At a time of generally increased interest in the Middle Ages, the Crusades are probably not one of the particular features of the period held in high repute. Except for the dedicated band of historians led by Kenneth Setton, or the impressive work of Sir Steven Runciman, most of us are more than likely to turn our backs on the Crusades as a regrettable lapse, an unfortunate outburst of religious enthusiasm. When we do think of them at all, we are more likely to recall the bones of Peter the Hermit's crazy followers bleaching at Civetot, the sack of Constantinople, or, most probably, that awful internecine struggle, the Albigensian Crusade, portrayed with such fiery anger in the pages of Zoë Oldenbourg's *Massacre at Monsegur*.1 An interest in the nature and origin of romantic love leads the student new to the Middle Ages inevitably to the Cathars and the Midi. There one meets not only the full horror of medieval warfare but the first excesses of the Inquisition. Alternatively one can take the comic view of Osbert Lancaster, in *The Saracen's Head*,2 whose young knight, William de Littlehampton, found himself en route to the Holy Land in the midst of an English army officers' mess composed of public school hearties for whom the sands of Acre bear a striking resemblance to the playing fields at Eton.
Each of these aspects of the Crusades was unquestionably a part of the story, but they are not the entire story. From Urban II’s sermon at Clermont to the end of the Crusades three hundred and fifty years later, the Crusaders were always impelled at least in part by a strong sense of idealism, a belief that the sacrifices they made, the hardships they endured, were for a cause more important than their own lives. One finds in the late-eleventh-century Song of Roland the dedication, the idealism as well as the bigotry and intolerance that seem to accompany idealism so often. In the fourteenth century Philippe de Mézières exemplified the burning sense of dedication to a cause as well as any other figure associated with the Crusades. Yet, stumping the courts of Europe to call forth once again ill-disciplined bands of knights for the expedition that ended with the disgraceful sack of Alexandria in 1365, he is clearly an anachronism. The religious fervor had shifted, had gone elsewhere. His successful response to that shift came later in his work for the cult of the Virgin.

Chaucer’s Knight too is an anachronism, a man who has fought in “his lorde werre”—the ambiguity of the lower case “l” must be deliberate—wherever a Crusade was in progress, even up to and including the sack of Alexandria. The Knight himself portrays laconically the ambiguities of a Crusade in his description of Theseus’s campaign against Thebes. In righting a wrong, in performing his function as a defender of the helpless, Theseus undertakes a military expedition that ultimately results in the total destruction of a city and the flight of those of its inhabitants not put to the sword. It cannot have been simply the physical and financial difficulties of mounting an expedition to the Holy Land that led finally to the end of those expeditions; there must also have been a growing recognition of the paradoxical nature of a war on behalf of the Prince of Peace.

Yet the idea of a holy war has lived on, even if attempts to realize that idea in assaults on Islam have ceased. Shakespeare’s Henry Bolingbroke knew the power of the old ideal, and vowed, as had kings before him, to “make a voyage to the Holy Land, To wash this blood off from my guilty hand” (Richard II, 5.6.49–50) to expiate the death of Richard. Yet his vow is an empty vow, and the
Jerusalem in which he dies is a room in England. It is in act 1 of *Henry V* that we see the full transformation of the idea of a holy war from one whose participants gained spiritual sanctification through the slaughter of unbelievers to a war for political or economic interests for which God’s support is sanctimoniously invoked. When Henry V prophesies that generations yet unborn will curse the Dauphin for his mocking gift of tennis balls, he sugarcoats his political feud with the pious conclusion,

But this lies all within the will of God,  
To whom I do appeal; and in whose name  
Tell you the Dauphin I am coming on,  
To venge me as I may and to put forth  
My rightful hand in a well-hallow’d cause.

(1.2.289–93)

With such sentiments we are in the world of the modern holy war. Because the United States has just lived through a war whose supporters often spoke as though we were engaged, not in a crusade in Europe, as Eisenhower called World War II, but a crusade in the East, it seemed appropriate for the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Ohio State University to bring together a group of scholars interested in how the first holy wars of Western Christendom began. For it is our belief that many of the justifications developed to sanction aggressive war that are in use today are similar to the justifications developed in the Middle Ages to sanction its own holy wars. A group of speakers, whose essays appear in this volume, were invited to address the problem of how a culture formally dedicated to fulfilling the injunction to “love thy neighbor as thyself” could move to a point where it sanctioned the use of violence against the alien both outside and inside society. In order to gain the perspective of a nonmedievalist sensitive to the issues of war and peace, we invited a representative from the Mershon Center for Education in National Security to take part in a concluding discussion that would consider how constant the justifications for the use of violence against one’s neighbor have been.

The papers that resulted speak for themselves. I have no intention here of summarizing them. However there are one or two general points that I do feel need to be made. First, I admire Mr.
Cowdry's willingness to assert without qualification that after all due allowance has been made for such causative factors as the need for channeling the warlike energies of the knights into areas "at a distance from the places of their birth" (p. 14), or the effect on the priests of a rise in the social status of the knights, ultimately there is a single dominant personality that causes the course of events to bend in a new direction. All those who participated in the conference wondered what might have happened had not Urban II been so successful in carrying on the program of Gregory VII. There is no question that the Church took a decisive turn that November day at Clermont, and lost a chance to speak unequivocally as the champion of peace for European Christendom in the centuries that were to follow. At a time when historians are turning with delight to the wonders of statistical analysis so that they may better count the consequences of many daily decisions, it is good to be reminded that there are moments in time when one person, for good or ill, takes a course that changes all that follows after. The substitution of a sword for a pilgrim's staff unquestionably placed not only Urban's papacy but those of his successors as well in the position of supporting war when it was waged for religious ideals.

Certainly the holy war, as that term is now generally understood, appears to have been an invention of the West. Professor Watt's paper makes it clear that the usual image of a horde of rabid Muslims sweeping all civilization before them in a war without quarter, a horde crying "Convert or die," is, like so many faces of the enemy, a caricature. For such warriors one must go instead to the verses of The Song of Roland where Roland cries "Nos avom dreit mais cist gloton ont tort"—"We are right but these wretches are wrong"—as he splits a pagan warrior in half. The Jihad succeeded precisely because it was not that sort of a war.

To say that Urban, or, for that matter, Bernard of Clairvaux, can be seen as a dominant influence in the making of the Crusades is not to say that other factors were not at work as well. There must be a catalyst, a magnetic figure, but such a figure cannot be heard where there are no ears to hear. The men at Clermont listened because they were ready to listen. The most serious conclusion to be drawn
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from Cowdrey’s analysis of the causes of the Crusades may be his statement that “men seem in all ages to engage in the aggressive warfare of ideas less for external gains than to relieve the internal tensions and problems of their own society” (p. 28). For the medieval holy wars those tensions seem to have arisen as much as anything else from the Church’s teachings on sin and penance. The songs that Professor Crocker includes are in many cases what one would expect, a soldier’s regrets at parting from his loved one. But there is the other strain as well:

He who goes with Louis, what has he to fear from hell? For surely his soul will dwell in Paradise with the angles of our Lord. (p. 84)

In a brutal world where life was cheap and short, what comfort to know with certainty that what one was doing would guarantee an eternity of bliss! What we would like to know much more about, however, is just how much the changes in the penitential teaching of the medieval Church altered attitudes toward holy war. For example, were the Crusades a casualty of the late medieval move toward internalizing penitential discipline?

Richard Southern, in his fine study of Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages,4 shows how closely related the Church’s programs always were to the needs of medieval society. And in late medieval society the need was for individual roads to God. Taking the vow of a Crusader made sense in an earlier world where “the need for a binding vow was one of the common assumptions that had bound together all religious orders in the Middle Ages.”5 As the sense of the efficacy of formal vows declined, one would expect a lessened interest in taking the Cross. The Templars were destroyed, to be sure, because their wealth was coveted by Philip the Fair, but they were also by the time of their demise in the early fourteenth century an anachronism. Certainly it is becoming clear that our best road to travel into medieval psychology is the road paved with Penitential manuals. What are the links between the reforms of the Lateran Council of 1215 and the changed attitudes toward taking the crusading vow that we find in the thirteenth century? What was the effect of a lessened emphasis on
external works, the increased concern for individual self-examination and private contrition we see in late medieval manuals of sin, or sermons on the Seven Deadly Sins? It would be fascinating to know whether the regularization of penitential procedures, the provision for more manageable ways to save one's soul, led to a decline in crusading enthusiasm.

Such things we may not ever know. But it is clear from the impressive array of documentation marshaled by Professor Brundage that once having decided to conduct holy wars, the medieval Church clearly felt a need to justify undertaking such endeavors. As Brundage makes plain, the concept of a just war has an ancient pedigree; and as one reads his careful delineation of what a just war involved, one realizes how strongly the concepts he sets out are still a part of our thinking. The insistence that a war to be just must be declared by a legitimate authority provided what was probably the most cogent attack on President Johnson's conduct of the Vietnamese War. The further conditions—that "there must be a reasonable and morally acceptable cause for the war: the war must be necessary, . . . and the war must be fought by acceptable means" (p. 102)—all are still recognizably current in any present discussion of the conditions under which war is justified.

What is of course of more interest to this discussion is Brundage's discussion of the subordinate category of the holy war, a phenomenon he too sees as essentially an invention of medieval European Christendom. As is so often the case, the lawyers come after the event, and codify contemporary practice. It is absorbing reading to watch the gradual development of legal justifications for participation in wars that purported to sanctify the soldiers who took part. In the first place one is struck quickly by the canonists' treatment of enemies in a holy war as beyond the pale. Weapons that were too horrible to be used against fellow Christians could be used against the infidel. The persistence of such thinking accounts in part for the current debate whether the Western Allies would have dropped an atomic bomb on Germany. Japan had certainly fulfilled all the conditions necessary to make the war in the Pacific a just war. Nevertheless, cultural differences led many to cast the
Japanese enemy in much the same mold that we find fitting the
Saracens, to accord them a different status from the European
enemy. Brundage is too good a historian not to point out that those
horrible weapons, the crossbow and the ballista, were in fact used
quite casually on fellow Christians despite the attempt to limit their
use. The destruction of Dresden or the fire-bombing of Hamburg
also suggest that the Allies had in fact few compunctions about what
they threw at Nazi Germany. It is the attitude toward the enemy in a
holy war that matters more than the actual weapons used against
him, the belief that he is not to be accorded full human status, that is
our unfortunate legacy from the crusading mentality.

Of course not everyone was an enthusiastic supporter of the idea
of the holy war even in the Middle Ages. It is good to be reminded
that Gratian did take seriously the argument that war was wrong, at
least for Christians. From the canonists quoted it is clear that the
defenses for a morally justifying war were hammered out in a
debate where the minority view always had supporters. Could it be
that the eventual defense of holy war as a variety of just war, in the
Augustinian sense of that term, a defense based on supposed papal
sovereignty over Jerusalem, came about because the concept of the
just war was a much less exposed position to defend? It is almost as
though those who were running the Crusades saw, as Stubbs later
maintained, that a war for rights, for limited political gains, was
more palatable than a war for ideas.

The canonists certainly did what they could to make the whole
idea palatable. Whoever the antiwar critics of the Crusades were,
whoever caused there to be a debate, they do not appear to have
been the poets of the period. Whether the dominant literary mode
of romance, focusing as it does on love and war as the theaters
within which heroes win their fame, prevented any extended public
criticism of the values of the Crusades or not is uncertain. One does
find a surprising number of virtuous pagans in the later romances,
suggesting that at least some of the poets had discovered that their
enemies were as fully human as they were themselves. In Huon of
Bordeau, for example, the world of the East is far more cultured,
and far more charitable, than the court of Charlemagne.
For an outright attack on the paradox of the Church of the Prince of Peace preaching war against the infidel neighbor, one has to wait for the writings of such Christian humanists as Erasmus and More. Perhaps one has to see the horrors at firsthand to understand the abstract incongruity. Thus it is that European humanists, Italian or Dutch, see more clearly than perhaps the English the bestial, pestilential side of war in general, and, from that general perception, the incongruity of Christians visiting such horrors on any other creature of God. And yet, at the same time, there is Luther, in a direct line of descent, speaking of war as a "precious and godly" work (p. 165) when it protects the good. As Professor Greene remarks, "The conception of the soldier as godly and the sword as potentially divine sufficed to justify wars of religion for many Protestants in the terrible century that followed" (p. 165).

Though we no longer slaughter each other in the name of God, we do still treat our enemies as though we were engaged in a holy war, still think of them as less than human, beyond salvation. Our soldiers may no longer believe that their deaths in our wars will automatically absolve them of sin, but they are still capable of destroying life and property indiscriminately if it belongs to "gooks." If there is one general conclusion that the panel was drawn to, it was to underline the close connections between how we view the world, and what form our violence will take. It does not seem any more possible now than at any other time in human history to envisage a world without violence, to suppose that no one will ever again raise up another swastika over another people. But it does seem possible, if education is still to have the effect that Erasmus hoped for it, to learn that there are no infidels, only other people.

5. Ibid., pp. 340–41.