kind.

Concluding Remarks

As a geopolitical phenomenon, the crusades were artifacts of neither the structural logic of anarchy nor the dynamics of the mode of production/exploitation; nor, ultimately, were they made possible by the broad *mentalités* of Medieval Latin Christendom (at least not in a direct or unmediated fashion). Rather, the crusades were made possible as a result of three key conditions that emerged in the eleventh century and persisted throughout the later medieval era. The first of these was the (re)constitution of the fundamental identity of the Latin Church as a divinely inspired agent of spiritual renewal within the Christian commonwealth. The crystallization of this new identity entailed the emergence of new core interests that placed the Church in a structurally antagonistic relationship with a range of social forces within and beyond Christendom. These included the Empire, heretics, various Muslim polities, and pagans who resisted the Church's evangelizing efforts. The second was the construction of a new social institution—the “crusade”—that reconstituted both the Church as a legitimate war-making unit and the armed nobility as *milites Christi* willing and able to fight on behalf of the Church and its interests. The third was the development of concrete institutional mechanisms for generating military force to advance and defend the Church's interests. With the emergence of these mechanisms, the structural antagonisms generated by the Church's new corporate identity were decisively converted into always-immanent violent conflict between the Church and its adversaries. Once these conditions-of-possibility had crystallized in the late-eleventh century, they made possible not just the First Crusade to Jerusalem, but all the subsequent crusades to the East, as well as those within the Iberian peninsula, along the Baltic coast, and against the enemies of the Church within Latin Christendom.⁹ Indeed, so crucial were these three developments that, counter-factually, it is hard to imagine anything like the crusades occurring in their absence.

In addition to providing a more complete and historiographically well-grounded account of the crusades (and especially the role and motives of the Latin Church) than is currently available in the IR literature, this study seeks to make three broad contributions to discipline. First, against realist claims that geopolitical conflict and war are artifacts of the transhistorical logic of conflict under anarchy, this article seeks to highlight the historical specificity of forms of organized political violence. As this study clearly demonstrates, the crusades were not simply products of the timeless structural imperatives of anarchy. Rather, they were artifacts of a historically specific set of social and political developments that created a new form of war-making unit—with socially constructed interests and values that not only differed from the pre-Gregorian Church, but also from other units of authority—existing in a structurally antagonistic relationship with a range of other polities and social forces. Prior to the crystallization of these conditions, the crusades were an impossibility; once those conditions no longer obtained, crusading passed from the historical scene. In effect, the crusades were the “New Wars” of the medieval era—and, as with the “New Wars” of today, the structural logic of anarchy in fact tells us almost nothing about the causes, character, or correlates of this type of violent conflict.

Second, this study problematizes the historical materialist argument that social property relations determine the identities of the constituent units of any geopolitical order (and that these in turn determine the nature of that order). A close examination of the crusades—grounded in state-of-the-art historiography—strongly suggests that it is not sufficient to reduce a heteronomous “international system” like Latin Christendom to a single unit-type and then explain

⁹ For a more complete account, see Latham (forthcoming).

system dynamics in terms of the constitutive logic of this unit-type (either social property relations or the self-regarding pursuit of power). Rather, the medieval geopolitical order must be understood as comprising multiple types of war-making units, each with a distinctive constitutive logic (and entailed interests and motives). This is the very meaning of “heteronomy.” When attempting to grasp the logic of any given world order, this suggests the need to map both the constellation of war-making units comprising that order, as well as the socially constructed interests of the dominant social forces within each of these units. Social property relations may well be part of the equation—indeed, understanding the logic of what John France (1999:1-15) calls medieval “proprietary war” requires attention to precisely these relations—but it simply does not constitute a sort of master variable capable of explaining the “constitution, operation, and transformation of geopolitical orders” (Teschke 2003:7).

Finally, this study suggests the need to supplement constructivist accounts that seek to explain violent political conflicts in terms of the broad *mentalités* with focused analyses of the mechanisms through which these *mentalités* are translated into concrete practices. In this study, I have highlighted two such mechanisms: “identity-interest complex” and “social institution”. The former has been fairly well attended in the constructivist literature (even if labeled somewhat differently), but the latter has not received the attention this study suggests that it merits. The idea that war constitutes an institution, of course, has been around at least since Hedley Bull (1977) first bruited it. Only recently, however, have scholars such as Jones (2006), Sharma, unpub. data, Davey, unpub. data, and Nexon (2009) begun to develop Bull’s insight more fully. As this study suggests, conceptualizing war as an institution (or constellation of institutions) has much to tell us about the conditions-of-possibility for the ecclesiastical wars of Medieval Latin Christendom. It also suggests that drawing on the insights of various theoretical approaches to the study of institutions—historical institutionalism, the English School, sociological institutionalism, constructivism—might yield significant insights into the some of the basic conditions-of-possibility for organized violence in other geopolitical orders as well.

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