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Columbus, the Crusades and Race

Y. G-M. Lulat

As one goes through the absolutely fascinating volume six, *A Synoptic Edition of the Log of Columbus's First Voyage* (edited by Francesca Lardicci and published in 1999), of the remarkable 'Repertorium Columbianum,' among the several themes that jump out at the reader (the shamefully relentless obsession with the quest for gold, for example; the constant amazement at the absence of much body clothing on the Arawaks is another), is one that is of much relevance here: the almost nonchalant assumption of ownership in the spirit of 'I found it first, so it is mine!' It appeared to have mattered little to Columbus and his men that the 'ownership' they were establishing was over other human beings and their rightful domain (and who had done or willed no harm to Europeans at any point prior to this encounter). In other words, they were with great impunity violating that 'sacred' law, *the natural law of prior claim*. [1] On the contrary, there are constant references to how peaceful the Arawaks were. The project of ownership commences almost as soon as Columbus sets sail and the process of actualizing it with the moment he and his men stumbled upon the Arawaks of the Bahama Islands in 1492 and set foot on dry land with the re-naming of the Islands that they visited (as if their residents didn't have their own names for their islands), and then proceeds to the promulgation of Spanish dominion over the islands under Spanish law in a language that the inhabitants did not understand, literally and figuratively; the capture and transportation to Spain of some of the inhabitants and so on. In other words: the Columbus project was also a racist project in that the peoples he encountered were considered but just one more 'exotica' in the Edenesque landscape of the mysterious and fascinating flora and fauna; ultimately to be possessed and exploited for the purposes of self-aggrandizement. Now, the question that emerges here is this: Where did such unabashed European arrogance regarding other peoples and their territories come from? To the Europeans like Columbus, the Arawaks were not human beings, they were property; but not only that, what is of critical importance to observe here, is that they had been dehumanized long before the actual encounter was forced on them. How? When the Europeans left Europe on their journeys of exploitation in the fifteenth century (and thereafter) they were carrying with them not only weapons of mass destruction for the time period (to use a term currently in vogue)--guns, cannons and diseases—but also an ideological world view that was thoroughly imbued with a virulent form of ethnocentrism. One that saw other human beings that they came across as a legitimate target for murder, enslavement and dispossession of their lands. Recall too, that unlike today, for Western Europeans of the 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, religion was not just a very, but an extremely, important part of their daily lives. How then did this highly malevolent European worldview originate? One response would be to say that it was simply capitalist greed! However, that would be too simplistic an answer, even though that was the basic motive force behind that fateful voyage—akin in import, by the way, without exaggerating in the least bit, to the very creation of the planet itself! To Columbus and his backers, his project was not an evil or an unholy undertaking (religiously or otherwise); on the contrary, it was also a 'Christian' project. After all, like other people of his day, Christian piety was an integral part of his person. It is the contention here that it was born out of the development of a Western European 'ethnocentrification' of Christianity (or more simply put, 'Westernization' of Christianity); that is a Christianity that no matter its Eastern provenance, was now thoroughly laced with Western European ethnocentrism. [2] In essence, what this meant is that at most basic experiential level for most ordinary Western European Christians, Christ had been plucked out of the Middle East, shorn of his Semitic ethnic heritage and reincarnated as a European-born savior—as is so well attested by Christian iconography to this day.

Now, the Westernization of Christianity itself, however, in turn, rested on three principal factors: the development of the 'East-West Schism' (also referred to as the *Schism of 1054*), the mythologization of the 'Curse of Ham,' and the launching of the Crusades against the Muslims. The second factor, the Biblical Curse of Ham, where the descendents of the three sons of Noah, (Japhet, Shem and Ham) were, through mythological trickery, imbued with a spiritually and materially corrupting racial hierarchy, has already been described at some length in Chapter One—so it need not detain us here further. As for the first factor, it is not necessary to go into the whyfors and wherefores of the Schism other than to note that it entailed political rivalry between the two major centers of Christianity: Rome and Constantinople. The rivalry itself was an outcome of an evolving 'papal monarchy' (see below) in Western Europe seeking to define the realm of its domain, Christendom, and which found a doctrinal basis for it—leading eventually to the separation of the two geographic wings of the Church and mutual excommunications of their pontiffs in 1054—namely, whether the Holy Ghost issued just from the Father (Byzantine belief) or from both the Father and the Son (Roman Catholic belief). It may be noted in parenthesis that in historical terms, the year 1054 should be considered as nominal rather than strictly factual; that is, its a historiographical device of convenience; for, phenomenon of this kind tend to be part of a long term process that cannot be pinned down to a single date. One is not surprised therefore, when Runciman (1955) convincingly shows that, in terms of permanence, the real cause of the East-West Schism were the Crusades because they introduced a powerful political factor (control of the symbolically important Holy Land) into the rivalry that could not be as easily dealt with as would have been possible with respect to mere doctrinal difference over the nature

of the Holy Ghost. As he pithily puts it: “The Crusaders brought not peace but a sword; and the sword was to sever Christendom.” (p. 101)

What is of importance here is the consequence of this rift for others over the long term: it rendered ‘true’ Christianity in the eyes of Westerners as essentially the Christianity as promulgated by the Western Church for they came to view the Eastern Orthodox Church, in time, as a church of heretics. That the Eastern Christians were also ethnically and linguistically different (Greeks, Syrians, etc.) was not coincidental in the evolution and cementing of this perception. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that the Eastern Christians that the Crusaders encountered were sometimes victimized by them just as much as the Muslims were. Courbage and Fargues (1997:47), point out that it was not unusual for the Crusaders to slaughter the Eastern Christians as well because they appeared to them to look like Muslims in terms of their dress and appearance (and plus, of course, they spoke a different language). They further note that for both political and economic reasons the Eastern Christians were quickly reduced to the same juridical inferior status as that of the remaining Muslims and Jews, and they suffered “the supreme humiliation,” of having the Church of the Holy Sepulchre wrested from their stewardship; the Latin Christians would now be in charge of the church. In fact, Daniel (1989a:6), goes further by noting that: “As soon as the ‘pilgrims’ left the Latin world, and long before they met a [Muslim], they came into conflict with cultures, different from their own, and an inflexible ‘Latin’ cultural intolerance remained with most of them throughout the crusading period.” He continues: “From the beginning, it was implicit in Urban’s decision to preach the crusade at all, in his choice of Clermont, and in the way he was understood in the west, that the crusade in the east should be an expansion of western European society.” In fact, as the Crusading project matured, the culturally rooted mutual antagonism between the Westerners and the Easterners, where each thought that the other was guilty of un-Christian and perfidious behavior, reached such heights that some ecclesiastical leaders in the West even talked about launching a holy war against the Byzantines themselves! (especially after the failure of the Second Crusade). Runciman (1955:128) describes the situation well: “It began to shock the West that the precious relics kept at Constantinople should be in the hands of such un-Christian owners. It was after the Second Crusade that the ordinary Westerner began to regard the East Christian as being something less than a fellow Christian.”

However, it wasn’t simply the matter of the disastrous failure of the second Crusade (the blame for which, quite unfairly, was laid by the Franks at the door of the Byzantines), but the problem went even much deeper, as just noted above; Runciman himself alludes to it: “They had set out to rescue Eastern Christendom, but when they came to the land of the East Christians they found it strange and unwelcoming. The language was incomprehensible, the great cities unfamiliar and alarming. The Churches looked different; the priests with their black beards and buns and black robes were quite unlike any Christian priests they had seen before....[and so on]” (p. 80) The Byzantines for their part saw the Franks, perhaps justifiably, as nothing less than an uncultured, thieving, insolent and blood thirsty rabble that had arrogated to itself the Crusading project. Any notion of even nominally submitting to the authority of the papacy was unthinkable. “How could they possibly allow their great and holy Church to submit itself to the domination of a bishop belonging to such a people.” (p. 128) Courbage and Fargues (1997:53) go so far as to suggest that the degree of mutual animosity between the Westerners and the Easterners was such that the Eastern Christians (and Jews too, of course) may have collaborated with the Muslims, when under Saladin, they retook Jerusalem in 1187. In the end, the Latin Christians could not be held back; under papal approval (Pope Innocent III, to be recanted by him later), and instigated by the greed of the Venetians, the Fourth Crusader army entered Constantinople, on April 13, 1204, to unleash a their three-day orgy of bloodshed, looting and destruction of the Byzantine capital. [3] This event stands out as among the clearest examples of the depth of intolerance exhibited by ignorant Westerners toward other ethnicities, even those who were fellow Christians!

Against the backdrop of such history, is it any wonder then that in centuries to come, Westerners would regard Christians of other races (blacks, Latinos, native Americans, etc.) as not worthy of full equality—racially or spiritually—even though the missionary effort to seek their conversion was actively pursued. How else can one explain the collusion of the European clergy with the racial segregation of the peoples they converted, including their enslavement and exploitation. So blinded were the Westerners by their ethnocentrism that they saw no contradiction in this regard—and not withstanding the fact that Christ himself was not a Western European, but an Easterner, a Semite of Palestinian Jewish descent. (One may legitimately conjecture here that had the Crusaders come across Christ himself, they would have probably killed him too in their disbelief at his appearance.) Like the second factor, the third factor, too, rested on yet another Western perversion of Biblical teachings: ‘thou shalt not kill,’ was now converted into ‘thou shalt kill so you may attain the Kingdom of Heaven.’ Thusly were the struggles of the emerging ‘papal monarchy’ (this apt term is borrowed from Mastnak, 2002:130, implying “a universal Christian society under the supreme rule of the papacy”) with the Muslims on one hand, and, this is important to emphasize, *with the temporal powers within Western Europe itself on the other*, over the definition of the internal (political) and external (geographic) boundaries of Christendom, now acquire a violent expression: the launching of the Crusades. [4]

Now, before proceeding further, one is forced to preface what follows with this observation: that centuries of derisory glance-backs at the medieval period by European historians in general (hence once upon a time the label ‘the Dark Ages’) have left their mark: the lack of full appreciation among them of the magnitude of the impact of the Crusades on the development of Western European institutions and psyche, even long after the last Crusader had put down his sword. Yet, as Brundage (1997:251), for example, has pointed out, without the Crusades Europe would not have evolved in the manner it did; for, “the incorporation of processes, systems and ideas that originated in medieval attempts to reconquer the Holy Land,” he explains, “remained part of European life for centuries after crusading had ceased.” Consequently, in establishing the importance of the Crusades for the development of Western European thinking regarding other peoples down the centuries, coming all the way to the present, one must be forewarned against the temptation to

dismiss it from the historical calculus. [5]

To move on: By the time Pope Urban II had launched the first Crusade with his sermon on Thursday, November 27th, 1095, the papacy had over the course of nearly three centuries following the arrival of the Muslims in Europe in the 8th century, slowly developed the notion that the entire planet was potentially a Christian realm to be headed by a papal monarchy and that to bring this into fruition was the objective of a Christian ‘just war’ to be waged against any one who stood in the way of this project, and in which violence, plunder, enslavement, etc. was now deemed as morally permissible for Christians. The first step in the creation of this global Christian realm, which notice was a religious, political, and economic project intertwined together, was the eradication of Islam from Europe and the Middle East, and later from the Afro-Asian land mass as well, and the second was to simultaneously work toward ensuring the subservience of the European princes and monarchies to papal authority—the Crusades had the potential to achieve both. However, the latter objective was part of a dyadic goal: the Crusading project would not only be a papal controlled mechanism for temporal authorities to acquire legitimacy (“you are either with us or you are against us,” to borrow the current phrase in vogue—and notice: involving essentially the same protagonists, Westerners and Muslims, even after almost a thousand years!), but it would also help to achieve at one and the same time peace among the warring factions within Europe itself, without which the authority of the papal monarchy would be greatly undermined. (Under the circumstances, it is not surprising then, as Mastnak (2002) points out, that the ‘liberation’ of the Holy Land in the later stages of the Crusades became of secondary importance to the broader goal of expanding ad infinitum the borders of Christendom.)

Now to effect such a grandiose project there was the very small problem of how to convince a superstitious, highly parochial, illiterate and ignorant peasantry (and the nobility was not too far behind either in these terms) to abandon their fields and villages and journey hundreds of miles to a foreign land—in an age where there were no trains, planes, cars or bicycles, to do battle with the infidel; and what is more at one’s own expense! As it turned out, in this regard, the papacy need not have been too overly concerned; the response from the European populace went beyond its wildest dreams. The question is why? [6] In a time when religion was of such great importance to people’s daily lives, where piety was universal, that is it was as much the preserve of the laity as of the clergy, four factors appear to have been highly significant in underwriting the magnitude of this positive response: one, was the promise of religious deliverance through penance, martyrdom and the forgiveness of one’s sins (see Maier, 2000; Riley-Smith, 1997); two, was the promise of adventure, booty, etc.; three, was the notion that the Crusades were an extension of the effort to bring universal peace to Christendom—itsself a project (*pax Dei* and *treuga Dei*, that is, the ‘Peace of God’ and the ‘Truce of God’) undertaken by the papacy as a device to keep an increasingly upsurgent secular authority at bay (Mastnak, 2002); and four, was the propaganda driven systematic vilification of Islam and the demonization of the Muslims (without which of course the other three factors become irrelevant). It is the fourth factor that is of interest here. Initially, Mastnak suggests, the general view of Muslims held by Christians, at least until the 11th century, was that they were one among a number of other Christian enemies (Jews, Magyars, Norsemen, Slavs, etc.); with the launching of the Crusades however, their perceptions changed dramatically: the Muslims were now the chosen enemy. How was this change in attitudes effected? He explains:

“In practical life, ignorance is often a powerful argument. The fact that Latin Christians knew nothing (or next to nothing) about Islam did not prevent them from making Muslims the enemy of Christianity and Christendom.... Urban II raised to new heights the hostility toward the Muslims that had hitherto been dormant in the Latin West. Without the elaboration of this enemy image, the new holy war, the crusade, was unimaginable. Whereas from the Carolingian times onward, holy wars had been fought against infidels in general, the crusade was at its inception the war of Christendom against the Muslims, ‘animated by a generalized hatred of Islam.’ (p. 115)”

It is instructive to note that even the fact that for centuries Christian pilgrims had been allowed to visit the Muslim held Jerusalem (except for a brief atypical period under al-Hakim) and to travel through Muslim lands unmolested, or the fact of the ubiquitous Levantine trade involving Christian and Muslim (and Jewish) merchants, appeared to have had no mitigating effect on the anti-Muslim hysteria that would now be whipped up by the papacy. [7] The truth is that at the time when the First Crusade was launched, Mastnak (2002:118) points out, the Muslims were at peace with Western Europe, and that the Eastern Christians who lived among them were, not withstanding Urban II’s propaganda, going about their business as they had always done under Muslim rule. “They continued to live as a subject minority population, protected by Islamic law, paying taxes, and having a measure of freedom of worship.” (p. 118-119—see also Courbages and Fargues, 1997.) (After all, recall that the acceptance of the diversity of faiths, ethnicities and cultures was built into the genesis of the Islamic civilization.) Moreover, given that the Crusades were a response to primarily internal Western European developments and not to anything that the Muslims were doing, to the Christian patriots it would have mattered little had they known that the Muslims on their side regarded them relatively benignly as the ‘People of the Book’—that is as adherents of a religion that was regarded as legitimate, so much so that even in the hereafter, the ‘Muslim’ heaven was not barred to them. Neither would have their Christian patriotic fervor weakened in the least had they known that Muslims revered Christ as among a long line of prophets (Abraham, Moses, etc.--with Prophet Muhammed being the last); or that the God of the Christians (and the Jews) was the same God that the Muslims worshipped; or that Jerusalem was sacrosanct to the Muslims (and to the Jews) too, or that the Muslims, even when the Crusades were in full swing, did not to see the invading hostile Christians as part of a global war of Islam vs. Christianity (Hillenbrand, 1999)—much to their own detriment as they would find out centuries later (for, as Daniel, 1989a:38, points out “...there is a clear continuous line from the crusades to the aggressive imperialism of the western European powers in the Levant and North Africa in the nineteenth century”); and so on. Had they known all this it would not have mattered: for, the view that was now adopted in Western Europe under papal propaganda was not only that Islam should be eradicated from the face of the earth, but that its believers were beyond redemption; so much so that even an attempt at their conversion was considered futile. Daniel

(1989b:77) in his exegesis on the character and mechanics of the ecclesiastical engineered and managed Crusade propaganda describes admirably the context from which such thinking arose: “To establish that a whole religion, society, lex, was in every respect the reverse or denial of European society was immensely helpful in creating a mental as well as a physical frontier. It was the best war propaganda in that it made the enemy the proper recipients of treatment unworthy of humanity in ordinary conditions.” He continues: “The evil alleged of Islam made the rules of the crusade, or of the ‘just war,’ emotionally acceptable. All war is more effective if it is fought with hatred and if the humanity of the enemy is minimized.” Not surprisingly, throughout the Crusading project, but most especially in the early phases, missionary work among the Muslims was rarely part of the papal calculus.^[8] On the contrary, there arose says Mastnak (2002:126), a new kind of love: a ‘Christian love’ that was exclusive to Western European Christians and therefore one that did not include those who were of other faiths. Consequently, “[t]he new exclusivity of Christian love—love that inspired the use of violence—opened the gate for the crusader’s shocking brutality toward the Muslims.” (p. 126) But it went even beyond this; as Mastnak explains:

“A disciplinary force within the Christian family, love turned into the annihilation of those outside the family. The power of that love was expressed in the fullness of hatred.... The destruction of paganism, the eradication of infidel peoples, became logical and necessary. Ideally, Christian holy war was genocidal, the ultimate victory in that war was genocide, and the peace achieved was the peace of the cemetery: perpetual peace (pax perpetua)—‘for the dead do not fight any longer.’ Integration of the infidel into Christian society, which perceived itself as a manifestation of the absolute, was inconceivable. ‘In Christendom, there is no place for non-Christians.’” (pp. 126-127)

Against this religious ideological background, is it any surprise at all that when, both, ordinary and elite Europeans first made contact with other peoples outside Western Europe on a global scale from the 15th century onwards, it occurred in the context of European greed—underwritten by a hate and distrust developed over the centuries of peoples of other faiths and ethnicities.^[9] It is from this perspective that one must view the behavior of the first Europeans who set out across the oceans in search of riches (and notice the coincidence of timing: it occurred on the heels of the Crusades, of which the last was when the province of Granada in Spain, the remaining Muslim stronghold, was overrun by the Spanish Christians.) In making this point, it is not to detract in any way from the fact that the European sea borne ventures were primarily economic projects, but that the ecclesiastical imprimatur on these projects also rendered them religious exercises in which all Western Christians were enjoined to participate. The path to the Kingdom of Heaven, therefore, also lay through the plunder and murder of others in far off lands. As Mastnak (2002:346) points out: “As an ideal and as a movement, the Crusades had a deep, crucial influence on the formation of Western civilization, shaping culture, ideas, and institutions.” Consequently, is it any surprise that when the first conquistadors arrived in the Americas (at whose hands, in an unimaginable, relentless orgy of bloodbath, entire civilizations and peoples would disappear within the short period of a lifetime or two) they did so accompanied by crusader iconography, as Brundage (1997:260) observes. “Thus both the intellectual and institutional foundations of European expansion in the sixteenth century,” he further continues, “rested squarely on the medieval crusades, which provided their rationale and much of their structure.” Imperialism, regardless of the forms it took, was not just an economic phenomenon, it was also an ideological phenomenon in which a Westernized Christianity played a prominent role. Yet, sadly, this is not all: the Westernization of Christianity laid the groundwork for the ecclesiastical acceptance of racism, slavery and exploitation, even when the victims were Christians, so long as the Christians were of a different ethnicity. This was most graphically demonstrated when Westernized Christianity was introduced in European colonies in Africa, in the Americas and in Australasia. This Christianity proved no barrier to the mass enslavement of Africans and Native Americans—their eventual conversion to Christianity notwithstanding; and a Western European God accepted, apparently without so much as a dissenting murmur, even racially segregated worship.

NOTES

^[1] The ‘natural law of prior claim’ (and ‘natural law’ should be understood here in the Aristotelian sense) can be defined, thusly: those who are the first (original) residents of a territory, possess an inalienable right to that territory regardless of the claims of all others who come afterward. (It is a law that finds its echo in the modern concept of ‘citizenship by birth.’) That is the reason why for, instance, no one would legitimately question the right of the right of Africans to live in Africa, or the Chinese to live in China, or East Indians in India, Europeans in Europe, etc. Moreover, it is a law that can only be contravened on the basis of armed power and violence. The profound and sobering implications of this law can be deduced from the following thought experiment: what if, tomorrow, Native Americans were to acquire the power sufficient to propel them to the headship (in all senses of the word, political, military, etc.) of the Americas? How would citizenship of the present descendants of all those who have migrated into the Americas over the centuries, literally at the point of the gun, be now defined? A taste of the answer—however repugnant it may be to all those who believe in the desirability of a multicultural democracy in that country, and anywhere else for that matter—is to be found today in the ongoing events in Zimbabwe today where the moral claims to citizenship by its white residents have been proven to have rested all along on armed political power that slipped out of their hands with independence in the 1980s. In other words, regardless of how one wishes to prevaricate on this matter: citizenship in lands that were colonized by Europeans, where the original inhabitants are still present, ultimately resides in monopoly over power, and not moral claims.

^[2] Among the hallmarks of this new *Westernized* Christianity with its racialized ‘us vs them’ approach was, of course, a religious

intolerance of frightening proportions and a legacy that would include events ranging from the bloody massacre of the inhabitants of Jerusalem by the Crusaders to the Spanish Inquisition, and from the ‘pogroms’ against the Jews (beginning with the massacres in Latin Christendom with the commencement of the First Crusade and culminating in the mind-numbing horrors of the Hitlerite Holocaust). to what many Muslims perceive as the current ‘crusade’ against Islam in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, the Philippines, etc. (as most in the Muslim world, going by news reports, surely view it) in Bosnia about a decade ago, and under the banner of the U.S. led fight against ‘Islamic terrorism.’ (See also Mastnak, 2002:347, on this point.)

[3] It may be noted here that the sacking of Constantinople inaugurated a period of Latin rule (1204 to 1261) that all modern historians agree was one of absolute disaster for that city—marked among other things by the barbarous looting of the city’s vast art treasures of incalculable value; even the sacred Christian relics were not to be spared (the magnitude of the despoliation of the Christian churches could only have been matched by the barbarians of an earlier period, the Vikings.)

[4] That the Crusades were aimed at a number of different perceived enemies of Christendom, and not just Muslims alone, is indicated by the fact that by the time one arrives at the end of the 13th century, crusades had been undertaken against “the Mongols, non-Christians peoples in the Baltic, heretics in Languedoc, Germany, Italy and the Balkans, Orthodox Christians in Greece and the Hohenstaufen rulers and their supporters in Italy and Germany.” (Maier, 2000:3) However, it is would be true to say that war against the Muslims would remain the principal task of much of the Crusader project.

[5] The importance of the Crusades in coloring perceptions even today, after more than five centuries later, in the west and the east can not be underestimated. Many among both Christians and Muslims perceive the U.S. led fight against ‘Islamic terrorism,’ for instance, as the modern replay of the Crusades. In the Islamic world especially, the conflagrations in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, the Philippines, in Bosnia about a decade ago, etc. are openly described as a global conflict between Christians and Muslims reminiscent of the Crusades. Consider, for example, the remarks of the Prime Minister of Malaysia in his address to the leaders of Islamic countries gathered for the tenth session of the Islamic Summit conference in Putrajaya, Malaysia, on October 16, 2003: “...our detractors and enemies do not care whether we are true Muslims or not. To them we are all Muslims, followers of a religion and a Prophet whom they declare promotes terrorism, and we are all their sworn enemies....Today we, the whole Muslim *ummah* [global Muslim community] are treated with contempt and dishonor. Our religion is denigrated. Our holy places desecrated. Our countries are occupied. Our people starved and killed....” He then goes on to invoke the memory of Muslim victories over the Crusaders, as a counter rallying point: “Remember Salah El Din [Saladin] and the way he fought against the so called Crusaders, King Richard of England in particular.” On the other side, consider the staunch defense of a high-ranking U.S. military official by right-wing Christian zealots in the U.S. when his remarks during a talk to a Christian prayer group, in June of 2003, sparked some public controversy because they appeared to suggest that the U.S. was engaged in a holy war against idol worshippers, the Islamic radicals. (The reference to idol worship by Muslims, it may be noted, is a very old Christian canard that was popular even in the time of the Crusades, and of course betrays a depth of ignorance of Islam—an uncompromisingly monotheistic religion—that is virtually bottomless. See also Mastnak, 2002:347, on this issue of the current relevance of the Crusades.)

[6] Daniel (1989b:40) posits the same question in an interesting way: “The Gibbonian—and, indeed medieval—disillusion with the crusader’s greed for land and booty has created a picture of them as rogues cynically exploiting religious sentiment to their profit. For us the interesting question is the reverse. How did the rogues come to be imbued with either the appearance or the reality of religious motivation?”

[7] Even some of the leading lights of Latin Europe would play their part in the anti-Islamic propaganda over the course of the Crusading project, in one form or another; they would include Peter the Vulnerable, St. Francis of Assisi, Roger Bacon, St. Thomas Aquinas, Ramon Lull, Dante Alighieri, and so on (see Mastnak, 2002 for more on this issue).

[8] Kedar, 1984, suggests that the general absence of mission as an objective of the Crusades, especially in the early years of the project, is to be explained by the perception that the Muslims were implacably intolerant of missionary work; and therefore only the Christian sword could pave the way for it. While this perception was probably quite true, in reading Kedar one is unable to find sufficient evidence to disprove the fact that the primary goal of the Crusading project was crusade and not mission for reasons internal to the rise of the papal monarchy. In other words, what one finds in Kedar is evidence that there were mission exceptions to the rule of crusade (but then exceptions do not disprove the rule, they confirm it). The prime motive behind the Crusading project was never proselytism given its essential underlying political objectives. Consequently, given the need to dehumanize the Muslims, by demonizing them, as a means of justifying the Crusading project and at the same time as a device to recruit the European peasantry and nobility to execute it, the objective of acquiring Christian converts among the Muslims would have hardly entered into the calculations of the papacy—regardless of whether it was feasible or not. How else can one explain, for example, the great rejoicing by the Crusaders at their handiwork when they finally breached the walls of Jerusalem on Friday, July 15th, 1099: the almost total and merciless slaughter of thousands upon thousands of its inhabitants, including children. (See France, 1997, for a chilling account of the capture of Jerusalem.) Consider this ‘thought experiment:’ supposing that the Muslims had permitted missionary work; would the Crusading project then have become irrelevant to the papal objective of erecting a papal monarchy?

[9] For a dissenting, albeit unconvincing, view on some of the points raised here regarding the Crusades, see the concluding chapter of Richard (1999) whose bias in favor of the Crusader project is betrayed by lines like: “...a liturgical feast was instituted in the breviary of the Holy Sepulcher to commemorate the capture of Jerusalem. *And the whole historical literature born of the crusade, like the epic, ends with this wonderful event.*” (p. 67—emphasis added.)

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