

The agnostic leaves these speculations, gladly or sadly, as unanswerable, believing only, perhaps, that we can do good to all men; a sort of 'justification by works' that I find impressive if simple-minded. In serious, deep discussion the priest has to know what he is dealing with. The most convincing thing is frank, good-humoured devotion to the faith and to the Church that gives it.

And so your priest will visit, frank, good-humoured, devoted, facing embarrassment, argument, opposition as well as sometimes satisfaction and delight. If he wonders at times just why and just what he is doing, I hope it may help him to remember my little girl. She spoke a truth—did she know?—but a truth that is sadly remote, painfully dim, that strikes us as uncertain and eerie, disturbing, fantastic. It may have been before her, until her mother laughed, as she looked with clear, round eyes at the abashed young priest with his love and his hope he might help, and she saw—and where else, and why not—that, right enough, here's God.

An Ambiguous Saint

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The tenth century was a time of change in the common attitude of Christians towards war; a change in fact so great as to be best understood as a swing from one extreme to another, and we should therefore have in mind from the outset two diametrically opposed points of view.

On the one hand, there is the uncompromising rejection of war and of military service by the early Christians. In the first two centuries after Christ, there was virtually no possibility of Christian participation in worldly conflicts between states. The *militia Christi*, the soldiers of Christ, were always contrasted with the *militia saecularis*, the soldiers of the world. The soldiers of Christ were to fight a spiritual battle with spiritual weapons, and the final victory was the victory of the martyr; the soldiers of the world fought with carnal weapons for base material

ends, and were subject to the lusts of the flesh; there was nothing in common between the camp of light and the camp of darkness. Moreover our Lord had come to bring his peace, a peace which was to be established in love; there could be no harmony between the love which he commanded, and the murder of our enemies in warfare. Such was the original 'thesis' of Christianity with regard to war, and it finds legal expression in the third-century *Canons of St Hippolytos* which state that a catechumen who wishes to become a soldier cannot be received into the Christian community.¹

At the opposite extreme we have to consider the mature ideal of the crusading knight, as finally elaborated by Pope Gregory VII towards the close of the eleventh century. *Militia Christi* is now no longer the antithesis of *militia saecularis*, but is an ambiguous term which can be used for either the spiritual or the worldly warrior, while the phrase *militia sancti petri* is used to designate more specifically those who fight for the defence of holy Church. Knighthood is now a consecrated profession, hallowed by solemn ritual; it is a way of sanctity, and death in a crusade against the enemies of Christendom ensures by virtue of a plenary indulgence immediate entry into the kingdom of heaven.²

There is, of course, a long interval between the uncompromising rejection of war by the early Christians and the final expression of the ideal of consecrated knighthood in the crusades; but in spite of the formal modification of the Church's attitude, dating from St Ambrose and St Augustine, the spirituality of the early Church remained highly influential throughout this period. The alliance of the Church with the Roman state under Constantine, and the increasing threat of barbarian invasion, seemed to give a sound justification for the participation of Christians in military service, and St Augustine gave a doctrinal basis to such participation by his theory of the just war. Nevertheless we find in the *Poenitentialia*, even in the eleventh century, that a soldier who kills in war must do penance. The normal period of penance prescribed for killing in open war under a legitimate prince was 40 days;³ Hrabanus Maurus⁴ specifically opposes the view that no penance is necessary

¹For a well-documented account of the attitude of the Early Church see C. J. Cadoux *The Early Christian Attitude to War*.

²For a detailed discussion of the growth of the crusading spirit see K. Erdmann, *Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedenkens*.

³According to Schmitz, *Bussdisziplin*, 40 days is prescribed by the *Poenitentialia* of Vaticellianum I and II, the *Poenit. Casinense*, the *Poenit. Bedae*, the *Poenit. Cummeani* and the *Poenit. Parisiense*.

⁴Migne, P. L. 110, 471.

for such a killing. For clergy and religious, it was absolutely forbidden to take part in military service, and in this the religious communities continued directly the tradition of the primitive Christian Church. There was no positive teaching concerning the ethics of the soldierly life, and certainly no liturgical consecration of militarism; neither were there properly speaking 'military saints'. There were, of course, saints such as Sebastian, Mauritius, and Martin, who had been soldiers; but their sanctity is not related to their military calling—indeed there is usually an opposition between the two. St Sebastian, for instance, joined the army to strengthen his comrades in times of persecution, and St Mauritius' fame rests on his refusal to obey an order to persecute Christians.

The tenth century, then, was a time of 'poised neutrality' with regard to the problem of war; but things were beginning to change. The sanctification of the state had reached a climax in the Carolingian Empire, and Western Christendom became aware of itself as a politico-religious whole. After the decline of the Carolingian Empire, the enemies of Christ pressed from all sides—the Normans from the North, the Hungarians from the East, the Moslems from the South. The problem of war acquired a new urgency, and at the same time the absorption of Norman warriors into Christendom raised again the existential problem of reconciling the Germanic religion of war with the Christian gospel of peace.

It is in this setting that I should like to consider the influential *Life of St Edmund*,⁵ which emanated, significantly enough, from the Cluniac Abbey of Fleury, in Normandy, towards the end of the tenth century. Previous saints' lives in the West had been almost exclusively concerned with clerics and religious; apart from the martyrs, there were hardly any saints who were not bishops, founders of monasteries, or ascetics. One outstanding exception to this rule was the life of St Gerald of Aurillac, which also came from Cluny earlier in the tenth century; we shall have occasion to refer to St Gerald's extraordinary military exploits later in this article. Gerald was an ordinary lay feudal lord, and therefore his *Life* was a completely new departure in hagio-

⁵Unless otherwise indicated in the text or footnotes, detailed references to the *Life of St Edmund* are to elements common to the original Latin of Abbo and the Old English version of Aelfric. For Abbo see Migne, P. L. 134, 507-520. For Aelfric see Walter Skeat's edition for the *Early English Text Society*. All the versions referred to in this article may be read together in a single volume in Lord Francis Hardy's *Garland of St Edmund*.

graphy; the *Life of St Edmund* is less original from this point of view, as it is concerned with a king, whose office is already sanctified by tradition. The *Life of St Edmund*, however, shows in a remarkable way the tension existing at this time between the idealism of war and the idealism of peace.

A very brief summary of the relevant parts of the story may be useful at this point. Edmund was a king of the East Anglians in the ninth century, renowned for his charity and for his humility. During his reign a marauding band of Vikings landed secretly on the coast, and slaughtered a great number of his people before he had a chance to resist. Then they sent a boastful message to the king, demanding that he should submit and promising rewards if he did so. Edmund consulted his bishop, who advised submission or flight, since there was no army to fight the Vikings; but the king scorned both submission and flight, and offered himself rather as a willing sacrifice to the fury of the pirates, who cruelly slaughtered him. After the Vikings withdrew he he was honoured as a great martyr by his people, and many miracles were attributed to his intercession.

King Edmund is presented first of all as an ideal type of consecrated Christian kingship. He recalls, at the moment of crisis, his triple consecration:⁶ his baptism, his confirmation, and his coronation; he is thrice dedicated to Christ, and only under Christ will he rule. His duty to his people is seen primarily as a service. Like St Oswald of Northumbria, he moves humbly among his people as a man among men, always generous to those in need, spreading happiness around him but himself leading a life of penance and self-denial. Here is clearly a successful marriage of Germanic and Christian concepts; the spirit of the *comitatus* is transfigured by faith and charity. But when we turn to the idealism of war, the harmony is more difficult to achieve.

In many ways, the behaviour of St Edmund before the enemy is strongly reminiscent of the Germanic heroic code. He shows the traditional defiance and courage in the face of the enemy: 'Never have I endured the shame of fleeing from the field of battle',⁷ he answers in reply to the bishop's ignoble suggestion that he should seek safety in flight or submission; and his answer to the messenger, the representative of the Vikings, is delivered with fitting scorn: 'You would now be worthy to die, but I will not defile my pure hands with your foul blood'. The substance of his reply is in the form of a traditional 'boast':

⁶In Abbo, not in Aelfric.

⁷In Aelfric's more sober version: 'It was never my custom to take flight'.

'Never in this life will Edmund submit to Hinguar, the heathen chieftain'. Concern for his fame as a warrior is by no means absent from his motives. Just as Aelfwine in *The Battle of Maldon* is unwilling to face the scorn of his countrymen should he desert his fallen lord, so Edmund is unwilling to besmirch his fair name by flight.

Not to submit in these circumstances means, of course, to face certain death, and this Edmund gladly accepts. His reasons are again derived largely from the loyalties of the *comitatus*. His fidelity to his men goes beyond death; his love for them is such that he has no wish to live after they have been slain; life itself, he says, would be hateful to him after the loss of those so dear to him. We think once more of the loyalty of Byhrtnoth's followers in *Maldon*, who would rather lie dead at his side than leave him on the field of battle, and we can see that Edmund is inspired by a complementary kingly idealism.

Thus in many ways, King Edmund speaks and acts in the heroic tradition; but he also speaks and acts unmistakably in the tradition of the Christian martyrs. He refuses to kill—and this refusal is no less significant for being couched in the scornful language of the Germanic hero, for it is, as he says, in imitation of Christ 'who gave us this example'. He will on the other hand gladly be slain by the Vikings if it is God's will, and he aspires to be 'a standard-bearer in the army of the eternal King',⁸ rather than submit to a pagan chieftain. So we see that the aspiration to sacrificial martyrdom is not absent from his motives. Moreover as the story continues the comparison of his sufferings with the passion of Christ becomes increasingly evident. He is first bound, and then made to stand before the heathen general like our Lord before Pilate; he is then mocked and buffeted, and subsequently tied to a tree and scourged. He is removed from the tree, and stands meekly like a ram chosen out of the whole flock; thus he is beheaded, and patiently endures his martyrdom with the holy name on his lips. He is immediately received into the court of heaven as king and martyr—in company, quite clearly, with St Sebastian and the martyrs of old whose example he so faithfully follows.⁹

Thus two traditions meet in the story of one man's death. But there is of course one crucial question: should he or should he not resist his attackers? If he does not resist, he will be acting in a way quite foreign to the heroic tradition which he represents; if he does resist, he will be acting in a way utterly contrary to the tradition of sacrificial

⁸In Abbo, not in Aelfric.

⁹The account here given of the martyrdom is based on Abbo.

martyrdom, equally clearly present in the narrative.

The success of the original story is probably due to the fact that it partially avoids this problem by a skilful manipulation of the events. The Vikings have come secretly to land, and deliberately slaughter all the young men who would have been capable of forming an effective army before the King, who is in retirement at Haeglesdun, is aware of their presence. He is thus placed from the beginning in a situation where effective resistance is out of the question. This however only partially avoids the question, because some resistance is still possible. What remains of the problem is solved by an ambiguous gesture: the King throws away his weapons as the Vikings approach. In the heroic tradition, this could be a final gesture of defiance; in the sacrificial tradition, a gesture of self-offering. Neither explanation, of course, is quite satisfactory: heroic defiance would not normally take this form, nor is a sacrifice convincing which is presented as the only way out.

The tension in the story is, of course, inevitable because of the opposing nature of the two traditions; and because of this tension, the story proved unstable. In at least two subsequent versions, it was modified to present a clearer and more traditional moral. Roger of Wendover enhanced the sacrificial aspect, making Edmund's final act an unambiguous rejection of violence. At the beginning of his version, the King is not deprived of all his soldiers, but fights a long and cruel battle. At the end of the day, when the field was red with the blood of countless numbers who had perished, 'the King was overwhelmed with compassion and sorrow, not only for his own followers, who were fighting for their country and race, and who had as he knew won the crown of martyrdom, but also for the death of the heathen, sent down, as he bitterly lamented, into the pit of hell. When, therefore, the heathen had first retired from the bloodstained field, the blessed confessor of Christ, King Edmund, with the surviving remnant of his troops, marched to the township of Haeglesdun, with the resolution immutably fixed in his mind never again to fight against the barbarians, as there was but one thing needful in his judgement, namely, that one should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish'. The enemy then surround Haeglesdun bent on vengeance; Edmund retires to the church on the advice of his bishop, to proclaim his membership of Christ, ridding himself of his material weapons to put on spiritual armour, and thus face his martyrdom. It will be seen that even in this version there is an element of ambiguity, for the acknowledged martyrdom of the defenders is a direct reflection of the

crusading creed; but the final act of Edmund is decisively a rejection of violence, springing at least partially from his compassion on the enemy, and inspired by the imitation of Christ.

Lydgate, in his version of the Edmund story, also develops the theme of the sacrificial martyrdom and makes it clear that the King conscientiously refuses to shed blood. 'To put off by force', he agrees, 'is a good law'; but at the same time,

'worldly men jupartie lif and al,
Slen ther neighbours, only to gete good,
But goddis law forbit shedyng of blood.'

Here too, of course, is an element of ambiguity: it must be conceded that 'to put off force by force is a good law'; but again the final act of the martyr seems to be unmistakably a vote for 'God's law'. In order, however, to put the King more securely in the tradition of the martyrs, in this version the Vikings demand that, as part of his submission, he should offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. His refusal to do so thus becomes a clear proclamation of faith, and his affinity with the early martyrs is firmly established.

Mention has already been made in this article to another Saint's Life from the Cluniac monasteries, which was also a departure from tradition and significant in the development of the crusading ideal; this was the *Life of St GERALD of Aurillac*, written by Odo, the founder of the Cluniac reform, in the first part of the tenth century.¹⁰ Gerald was not a king but an ordinary lay feudal lord—probably the first to make a formal appearance in hagiographical literature. But in many ways Gerald was little more than a monk in disguise; in his youth he always had a greater love for learning than for exercises of violence, and later on he had no wish at all to assume his natural position of authority, but would have preferred to live the life of a recluse. He was, however, persuaded by those who urged that the poor should not be left unprotected, and that the violent should not go unrestrained; so he eventually assumed his responsibilities, lest he should be found neglectful of the precept to care for the poor. Thus he was obliged, in cases of dire necessity, to go to war, and to exercise judicial authority—the latter always with great clemency, and never resorting to the death penalty. There was, however, something very peculiar about his tactics in war. He always ordered his men to fight with their spears and swords reversed. Now this, of course, was a very strange command, and ordinary soldiers might not have obeyed, were it not for the fact that

¹⁰Odo, *Vita S. Geraldii*, Migne P. L., 133, 639 ff.

Geral was known never to have been defeated, since both he himself and those who fought with him seemed to enjoy the special protection of heaven! Nothing could show more clearly than this curious story the tensions which resulted from trying to adapt the ascetic ideal to the realities of feudal life.

Both the *Life of Edmund* and the *Life of Geral* emanate from Cluniac sources; in order therefore to relate these works to the general change in the attitude to war which we outlined at the beginning of this article, it would be well to consider briefly the importance of the Cluniac monasteries themselves.

The Cluniac reform established a new pattern of Benedictine monasticism which was highly influential in Western Christendom from the middle of the tenth to the middle of the twelfth century; so influential, in fact, that the abbot of Cluny was regarded as the most important man in Christendom, after the Pope. The reform began as a strictly monastic movement, but it very soon became concerned with the sanctification of secular life as well, and in particular of the warlike Norman aristocracy with which it was so closely associated. At the same time, Cluny was closely linked with the 'Truce of God' movement in the tenth century, which was again an incursion of the Church into secular life, in this case by direct political involvement. Now both the concern of the Cluny monks for their lay associates (which was, of course, the reason for the writing of the *Life of St Geral*) and their involvement with the 'Truce of God' led to an increasing accommodation to the idealism of war. For in the religion of the Germanic peoples, and of the Northmen in particular, war held pride of place; the highest virtues were the virtues of the battle-field, and death in battle was the warrior's martyrdom. The Normans of the tenth century were not far from their primitive ancestors; Wotan still lived in their blood, if not in their minds. It is not an accident therefore that the great influx of Germanic blood into Christendom corresponds with the upsurge of the crusading spirit. The 'Truce of God' on the other hand was, of course, a sanctification of peace; but ironically enough, the very involvement of the Church in political peace tended towards a sanctification of war. For if the peace was sacred, those who broke it were desecrating it, and those who punished the desecrators were instruments of God.

There is considerable evidence of the connection between Cluny and the new crusading spirit. There is, for instance, the famous satire on Abbot Odilo of Cluny, written by Archbishop Adalbero of Laon, in

which the Abbot is portrayed leading out his monks in knightly armour to do battle against the Muslims—a libel, no doubt, but presumably not without a kernel of truth. The liturgical solemnisation of knight-hood is associated at an early stage with reformed monasteries such as Fleury; and, of course, there is a link between Cluny and early crusading campaigns in Spain, though the closeness of this link is at the moment difficult to determine; certainly in the beginning of the eleventh century the armies fighting the Moslems asked especially for the prayers of Cluny, and regarded the Cluniac monks with particular veneration. Of even greater significance is the fact that Pope Gregory VII, rightly regarded as the father of the crusades, was educated at a Cluniac house in Rome and probably spent a period of retirement at Cluny before he was elected Pope; while Urban II, who later exercised a great influence on the development of the crusading ideal, was himself a Cluniac monk.

For a direct evidence of the martial spirit of Cluny, however, we need not look further than the introduction to the *Life of St Edmund* itself. Abbo of Cluny sets the scene first of all by sketching the history of England, and in particular the Anglo-Saxon conquest. The Anglo-Saxons, he points out, were first of all invited to Britain by the British to fight for them. They then found themselves 'involved in frequent wars, but defended themselves and their clients with courage; but as the latter were given over to sloth, and stayed at home, as might be expected of a proletariat absorbed in pleasure, trusting to the unconquered bravery of the hired soldiery whom they had retained, the protectors took counsel for the expulsion from home and country of the wretched natives. And so it was done: the Britons were turned out, and the alien conquerors set to work to parcel out among themselves the land, replete as it was with wealth of every kind, on the grounds that it was a shame that it should be retained under the rule of a lazy populace, when it might afford a competent livelihood to men of mettle, who were able to defend themselves'.

Such is the martial setting for the presentation of Edmund, king, hero and saint, whose life sums up a highly significant chapter in the development of western spirituality.