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Ecclesiastical Attitudes Towards War in the Visigothic Kingdom

Jesús Huertas-Gómez

Abstract
The Hispanic clergy during the Visigothic period was far from being clearly enthusiastic about war. However, the conception of war evolved during the 7th century, especially after the conversion of the kingdom to Catholicism, to the point of creating a liturgy of war. The aim of this contribution is to give an overview of the perception of war held by ecclesiastics, such as Isidore of Seville or Julian of Toledo, and to try to elucidate the causes of these ideological changes in the war..

Keywords
War; Church; Visigothic Kingdom; Clergy; Hispania.

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ECCLESIASTICAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS WAR IN THE VISIGOTHIC KINGDOM

Jesús Huertas-Gómez*

I. Church and War: An Ambiguous Relationship

The society which shaped the socio-political reality of the *regnum Gothorum* was the result of the integration between Hispano-Romans and Gothic populations. The synthesis of both groups took place in a long historical process that reached its peak at the juncture between the celebration of the Third Council of Toledo (589), when the Goths were converted to Catholicism, and the Fourth Council of Toledo (633), when the king, the bishops and the nobility laid the foundations of the political and religious project for the kingdom.[1] The Goths came from a highly militarised society. War, plunder and looting were necessary for the consolidation of the dominant family group over the others.[2]

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[1] Isabel Velázquez, "'Pro patriae gentisque Gothorum statu' (4th Council of Toledo, canon 75, A. 633)," in *"Regna and Gentes": The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut and Walter Pohl, Transformation of the Roman world 13 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2003), 161–217; J. Wood, *The Politics of Identity in Visigothic Spain: Religion and Power in the Histories of Isidore of Seville*, Brill's series on the early Middle Ages 21 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2012).

[2] On the militarization of Gothic society, see P. Poveda Arias, "The Role of the Military Factor in the Political and Administrative Shaping of the Visigothic Kingdom (Sixth to Seventh Century)," in *Early Medieval Militarisation*, ed. Ellora Bennet et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 115-29. On the role of booty, see P. Poveda Arias, "¿Hacia la unidad de Hispania? Explicaciones sociales a las ofensivas militares visigodas en la Península Ibérica (siglos VI-VIII)," *Gladius* 40 (2020): 73–92; S. Orlowski, "Los reyes visigodos de Toledo y el botín de guerra. Reparto y destino," *Espacio, tiempo y forma. Serie III* 37 (2024): 855–78; F. Ruchesi, "Violencia, factores económicos e identidad. La formación de cohesión social y los grupos guerreros en el reino visigodo de Toledo," *Imago Temporis. Medium Aevum* 18 (2024): 377-92.

In fact, the acquisition of wealth and land and its subsequent redistribution among the *fideles* of the king was one of the central elements for the proper political functioning of the kingdom.[3] By this point, the Church had ceased to be merely a religious institution and had become the most direct heir of the Roman Empire, both administratively and ideologically, following the Empire's dissolution in the West.[4] The Church aimed to guarantee social stability, harmony, and unity among the kingdom's different actors through communion in orthodoxy. There was a relationship of mutual influence between the Gothic aristocracy and the Church that resulted in a certain pacification of Gothic political ideals through Christianity and, on the other hand, a certain militarisation of the Church and its thinking.

The Church's position on war had evolved throughout history. From a more anti-war stance during the first centuries of Christianity's existence, it had moved towards a progressive justification of war, violence and coercion.[5] Throughout this chapter, I will examine the relationship between the Church and war in the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo, focusing primarily on ecclesiastical perceptions of this phenomenon. What can be said from the outset is that the Church's position on war was openly ambiguous. Although, because of its moral and religious convictions, the Church tended to seek to build social consensus through non-violent means, there was never a categorical condemnation of war either.

Within the Hispano-Visigothic Church, various factions and groups coexisted, and their actions were not uniform. The ecclesiastical elites engaged in the same power dynamics as other noble groups within the kingdom.[6] For

[3] P. C. Díaz Martínez, "Rey y poder en la monarquía visigoda," *Iberia* 1 (1998): 175–95; P. C. Díaz Martínez and P. Poveda Arias, "Hacia una caracterización política del 'regnum Gothorum' hispano," in *Los procesos de formación del feudalismo. La península ibérica en el contexto europeo*, ed. Iñaki Martín Viso (Gijón: Ediciones Trea, 2023), 144–52.

[4] On the leaderships exercised by bishops in Late Antiquity, see C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, The Transformation of the classical heritage 37 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005). On the other hand, on the development of the Church in *Hispania* during the fifth century with the consequent assumption of new social responsibilities, see P. Ubric, *La Iglesia en la Hispania del siglo V* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2004).

[5] The most complete study to date is that carried out by J. Fernández Ubiña, *Cristianos y militares. La iglesia antigua ante el ejército y la guerra* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2000). Also, see J. Shean, *Soldiering for God and the Roman Army*, History and Warfare 61 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2010); and D. Iosif, *Early Christian Attitudes to War, Violence and Military Service*, Gorgias studies in classical and late antiquity 1 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013).

[6] M.ª R. Valverde Castro, "La Iglesia hispano-visigoda: ¿fortalecedora o limitadora de la soberanía real?," *Hispania Antiqua* 16 (1992): 381–92.

this reason, throughout this chapter, I will seek to reflect, as far as possible, the diverse perceptions of ecclesiastics operating in different spheres. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that the Church, as an institution of power embedded within the kingdom, tended to project an appearance of consensus and unity – even while fully aware of the underlying conflicts and internal dissensions.[7]

A. The Meaning of War and Its Ecclesiastical Perception

In the post-Roman world, war was fully naturalised as a social and historical phenomenon, framed by a Christian understanding of history and reality rooted in divine providence.[8] Within Christian thought, historical events were often interpreted as manifestations of God's providence, with the belief that he had a plan of salvation for individuals, peoples, and kingdoms. Thus, particular occurrences could be perceived as stages in the unfolding of that theological history. God was perceived as engaging with humanity through a system of punishment and reward: when people sinned excessively, he withdrew his grace as a form of chastisement. Through a period of penance, the faithful could regain divine favour. Conversely, God rewarded the faithful with various temporal blessings.[9] In this framework, the evils afflicting society were seen as consequences of sin.[10] Periods of war or peace were likewise understood through this language by which God communicated with his people.

King Sisebut addressed a letter to the Longobard king Adalald and his mother, Theodolinda, in which he urged the king to abandon Arianism and embrace Catholicism.[11] One of his central arguments rested precisely on the linking of the Arian period of the Goths as a time of calamity, misfortune and war, whereas God had rewarded the later orthodoxy of the Goths with the

[7] R. L. Stocking, *Bishops, Councils, and Consensus in the Visigothic Kingdom, 589-633* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000); P. Poveda Arias, "Límites y usos del consenso político en el reino visigodo hispano," in *El estado y la Alta Edad Media. Nuevas perspectivas*, ed. Álvaro Carvajal Castro and Carlos Tejerizo García (Vitoria: Universidad del País Vasco, 2023), 131–48.

[8] E. Sánchez Salor, *Historiografía latino-cristiana. Principios, contenido, forma*, Hispania antigua 1 (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2006), 128–50.

[9] Isidore, *Sententiae*, 2.5.1, ed. Julio Campos and Ismael Roca (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1971), 310.

[10] On the meaning of evil in Isidore, see P. Cazier, "Isidore de Séville et la naissance de l'Espagne catholique," *Théologie historique* 96 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1994), 92–96.

[11] O. Dinarès, "La carta de Sisebuto a Adaloaldo y Teodolinda. El reino arriano en la perspectiva de un rey visigodo del siglo VII," *Hispania sacra* 71.144 (2019): 379–88.

peace and prosperity of the *imperium Gothorum*: "Then it oppressed this very insolent people with immense calamities and different very harsh needs, frequent wars and daily miseries, lack of fruits and noxious wounds with time turned back; afterwards a starry brilliance struck the hearts of the faithful and orthodox faith sprang out of blind minds, the catholic faith was increased, with the Lord favouring, and the empire of the Goths thrives."[12]

This association of the peace granted by God with the reward for human faithfulness was far from incidental. At the time, the model of community had shifted from a civic to an ecclesiological conception: it was now membership in the Church that defined one's integration into the social body.[13] In this sense, Isidore of Seville linked belonging to the Catholic Church with the promise of eternal peace free from adversity.[14] Being part of the community of the baptised was thus to partake in a state of peace – both individual and social – that was a consequence of close communion with God.

The Visigothic Church, continuing the pre-existing intellectual tradition of Christianity, understood that war had a parenetic and moralising function. God allowed wars to exist in order to purify the Christian people of their sins and help them to return to the path of righteousness. The presence of these ideas in texts of different kinds only shows us how present they were in the mentality of the time. Sometimes God used enemy peoples to restore his people's desire for the things of heaven. This is, for example, Isidore's interpretation of the Roman Empire's clashes against the Huns, whom he called "virga furoris dei."[15] War was the punishment by which he achieved the necessary change of attitude in his people to bring about their salvation.[16]

[12] *Epistulae [Wisigothicae]*, ep. 8, in *Miscellanea Wisigothica*, ed. Juan Gil, Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla. Filosofía y letras 15 (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1972), 21. For English translation, see "A Letter from King Sisebut of the Visigoths (616-620)," https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/44.html.

[13] J. Wood, "Elites and Baptism: Religious 'Strategies of Distinction' in Visigothic Spain," *Studies in Church History* 42 (2006): 3–17; N. P. Chase, "From Arianism to Orthodoxy: The Role of the Rites of Initiation in Uniting the Visigothic Kingdom," *Hispania sacra* 72.146 (2020): 427–38.

[14] Isidore, *Etimologiae*, 8.1.6, ed. trans. and ann. José Oroz Reta and Manuel A. Marcos Casquero, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos 647 (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2004), 676-77.

[15] Isidore, *Historia Gothorum*, chap. 29, ed. and trans. Cristóbal Rodrí
guez Alonso (Leon: Centro de estudios e investigacion "San Isidoro," 1975), 218.

[16] The awareness of punishment as part of God's language was deeply rooted. See, e.g, Isidore, *Sententiae*, 3.1–4, ed. Campos and Roca, 398-99.

A similar perspective is offered by Braulius of Saragossa in his *Vita Sancti Aemiliani*.[17] Aemilian, a hermit saint from the second half of the sixth century, had a vision in the twilight of his life in which the destruction of Cantabria was revealed to him. He brought this prophecy to the senate of Cantabria. Most of the senators listened with reverence, but one of them, a certain Abundantius, dismissed him as a senile old man.[18] In Braulius's eyes, the destruction of Cantabria could be interpreted as divine retribution for the offence against the saint.[19]

The connection between sin and war made wartime a time of penance and spiritual purification. Bishop Eugenius II of Toledo, the most celebrated poet of Visigothic Hispania, articulated this link in one of his *carmina*, presenting war and suffering as consequences of sin. For this reason, the verses of this beautiful liturgical hymn beseech God for deliverance from a twofold affliction: on the one hand, the suffering caused by sin itself; on the other, the suffering caused by war.[20]

Within the dominant ecclesiastical paradigm, kings too sought to interpret the hardships and misfortunes of their reigns in light of the people's sin.[21] The fall of the kingdom in 711, in particular, was interpreted in this very manner. The author of the *Mozarabic Chronicle* refrains from passing moral judgement on the conquest, likely due to the context in which the text was composed –

[17] S. Castellanos García, *Poder social, aristocracias y hombre santo en la Hispania Visigoda. La "Vita Aemiliani" de Braulio de Zaragoza*, Bibliotecas de investigación 29 (Logroño: Universidad de La Rioja, 1998).

[18] *La vita di S. Emiliano scritta da Braulione vescovo di Sarragozza. Edizione critica*, ed. Ignazio Cazzaniga, *Bolletino del Comitato per la preparazione della edizione nazionale dei classici greci e latini. Nuova serie* 3 (1954): 33.

[19] The appearance of divine punishment in Visigothic hagiography was an ideological device that sought to delegitimise a particular political faction, as shown in S. Castellanos, *La hagiografía visigoda. Dominio social y proyección cultural* (Logroño: Fundación San Millán de la Cogolla, 2004), 331–73.

[20] *Eugenii Toletani Carmina (CPL 1236), carmen* 5b, in *Eugenii Toletani opera omnia*, ed. Paulo F. Alberto, Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 114 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 213-215. See also A. Pilarski, *Der "Libellus Carminum" des Eugenius von Toledo. Poesie als Lebensbewältigung und spirituelle Praxis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023), 155–58; J. Á., *La sacralización de la guerra en el mundo visigodo. Ceremonias, ritos y símbolos*. Guerra Medieval Ibérica (Madrid: La Ergástula, 2024), 89-91.

[21] This can be seen in the *prologus* of the XII Council of Toledo (681), ed. Gonzalo Martínez Díez and Félix Rodríguez, *La colección canónica hispana, VI* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2002), 137-40; or in the *tomus* given by Egica to the bishops at the XVI Council of Toledo (693) ed. José Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispanorromanos* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1963), 483-88.

under the conquerors' rule.[22] This, however, does not prevent the chronicler from presenting the events as unfolding according to God's will.[23] Moreover, he inscribes the conquest in a bitter tone within the framework of the great misfortunes of salvation history.[24] More explicit is a liturgical hymn, called *De tempore belli*, which seems to have been composed immediately after the Arab conquest. The tone of lamentation is similar to that found in the *Mozarabic Chronicle*, but the plea for forgiveness of sins is much more evident.[25] In any case, it was in the Asturian monarchy of the ninth century, and subsequently in the later Christian kingdoms, that a comprehensive providentialist interpretation of these events came fully into view.[26]

Thus, if war formed part of the divine plan for the salvation of Christians, it represented a social reality that had to be accepted as an element of earthly existence. Even so, the suffering generated by armed conflict was seen as an evil to be avoided as far as possible.[27] At the same time, contemporary authors were clear that war was not the preferred condition of society. It is not by chance that Sisebut, counted among the most pious of Gothic kings, is one of those who were most pained by the sufferings of the wars he had to face.[28] The

[22] A. P. Bronisch, *Reconquista y guerra santa. La concepción de la guerra en la España cristiana desde los visigodos hasta comienzos del siglo XII* (Granada: Universidad de Granada–Universidad de Oviedo–Universidad de València, 2006), 124–41.

[23] *Cronica Mozarabe de 754. Edición crítica e introducción*, chap. 54, ed and trans. José Eduardo López Pereira, Textos medievales 58 (Zaragoza: Anúbar, 1980), 70-73. S. Marschner, *Das neue Volk Gottes in Hispanien. Die Bibel in der christlich-iberischen Historiographie vom 8. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert* (Münster, Berlin, Vienna, Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2023), 88-94. On God's providence in Visigothic sources, see Castillo Lozano, *La sacralización de la guerra en el mundo visigodo*, 25-56.

[24] Ibid., chap. 55, ed. López Pereira, 72-75.

[25] M. C. Díaz y Díaz, "Noticias históricas en dos himnos litúrgicos hispanovisigodos," *Antigüedad y cristianismo* 3 (1986): 448–52; Bronisch, *Reconquista y guerra santa*, 141–47.

[26] C. de Ayala Martínez, "La memoria del 711 en la historiografía cristiana medieval y actual," *Revista del Instituto Egipcio de Estudios Islámicos* 39 (2011): 113–48; A. García Sanjuan, "Las causas de la conquista islámica de la península ibérica según las crónicas medievales," *Miscelánea de estudios árabes y hebraicos. Sección Árabe-Islam* 53 (2004): 101–27. On conceptions of divine providence in the Visigothic period, see E. Sánchez Salor, "El providencialismo en la historiografía cristiano-visigótica de España," *Anuario de estudios filológicos* 5 (1982): 179–92.

[27] I. Cabello Llano, "'Heu pro dolor! Pacem rogamus, pacis infer copiam.' Guerra y paz en textos de la Spania tardoantigua y visigoda," *Brocar* 46 (2022): 43–95.

[28] Isidore, *Historia Gothorum*, chap. 60, ed. Rodríguez Alonso, 270-273; *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with Its Continuations*, 4.33, ed. and trans. John M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford: Oxford University Press; rprt.: Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1981), 21-22; *Cronica Mozarabe de 754*, 13. See also M. A. Rodríguez de la Peña, *Los reyes sabios. Cultura y*

Frankish chronicler Pseudo-Fredegarius put into his mouth the following words, which he uttered "pietate plenus" on contemplating the slaughter of Romans carried out by his men: "Woe is me, that my reign should witness so great a shedding of human blood!"[29] In the king's negotiations with the Byzantine patrician Caesarius, the same attitude is evident in his efforts to reach an agreement that would enable both sides to avoid bloodshed.[30] Another quite clear example of this awareness can be found in the letters that *comes* Bulgaranus exchanged with a Frankish bishop as part of diplomatic negotiations.[31]

However, this was one of the areas in which some clergymen's stance on war was particularly ambiguous. The criticism of the war was not ontological in nature; what was lamented were the contingent consequences of conflict – in short, the suffering caused in specific circumstances. Taio, bishop of Saragossa between 651 and 680, exemplifies this ambiguity of the Hispano-Visigothic clergy. In the letter-preface he dedicated to Quirico of Barcelona in his *Sententiae*, Taio offers the most precise description we have of the rebellion of Froia.[32] Naturally, Taio perceives Froia's usurpation as a calamity and laments all the crimes that are taking place in the course of that war.[33] Although he is pained by the surrounding reality, it becomes clear that his concern is not with war as such, but specifically with the conflict instigated by Froia. First of all, Taio interprets Froia's actions not only as a political revolt, but above all as a religious one. The rebellion is presented as an attack on God himself.[34]

poder en la Antigüedad Tardía y la Alta Edad Media (Madrid: Actas, 2008), 266–72; Cabello Llano, "'Heu pro dolor!,'" 66–76.

[29] *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, 4.33, ed. Wallace-Hadrill, 21-22.

[30] M. Vallejo, *Hispania y Bizancio. Una relación desconocida* (Madrid: Akal, 2012), 344–56; *La Hispania tardoantigua y visigoda en las fuentes epistolares. Antología y comentario*, ed. José Carlos Martín-Iglesias, Pablo C. Díaz Martínez and Margarita Vallejo Girvés. Nueva Roma 52 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2020), 517–23.

[31] Cabello Llano, "'Heu pro dolor!,'" 61–66. For Bulgaranus's letters, see the edition in *Epistulae [Wisigothicae]*, ep. 10-15, ed. Gil, 30-43. On these letters, see discussion in *La Hispania tardoantigua y visigoda en las fuentes epistolares. Antología y comentario*, ed. Martín-Iglesias, Díaz Martínez and Vallejo Girvés, 488–97.

[32] Taio, *Epistula ad Quiricum*, 4-16, ed. and trans. Julia Aguilar Miguel, "'Epistula ad Quiricum Barcinonensem antistitem' y 'Epigramma operis subsequentis' de Tajón de Zaragoza. Estudio, edición crítica y traducción," *Euphrosyne* 46 (2018): 181-204; *La Hispania tardoantigua y visigoda en las fuentes epistolares. Antología y comentario*, ed. Martín-Iglesias, Díaz Martínez and Vallejo Girvés, 656–58;

[33] Cabello Llano, "'Heu pro dolor!,'" 77–80.

[34] Bronisch, *Reconquista y guerra santa*, 90; idem, "Cosmovisión e ideología," in *La carisa y la mesa. Causas políticas y militares del origen del Reino de Asturias*, ed. Juan Ignacio Ruiz de la

Accordingly, Taio claims that his intention was to subdue "christianam patria"; he would not hesitate to describe Froia in religious terms: "illum uero tyrannicae superstitionis auctorem." For his part, the actions of Recceswinth, the legitimate and orthodox king, are interpreted as God's answer to the prayers of the poor. Recceswinth appears as a valiant warrior, aided by God himself. The narrative sets up a stark opposition between the model king and *tyrannus*.[35] The destruction of the rebels is even celebrated with the Song of Moses, a detail that points to the appropriation of Old Testament imagery in representations of warfare.[36] This makes clear that Taio does not regard war as inherently problematic; rather, it is violence not sanctioned by God and directed against the king that is understood as truly evil.

It was a king's Catholic faith that enabled God's grace to be channelled through his actions and thus war to become a positive element. The reign of Leovigild is a good example of this. His campaigns against the Byzantines, the Suevi, and various local communities that remained beyond central control find some justification in John of Biclaro or Isidore of Seville. Biclaro, for his part, did not hesitate to give a positive assessment of the king's conquests.[37] Leovigild's Arian affiliation is left entirely unjudged. Isidore of Seville, by contrast, while expressing a degree of admiration for Leovigild's military accomplishments, adds a notable caveat: "But the error of his impiety tarnished the glory of his great success."[38] The criticism is not harsh because we must

Peña Solar and Jorge Camino Mayor (Oviedo: Asociación de Amigos de la Carisa, 2010), 323.

[35] J. Á. Castillo Lozano, "La figura del 'tyrannus' en la tradición literaria del reino visigodo de Toledo a la luz de las obras de Juan de Bíclaro, Isidoro de Sevilla y Julián de Toledo," (unpublished PhD thesis, Universidad de Murcia, 2018), 29–30.

[36] Exod 15:6-8. The same chant is said to have been sung by the inhabitants of Merida in celebration of the victory over the Narbonese rebels during the reign of Reccared (*Vitas sanctorum patrum Emeretensium*, 5.12, ed. Antonio Maya Sánchez, Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 116, [Turnhout: Brepols, 1992], 94). See also M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 304–5. On the influence of the Old Testament on early medieval politics, see W. Ullmann, "The Bible and Principles of Government in the Middle Ages," in idem, *The Church and the Law in the Earlier Middle Ages: Selected Essays* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1975), 181–227.

[37] Some examples in *Juan de Biclaro. Obispo de Gerona. Su vida y su obra*, a. 569, 4; a. 572, 2; a. 574, 2, ed. Julio Campos (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1960), 80, 82, 84. See also Bronisch, *Reconquista y guerra santa,* 78. A critical view of the planned quest for peninsular unity in Poveda Arias, "¿Hacia la unidad de Hispania?," 73–92.

[38] Isidore, *Historia Gothorum*, chap. 49, ed. Rodríguez Alonso, 252-55. English translation from K. B. Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011 [1st ed.: 1990]), 67–90. Bronisch, *Reconquista y guerra santa*, 80–88.

remember that in Isidore's *Historia Gothorum* the Arian Goths are not portrayed primarily as heretics, but rather as future Catholics – people who are part of the divine plan.[39]

The shift in mentality took place with Reccared's conversion to Catholicism. The new king's embrace of the Catholic faith made it possible for God to extend his grace to the Goths in warfare as well. On this point, John of Biclaro is unequivocal. In recounting Reccared's victory over the Franks at the Battle of Carcassonne, he presents "gratia divina" and "fides catholica" as decisive elements of the triumph: "In this battle divine grace and the Catholic faith – which King Reccared along with the Goths had faithfully taken up were at work, since it is not a difficult thing for our God to give victory to a few over the many."[40] Moreover, he further imbues the victory with biblical resonance, likening it to Gideon's victory over the Midianites and considering the Goths as *populus Dei*. In doing so, John of Biclaro reveals how the conception of the *gens Gothorum* as a people of a new covenant was already taking shape in the heart of the Hispanic Church.[41] Isidore also considers it to be the greatest victory of the Goths.[42] A similar account is found in the *Vitas sanctorum patrum Emeretensium*, where the hagiographer describes the confrontation between certain Arian factions in Narbonensis and King Reccared at the outset of his reign. Composed in the 630s, this narrative shows a further development in the religious interpretation of warfare.[43] Here, God is not merely acting through Reccared: he becomes the principal agent in the battle itself. In response to the king's prayers, God personally exacts vengeance for the slaughter of Christians: "After this, sublime Almighty God did not delay to fight back against his enemies with his celestial power, avenging through the prayers of the most excellent prince Reccared the blood of the innocents, and exacting a wondrous immediate retribution on his enemies with his avenging scythe."[44]

For Isidore, the military prowess of the kings is an important quality that deserves recognition in historical narrative. For this reason, from the very

[39] Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, 19.

[40] *Juan de Biclaro. Obispo de Gerona. Su vida y su*, a. 590, 1, 97-99. English translation after Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, 51–66. See also Bronisch, *Reconquista y guerra santa*, 78–79. J. A. Castillo Lozano, "La sacralización de la guerra en la Antigüedad Tardía. La batalla de Carcasona (589) y los otros 300," *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar* 7.14 (2018): 94–114.

[41] Bronisch, "Cosmovisión e ideología," 319–20; Marschner, *Das neue Volk Gottes in Hispanien*, 498-99.

[42] Isidore, *Historia Gothorum*, chap. 54, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 262-65.

[43] Bronisch, *Reconquista y guerra santa*, 89.

[44] *Vitas sanctorum patrum Emeretensium*, 5.12, ed. Maya Sánchez, 93. English translation after A. T. Fear, *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers*, Translated texts for historians 26 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), 45-105.

opening of his *Historia Gothorum*, he praises the military strength of the Goths and celebrates the military victories and triumphs achieved by their kings. His intention was to affirm the military superiority of the Goths over other peoples.[45] In *De ortu et obitu patrum*, Isidore proposes King David as a model of kingship, but presents him more as a military leader than as a figure of wisdom.[46] In his thought, both war and peace are legitimate instruments of political rule.[47] However, the Isidorean ideal was far from the exaltation of war. His description of Reccared, in deliberate contrast to his father Leovigild, is telling: "He was a devout man, very different from his father in his way of life. For while the one was irreligious and had a very warlike disposition, the other was pious and outstanding in peace; while the one was increasing the dominion of the Gothic people through the arts of war, the other was gloriously elevating the same people by the victory of the faith."[48] For Isidore of Seville, peace through faith is a higher value than military conquests. Isidore went on to write about the reign of Reccared: "The provinces which his father conquered in war, Reccared preserved in peace, administered with equity, and ruled with moderation."[49] Through such writings, the Church, with Isidore at its head, sought to promote a model of kingship in which *iustitia* and *pietas* were the defining virtues of the monarch.[50] From these qualities would derive his style of governance shaped by the ideal of the *princeps christianus* as proposed by Gregory the Great.[51] The king was to be, above all, an

[45] Some examples in Isidore, *Historia Gothorum*, chaps. 54, 58, 61, 62, 64, ed. Rodríguez Alonso, 262-65, 268-71, 272-75, 274-77, 278-79. See also Wood, *The Politics of Identity*, 161–79.

[46] Isidore, *De ortu et obitu partum*, chap. 33.1, ed. César Chaparro Gómez (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1985), 152-153. See also Rodríguez de la Peña, *Los reyes sabios*, 276–77; D. Castro, "Modelos bíblicos para reyes visigodos. Un estudio a partir de las 'Sentencias' de Isidoro de Sevilla," *Espacio, tiempo y forma. Serie III* 28 (2015): 260.

[47] P J. E. Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings: Peace, Power, and the Early Medieval Political Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 111–12. Isidore defines war in Isidor, *Etimologiae*, 18.1, pp. 1214-1217. He confines himself to distinguishing its constituent elements and the various types of war, consistently following Ciceronian thought.

[48] Isidore, *Historia Gothorum*, chap. 52, ed. Rodríguez Alonso, 260-61.

[49] Ibid., chap. 55, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 264-67.

[50] For his model of kingship, see especially Isidore, *Sententiae*, 3.48–51, ed. Campos and Roca, 493-500. See also Cazier, *Isidore de Séville*, 235–62; M. Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville*, Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 243 (Rome: Ecole Française de Roma, 1981), 505–97; Wood, *The Politics of Identity*, 138–47; Rodríguez de la Peña, *Los reyes sabios*, 272–81; Castro, "Modelos bíblicos," 255– 73.

[51] On the Gregory the Great's ideal of kingship, see Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine*, 441–503.

administrator committed to building up the common good of his subjects, guaranteeing physical and spiritual integrity.[52] He could – and indeed should – resort to warfare when it was necessary to maintain the *pax* and *securitas* of the kingdom and the Church. Thus, the king's military capacity was always linked to his role as protector of the Church.[53] In essence, the project aimed to sublimate the traditional features of Gothic military kingship and redirect them to serve Christian purposes. The underlying logic of this ideological program was to reorient the monarch's martial duties toward the defence of orthodox faith and the unity of the Church —understood also in its territorial dimension.[54]

From the Third Council of Toledo (589) through the Isidorean period (d. 636), the ideological foundations of the kingdom were laid. During this time, some of the Gothic elites increasingly articulated an identity that cast the *gens Gothorum* as a people forging a new covenant with God. This process unfolded alongside the development of a biblical origin myth for the Goths, shaped deliberately by Isidore of Seville to support the emerging ideological framework of the kingdom. In the first redaction of the *Historia Gothorum*, Isidore simply traced the origins of the Goths back to the Scythians. However, in the second redaction – produced around 626, at a time when the politico-religious vision later codified at the Fourth Council of Toledo (633) was already taking shape – he revised this account. In this case, he places them as descendants of Magog, son of Japheth and grandson of Noah.[55] The origins of the Goths are thus directly linked to the Jewish Old Testament tradition. This reinterpretation of Gothic history proved central to Isidore's conception of war. This is why his *Laus Spaniae* is a praise of *Hispania* as a promised land chosen by God for the Goths to inhabit.[56] Through this subtle interplay of rhetorical strategies, the Goths are granted a privileged place in the unfolding of salvation history.

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[52] Reydellet, *Le royauté dans la littérature latine*, 541–43.

[53] M.ª R. Valverde Castro, *Ideología, simbolismo y ejercicio del poder real en la monarquía visigoda. Un proceso de cambio* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 2000), 233–36; Rodríguez de la Peña, *Los reyes sabios*, 276. On the other hand, the gradual preference for royal titles linked to the Christian vision of royalty to the detriment of those that made military allusions is significant, see M. C. Díaz y Díaz, "Titulaciones regias en la monarquía visigoda," *Revista Portuguesa de História* 16 (1976): 133–41; idem, "Más sobre epítetos regios en la Hispania visigótica," *Studi Medievali* 19 (1978): 317–33.

[54] Rodríguez de la Peña, *Los reyes sabios*, 272–78; Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature* latine, 534–35.

[55] Isidore, *Historia Gothorum*, chap. 1, ed. Rodríguez Alonso, 172-73. See also Bronisch, "Cosmovisión e ideología," 315–20.

[56] Bronisch, *Reconquista y guerra santa*, 84–88; Wood, *The Politics of Identity*, 179–88.

The attitude of the ecclesiastical hierarchy towards the war must be understood in the light of these efforts to shape new collective memory and the development of the politico-religious theory of power.[57] Authority was believed to originate in God, who entrusted it to a king of His choosing. The role of the nobility and clergy, at least in theory, was to confirm a decision already made by divine will. This doctrine found its ultimate expression in the ceremony of royal anointing and resulted in the sacralization of the figure of the monarch.[58] By receiving the status of *christus meus* – the Lord's anointed – the king was called to enact God's will for his people. Over time, the image of kingship shifted from a model resembling the imperial to one increasingly imbued with religious significance, closer to that of bishops or biblical kings.[59] The implications of this change were important, as it conferred a certain sacred character upon warfare itself.

In the late Visigothic period, Julian of Toledo devoted special attention to the issue of war.[60] Julian undertook the task of systematizing ideas favourable to war that already circulated in the mindset of his time. From the outset, he presents an ideal model of kingship in the figure of Wamba, portrayed as the living image of an Old Testament monarch subjugated to God's will.[61] Likewise, his depiction of the campaign against *dux* Paul is replete with Old Testament allusions, which serve not only to frame the war in biblical terms but also to Christianize it – that is, to render it acceptable to Christian conscience through scriptural justification. In this framework, war is no longer

[57] Valverde Castro, *Ideología, simbolismo y ejercicio del poder real*, 195–215.

[58] A. Barbero, "El pensamiento político visigodo y las primeras unciones regias en la Europa medieval," *Hispania* 115 (1970): 245–326; P. C. Díaz Martínez and M.ª Rosario Valverde Castro, "The Theoretical Strength and Practical Weakness of the Visigothic Monarchy of Toledo," in *Rituals of Power: From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Frans Theuws and Janet L. Nelson, The transformation of the Roman world 8 (Leiden, Boston MA and Cologne: Brill, 2000), 74–84; S. Teillet, *Des goths à la nation gotique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2011 [1st ed.: 1984]), 607–11.

[59] Teillet, *Des goths à la nation gotique*, 586–87.

[60] Regarding Julian of Toledo, see esp. J. N. Hillgarth, "St. Julian of Toledo in the Middle Ages," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21.1-2 (1958): 7–26; J. C. Martín-Iglesias, "Julián de Toledo," in *La Hispania visigótica y mozárabe. Dos épocas en su literatura*, ed. Carmen Codoñer, Obras de referencia 28 (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 2010), 155–72. The most comprehensive study on this figure and his writings is S. Pabst, *Das theologische Profil des Julian von Toledo. Das Leben und Wirken eines westgotischen Bischofs des siebten Jahrhunderts*, Supplements to Vigiliae christianae 165 (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

[61] Teillet, *Des goths à la nation gotique*, 599–602; G. García Herrero, "Julián de Toledo y la realeza visigoda," *Antigüedad y cristianismo* 8 (1991): 201–55.

perceived as a mere political instrument but becomes a genuine *iudicium Dei*.[62] When conducted in accordance with God's will and the dictates of divine law, war is by its very nature just.[63] It becomes an expression of God's justice, made manifest through the agency of the king. In this case, martial values are embedded in an exemplary context, serving as a behavioural model for the warrior aristocracy.[64] Military *virtus* is to be shaped by loyalty to the legitimate sovereign, piety, clemency, and a striving for justice – always within an Old Testament framework.[65] Underlying this vision is a nascent glorification of war conceived as sacred. This tolerance of violence in the name of justice clearly surfaces in Julian's *Antikeimena.* In one of the questions, he contrasts *Psalm* 4:5 with the *Epistle to the Ephesians* 4:26,[66] posing the problem of the relationship between anger and sin. For Julian, there is an anger that comes from an irrational impulse, traditionally condemned as a vice. But there is also a righteous anger – *zelus iustitiae* – which is positive, for it leads to the

[62] See esp. Julian of Toledo, *Historia Wambae regis*, chaps. 10, 12 and 25, ed. Wilhelm Levison, in Iulianus Toletanus, *Sancti Iuliani Toletanae sedis episcopi opera. Pars I*, ed. Jocelyn Nigel Hillgarth, Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 115 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), 226-27; 228-29; 239-40. Also, *Iudicium in tyrannorum perfidia promulgatum*, 1, ed. Wilhelm Levison, in Iulianus Toletanus, *Sancti Iuliani Toletanae sedis episcopi opera. Pars I*, ed. Jocelyn Nigel Hillgarth, Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 115 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), 250-51. See also Bronisch, *Reconquista y guerra santa*, 91–96. On war as divine judgement, especially in intracultural contexts, see M. Clauss, "Der Krieg als Mittel und Thema der Kommunikation. Die narrative Funktion des Gottesurteils," in *Gottes Werk und Adams Beitrag. Formen der Interaktion zwischen Mensch und Gott im Mittelalter*, ed. Thomas Honegger, Gerlinde Huber-Rebenich and Volker Leppin, Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung. Beihefte 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 128–41.

[63] Isidore. *De differentiis*, 1.20, ed. and trans. Carmen Codoñer, Auteurs latins du Moyen Âge 8 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1992), 94-95.

[64] Rodríguez de la Peña, *Los reyes sabios*, 294–96. On the work as *exemplum*, see R. Collins, "Julian of Toledo and the Education of Kings in Late Seventh-Century Spain," in *Law, Culture and Regionalism in Early Medieval Spain* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1992): 20-22.

[65] The Old Testament models were addressed to the laity, while the New Testament models were proposed for the religious, see Cazier, *Isidore de Séville*, 241.

[66] Julian of Toledo, *Antikeimenon*, 1.62, ed. José Carlos Martín-Iglesias, in Iulianus Toletanus, Felix Toletanus, Iulianus Toletanus (Ps.), *Opera II: Elogium Ildefonsi, Vita Iuliani (auctore Felice Toletano), Antikeimena, Fragmenta, Ordo annorum mundi*, ed. José Carlos Martín-Iglesias and Valeriano Yarza Urquiola, Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 115B (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 198-201. On the *Antikeimena*, see Pabst, *Das theologische Profil des Julian von Toledo,* 300–51.

establishment of justice.[67] It is this distinction that underlies Julian's broader reflection on war: for him, the act of war becomes a work of divine justice. What had traditionally been regarded as a vice could be channelled in a valid way for Julian.[68]

This shift in perceptions of war gave rise to the formation of a war liturgy. It is difficult to determine the precise moment when this liturgical *ordo* was composed. Bronisch has argued that the parallels between the war liturgy and Julian of Toledo's *Historia Wambae* suggest Julian's involvement in its composition.[69] According to the biography of Julian written by Felix of Toledo, the bishop undertook a liturgical reform primarily aimed at codifying the liturgy.[70] Although Julian may have systematised the war liturgy as part of this reform, it cannot be ruled out that he may have been working with liturgical materials that predated him by several decades.

It was through the development and consolidation of the liturgy of war that the Church participated more fully in warfare. The liturgy included both an *ordo* for when the king went on military campaign (*Ordo quando rex cum exercitu ad prelium egreditur*), with a rich ceremony full of allusions to the Old Testament and to God's role as *Deus exercituum*,[71] and another for the king's return

[67] Isidore does not seem to make this double distinction of anger. He sees it as a vice to be repressed by patience and continence. See Isidore, *Sententiae*, 2.37.4, ed. Campos and Roca, 373; idem, *Etymologiae*, 10.C.35, ed. Oroz Reta and Marcos Casquero, 798-99; idem, *De differentiis*, 1.23 and 1.92, ed. Codoñer, 96-97 and 130-31. In fact, he expresses strong disapproval of irascible bishops, see Isidore, *Sententiae*, 3.40, ed. Campos and Roca, 479. Later authors, however, continued this line of distinction between the vice of anger and anger as *zelus iustitiae*. See E. Mitre, *Pecados y pecadores de la Edad Media. Ortodoxos frente a disidentes* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2023), 116–18.

[68] This tension between anger as a vice and anger as *zelus iustitiae* is present in both classical authors and Christian authors such as Gregory the Great and Augustine, for example. On this question, see S. J. Spencer, *Emotions in a Crusading Context, 1095-1291* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 177–83.

[69] Bronisch, *Reconquista y guerra santa*, 108.

[70] See *Vita s. Iuliani (BHL 4554)*, chap. 6, in José Carlos Martín-Iglesias, "Relatos hagiográficos sobre algunos obispos de la España medieval en traducción. Ildefonso y Julián de Toledo (*BHL* 3917 y 4454), Isidoro de Sevilla (*BHL* 4488) y Froilán de Léon (*BHL* 3180)," *Veleia* 28 (2011): 218. On Julian's liturgical reform, see J. Janini, *Liber missarum de Toledo*, vol. 2 (Toledo: Instituto de estudios visigóticos y mozárabes, 1983), XXXII-XXXV.

[71] *Le "Liber Ordinum" en usage dans l'Église wisigotique et mozarabe d'Espagne*, ed. Marius Férotin. Monumenta Ecclesiae liturgica 5 (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot, 1904), cols. 149–53. English translation in J N. Hillgarth, *Christianity and Paganism, 350-750: The Conversion of Western Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 93–95. On this *ordo*, see J. Janini, "El 'ordo' ceremonial de la reconquista cuando el rey y su ejército salían a la guerra," *Anales Valentinos* 11.21 (1985): 148-50; McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 297–327;

(*Orationes de regressu regis*), which would consist mainly of prayers to give thanks for the return and to implore for the king's health and the maintenance of peace.[72] Furthermore, according to Collins, the missing rubrics would deal with the manner in which the relic of the cross that had been taken to war was returned in times of peace.[73] Likewise, since the Council of Merida (666), daily masses were to be offered in all the churches of the kingdom for the safety of the king and his army, as well as for victory on the battlefield.[74]

The liturgical regulation of war constituted an ideological intervention by some sectors of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This could be interpreted in two ways. The first would be that the Church became the ultimate authority, able to confer legitimacy on the king's military initiatives. The second, on the other hand, could imply a further degree of subordination of the Church to the crown, which would have to bow to the king's wishes and limit itself to granting them religious validity. It could also be a combination of the two, a logical consequence of the dynamics of collaboration and tension between the king and the episcopate.

It was expected that the spirit of penance and spiritual purity would be maintained during military campaigns. This was deemed the only way to maintain communion with God and thus to secure his favour for the final victory. One of the most striking examples is that of King Wamba after the victory against the Vascons. Julian of Toledo recounts how the soldiers were dulled by the lust for plunder and how they raped the Vascon women. Wamba, who is presented as a model of a Christian king, understood that he bore the responsibility for correcting the sin of his people. As a form of punishment, he ordered the foreskins of the offending soldiers to be cut off. Julian places in the background the biblical passage of Eli who suffered death for not rebuking his sons for their misconduct.[75] Certain excesses were impermissible in a war understood as a divine *examen* – a sacred trial in which the moral conduct of the combatants was subject to God's scrutiny.[76] On the other hand, particular

Bronsich, *Reconquista y guerra santa*, 101–12. On the hymn *De profectione exercitus*, which was to be sung during the departure of the army for the campaign, see also Díaz y Díaz, "Noticias históricas," 445–48.

[72] *Le "Liber Ordinum,"* 49; Bronisch, *Reconquista y guerra santa*, 113–16.

[73] R. Collins, "Continuity and Loss in Medieval Spanish Culture: The Evidence of MS Silos, Archivo Monástico 4," in *Medieval Spain: Culture, Conflict and Coexistence*, ed. Roger Collins and Anthony Goodman (Gordonsville, VA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 8.

[74] Council of Mérida c. 3, ed. José Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispanorromanos* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas), 327-28. McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 305.

[75] Julian of Toledo, *Historiae Wambae regis*, chap. 10, ed. Levison, 226-27.

[76] Bronisch, *Reconquista y guerra santa*, 105: Michałowski, "Christianisation of the Piast Monarchy in the 10th and 11th Centuries," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 101 (2010): 26-28.

behaviours were praised that served to temper the violence of war. The most telling example is that of Sisebut, who, in the course of a campaign against the Byzantines ordered the release of prisoners taken by his troops.[77] His clemency appears as one of the key virtues of the warrior-king – one who should not be bloodthirsty, but merciful.[78] Finally, warfare itself was subject to a temporal framework of sacred observance. In keeping with classical Roman tradition, fighting was permitted on designated *praeliares* days, while others – such as Sundays and Easter – were to be respected and reserved for the Lord.[79]

In short, war was one of the instruments that monarchs had at hand to fulfil their function of justice and the maintenance of order. However, the king, as God's anointed, has become the only authority competent to declare wars legitimately and to exercise violence against rebels and seditionists in order to maintain the political and social coherence of the kingdom. It was the Church's role to bestow religious sanction upon the king's martial actions, interpreting them as efforts in the service of *pax* and *iustitia*.[80]

B. Monasticism, Sanctity and War

Within the Church, monasticism represented a distinct and particular reality. First of all, the choice of monastic life entailed a renunciation of the world – including secular glory, and by extension, warfare – which made the two lifestyles incompatible. Yet the monks did not renounce the world for nothing, but rather in pursuit of a higher good. The path to salvation required a life of asceticism, prayer, and the cultivation of virtue. In short, a sustained spiritual

[77] Isidore, *Historia Gothorum*, chap. 61, ed. Rodríguez Alonso, 272-74.

[78] Cazier, *Isidore de Séville*, 244-–48. This balance between the warrior and clement character of a monarch is again illuminated by the figure of David in Isidore, *De ortu et obitu partum*, chap. 33, ed. Chaparro Gómez, 152-55.

[79] See Isidore's *De natura rerum*, 1.4, ed. Jacques Fontaine, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études Hispaniques 28 (Bordeaux: Féret et fils, éditeurs, 1969), 178-79. This is evident in several passages from sources, where it is explicitly noted that war should not be waged during Easter (Orosio, *Historias. Libros V-VII*, 7.37, ed. and trans. Eustaquio Sánchez, Biblioteca clásica Gredos 54 (Madrid: Gredos, 1982), 261-65; *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the "Consularia Constantinopolitana,"* ed. Richard W. Burgess (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), chap. 194 [199], p. 113, or on Sundays (Isidore, *Historia Gothorum*, chap. 42, ed. Rodríguez Alonso, 242-43).

[80] Peace was conceived as a phase of the cycle of war by Isidore, see Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 18.1.11, ed. Oroz Reta and Marcos Casquero, 1216-17. This martial conception of peace is reflected in the Council of Mérida, opening, ed. Vives, 325, or III Council of Zaragoza, closure, ed. José Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispanorromanos* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas), 480-81.

labour aimed at ongoing personal conversion and ever-deeper conformity to the models of sanctity.[81]

The ways of life prescribed in various monastic rules were hardly compatible with those of the earthly *militia*.[82] Within the communal setting of the monastery, monks tried to overcome their vices and strengthen their virtues in order to live fully dedicated to God. In this sense, the monks had to avoid the use of any kind of violence.[83] In this regard, the case of Fructuosus is particularly illustrative. His systematic and radical rejection of violence extended even to shielding a roe deer from hunters in order to spare its life.[84] Another noteworthy episode involves Fructuosus's nonviolent resistance in the face of aggression by a villager who had mistaken him for a fugitive.[85] It is striking that the monastic authors do not differentiate between the two types of anger as Julian of Toledo did, but instead unanimously consider anger a vice to be controlled to achieve inner peace.

The case of Ildephonsus of Toledo is particularly revealing. The bishop, a member of one of the great families of the *urbs regia*, had previously embraced the monastic life at the monastery of Agali.[86] His monastic formation left a lasting imprint on him. In his treatise called *De itinere deserti*, a continuation of

[81] P. C. Díaz Martínez, "La conversión personal como instrumento de salvación en el eremitismo y en el monacato visigodo," in *Œuvrer pour le salut. Moines, chanoines et frères dans la péninsule Ibérique au Moyen Âge*, ed. Amélie de las Heras, Florian Gallon and Nicolas Pluchot (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2019), 17–37.

[82] An apt description of the way of life of the monks in Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, 2.16.11–15, ed. Christopher Lawson, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 113 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989), 77-78. On the Visigothic monastic ideal, see A. Linage Conde, "El ideal monástico de los padres visigóticos," *Ligarzas* 1 (1968): 79–97; J. A. Testón Turiel, *La vivencia monástica en las tradiciones regulares de San Isidoro de Sevilla y San Fructuoso de Braga. Origen y diferencia de una doble corriente espiritual en la antigüedad tardía hispana*, Publicaciones de la Facultad de Teología del Norte de España, sede de Burgos 81 (Burgos: Facultad de Teología del Norte de España, 2015); P. Barata Dias, "L'idéal monastique, les moines et les monastères du monde wisigothique selon Isidore de Séville," *Antiquité Tardive* 23 (2015): 143–54.

[83] There was a type of legitimate violence in the monasteries that was used to punish the monks' faults and to correct them. However, this type of violence was exercised by the authority of the monastery. The monks, on an individual level, renounced violence. See P. C. Díaz Martínez, "Violencia en el monasterio, violencia contra el monasterio: conflictividad en el monacato hispano del siglo VII," in *Conflicto y violencia en los monasterios hispanos medievales*, ed. José Ángel García de Cortázar and Ramón Teja Casuso (Aguilar de Campoo: Fundación Santa María la Real, 2021), 15–35.

[84] See *Vita Fructuosi*, chap. 10, in *La vida de san Fructuoso de Braga. Estudio y edición crítica* (Braga: Empresa do Diário do Minho, 1974), 94-97.

[85] Ibid., chap. 11, 98-101. Another example of peaceful resistance, see *Vitas sanctorum patrum Emeretensium*, 5.6, ed. Maya Sánchez 62-71.

[86] Martín-Iglesias, "Relatos hagiográficos," 212–15.

his earlier work *De cognitione baptismi*, Ildephonsus proposes a desert as a metaphor for earthly life – an image that clearly echoes the exodus of the people of Israel. Across several chapters of the work, he outlines a spiritual itinerary leading toward eternity. Its particular value lies in the way Ildephonsus adapts monastic spirituality for Christians living in the secular world, offering them a path by which they too might attain salvation. In line with monastic tradition, the bishop of Toledo identifies a number of spiritual diseases to be avoided: contentions (*contentiones*), rivalries (*aemulationes*), anger (*irae*), rifts (*rixae*), dissensions (*dissensiones*), factions (*haereses*), envy (*enuidiae*) or homicides (*homicidia*).[87] In the next chapter, continuing his commentary on the *Epistle to the Galatians*, Ildephonsus presents the virtues that nourish the soul and draw the baptized toward spiritual fulfilment: charity, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, patience, gentleness, moderation, self-control, chastity.[88] The model of life he proposes for the laity is thus shaped far more by the evangelical spirituality cultivated in monastic settings than by the prevailing martial ideals of his time.

Participation in wars could hinder the monk's path to salvation, exposing him to the dangers of greed, lust and the exercise of unnecessary violence. While monastic and ascetic texts do not contain an outright condemnation of war, they clearly present an incompatibility between the monastic vocation and the life of the soldier – an incompatibility that occasionally gave rise to tension.[89] A compelling indication that monasteries functioned outside the military dynamics of the kingdom is their frequent role as places of exile and political banishment.[90] Tonsure effectively removed individuals from the political sphere; those who received it were excluded from holding power. Cases of politically motivated tonsure are numerous, though the most famous is undoubtedly that of Wamba, which became a matter of considerable debate at the Twelfth Council of Toledo.[91] The contrast between these two social spheres – monastic and military – is vividly illustrated in a passage from the *Vita Fructuosi*. According to the hagiographer, several *duces* complained to the king about the overwhelming popularity of the Fructuosian movement,[92]

[87] *Santos Padres españoles, I. San Ildefonso de Toledo*, ed. Julio Campos, Biblioteca de autores cristianos 320 (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1971), 397.

[88] Ibid., 398.

[89] D. Pérez Sánchez, *El ejército en la sociedad visigoda*, Acta Salmanticensia 57 (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1989), 143–45; A. Isla, *Ejército, sociedad y política en la Península Ibérica entre los siglos VII y XI* (Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, 2010), 94.

[90] A. Prego de Lis, "La pena de exilio en la legislación visigoda," *Antigüedad y cristianismo* 23 (2006): 515–29.

[91] XII Council of Toledo, c. 2, ed. Martínez Díez and Rodríguez, 155-58.

[92] *La vida de san Fructuoso de Braga*, chap. 14, 104-7.

claiming that no one was willing to join the army. This was not the only military-related conflict associated with Fructuosus. When the saint decided to found a monastery on his lands, he had a confrontation with his brother-in-law, Visinand. According to Amancio Isla's interpretation of this episode, the dispute's root was military. By compelling the family's servants to enter religious life, Fructuosus was effectively reducing the military potential of the kin group, and by extension, that of Visinand himself.[93]

Monasteries, while espousing an ideal of asceticism and renunciation of the world, were deeply embedded in the fabric of society.[94] They responded to societal needs while uniting the heavenly and the earthly through communal liturgy and prayer.[95] It was likely owing to this indispensable religious function that monasteries were consistently exempted from military obligations. In any case, as far as the available evidence suggests, no specific war liturgy was developed within monastic contexts during the Visigothic period. Their liturgical responsibility was limited to offering masses for the king's victory, as mandated for all churches of the kingdom at the Council of Merida (666).[96] Nonetheless, military language was deeply familiar to Late Antique societies and exerted a strong influence on Christian discourse.[97] This led to an assimilation of military imagery into the ascetic life. Though such metaphors originated in the Late Roman period, they gained particular prominence in the seventh century. The monks were envisioned as *milites Christi*, engaged in the most important of battles – one not waged with violence or death, but with spiritual weapons – fighting against the evil that dwelled in the world.[98]

In monastic environments, there was a preference for a way of life far removed from conflict and external violence. There is no ontological rejection

[93] Isla, *Ejército, sociedad y política*, 103–8.

[94] P. C. Díaz Martínez, *Formas económicas y sociales del monacato visigodo*, Acta Salmanticensia 53 (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1989).

[95] F. Gallon, "Médiations monastiques et salut dans le Moyen Âge ibérique," in *Œuvrer pour le salut*, 97–103. A monographic study on this reality of the monasteries in the Carolingian world in R. S. Choy, *Intercessory Prayer and the Monastic Ideal in the Time of the Carolingian Reforms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[96] Council of Mérida, c. 3, ed. Vives, 327-28.

[97] L. Sarti, *Perceiving War and the Military in Early Christian Gaul (ca. 400-700 A.D.)*, Brill's series on the early Middle Ages 22 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), 330-334. On the development of the language of spiritual combat and its implications during the Middle Ages, see K. A. Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture*, Studies in the history of medieval religion 37 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), 9-38.

[98] On the perception of evil in the Visigothic kingdom and its reflection in hagiography, see G. M. Favaro Esteves, "Entre santos e demônios. A percepçâo do Mal na teología e hagiografías do Reino Visigodo de Toledo (séculos VI-VIII)" (unpublished PhD thesis, Universidade Estadual Paulista, 2015).

of war – since it is seen as an obligation of the warrior aristocracy – but there is a greater sensitivity to alternative conceptions of society. This outlook also finds expression in the social projection of the figure of the *holy man* through hagiography. By this time, the *holy man* was no longer exclusively a monk; also, clerics and bishops could be regarded as bearers of sanctity. In large part due to the influence of Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis*, the episcopal office would acquire an ascetic and contemplative dimension, one meant to complement the bishop's pastoral responsibilities.[99] The Visigothic saint functioned as a unifying force within society.[100] For this reason, the image that the hagiography of the seventh century attempts to project – most notably in the *Lives of the Holy Fathers of Merida* – is that of the Catholic community bound together in the shared joy provoked by the presence of the holy man.[101] The role the Church sought to assume in society – or at least the role envisioned by certain ecclesiastical circles – was that of the cohesive centre of the Christian community, unified through the sanctity of its exemplars. These holy men not only fostered concord but also spurred Christians to lead lives of deeper holiness. This is the model of idyllic social pacification. A similar vision of governance is articulated by Valerius of Bierzo in his admonitions to the powerful. He exhorts them to care for the needy in society, to be compassionate, affable, to keep their eyes always on the heavenly realities that await them and to "perfectam plenamque propagate pacem."[102] The perfect peace he envisioned is not merely the absence of armed conflict, but the possibility of the construction of a more just and unified social body through genuinely evangelical attitudes.

It is significant that the authors who most explicitly depicted the sufferings of war often emerge from monastic backgrounds. The intense spiritual and intellectual formation fostered in the monasteries, – designed to lead monks

[99] T. Renna, "The Idea of Peace in the West, 500-1150," *Journal of Medieval History* 6.2 (1980): 149–50. On the model of holiness proposed in the *Pastoral Rule* and its influence on the Iberian Peninsula, see J. Fernández Alonso, *La cura pastoral en la España romanovisigoda* (Rome: Iglesia Nacional Española, 1955), 121–35.

[100] S. Castellanos, "The Significance of Social Unanimity in a Visigothic Hagiography: Keys to an Ideological Screen," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11.3 (2003): 387–419. On the virtues of these peacemaking leaders, see P. Ubric, "Destrezas y atributos del líder hacedor de paz. Reflexiones desde el cristianismo tardoantiguo," in *Estudios en cultura de paz, conflictos, educación y derechos humanos. In memoriam Francisco A. Muñoz*, ed. Cristina E. Coca Villar et al., Psicología / Educación 13 (Madrid: Síntesis, 2015), 199–208.

[101] One of the most significant passages is *Vitas sanctorum patrum Emeretensium* 5.5.3-7, ed. Maya Sánchez, 56-58.

[102] Valerio del Bierzo, *Epitameron de quibusdam admonitionibus vel rogationibus*, 8, ed. Manuel Cecilio Díaz y Díaz, in his *Valerio del Bierzo. Su persona. Su obra*, Fuentes y estudios de historia leonesa 111 (León: Centro de estudios e investigación San Isidoro, 2006), 346.

and young men to renounce worldly ideals and embrace the fullness of the spiritual life – undoubtedly shaped this distinct sensibility. Despite his ambivalent stance on war, shaped in part by the prevailing attitudes of his time, Taio was quite crude in showing the sufferings that the Froia revolt had caused. Before becoming bishop, Taio had served as abbot of a monastery near Saragossa, a background that likely informed his perspective.[103] Eugenius II of Toledo, by contrast, was initially trained within the Toledo clergy but later withdrew to embrace a monastic and eremitical life in the monastery of the Eighteen Martyrs in Saragossa.[104] He would become the most celebrated poet of Visigothic Hispania, having bequeathed more than one hundred *carmina*. Peace is one of the most recurrent themes in Eugenius's poetry. One of his liturgical hymns, composed around 653 in the context of Froia's rebellion, is a prayerful plea for the restoration of peace and tranquillity.[105] The desire for peace that Eugenius expresses is far from abstract; it is grounded in concrete experience reality and shaped by his direct witness to the horrors of war.[106] Closely related is *carmen* 36, entitled *Redintegratio pacis*, written shortly thereafter in celebration of the return to peace.[107] The poem conveys great joy at the re-establishment of the order willed by God. Yet without doubt, Eugenius's most beautiful composition on peace is the *De bono pacis*.[108] In this poem, he expresses the fullness of the peaceful ideal characteristic of Christianity in general and monastic spirituality in particular. Rooted in the conviction that Christ is the true source of all peace, Eugenius affirms that peace radiates outward from the person who harbours it within, flowing into and transforming the wider fabric of society.

Other figures, such as Valerius of Bierzo, Fructuosus of Braga or Ildephonsus of Toledo, have already been mentioned in this regard. While this tendency may in part be explained by the greater volume of texts produced in monastic settings, I am inclined to believe that the very nature of monasticism itself also played a formative role. Nevertheless, this remains an area that will require further investigation in future research.

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[103] *Braulionis Caesaraugustani epistulae*, ep. 35, in *Braulionis Caesaraugustani epistulae et Isidori Hispalensis epistulae Braulionem*, ed. Ruth Miguel Franco and José C. Martín, Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 114B (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 107-13.

[104] See *De viris illustribus*, 13.1, in *El "De viris illustribus" de Ildefonso de Toledo. Estudio y edición crítica*, ed. Carmen Codoñer (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1972), 132-33.

[105] *Eugenii Toletani Carmina*, *carmen* 5b, ed. Alberto, 213-15.

[106] Cabello, "'Heu pro dolor!,'" 85.

[107] Pilarski, *Der "Libellus Carminum,"* 179–84.

[108] *Eugenii Toletani Carmina*, *carmen* 4, ed. Alberto, 210. See also Pilarski, *Der "Libellus Carminum,"* 154–55; Cabello Llano, "'Heu pro dolor!,'" 84–85.

II. Final considerations: Church, War and the Struggle for Power

To conclude this chapter, I would offer a brief reflection on the following question: why did the sacralization of war gain momentum in the second half of the seventh century? I find this question particularly compelling, as it sheds light on the complex and often ambiguous relationship of the Church and warfare in the Visigothic kingdom. While the Church formally rejected the participation of its members in armed conflict and acknowledged the suffering war inflicted upon society, it was simultaneously entering into a process of religious military exaltation. It may be tempting to view this development as part of an unbroken sequence beginning with Constantine the Great, culminating inevitably in the sacralization of war in the early Middle Ages. Yet while the alliance between Church and political power undoubtedly had far-reaching consequences for Christian conceptions of warfare, such a teleological reading must be set aside. Instead, each historical moment must be examined on its own terms, with careful attention to the specific contexts and contingencies that shaped ecclesiastical attitudes toward war.

As I have argued throughout the chapter, Reccared's conversion to Catholicism marked a considerable change in mentality. The Goths began to perceive themselves as a new people of God and thus came to understand their role as one of privileged participation in the unfolding of salvation history. The growing use of the Old Testament imagery in relation to warfare facilitated a reinterpretation of war – not merely as a consequence of sin, but as a moment in which God might manifest his grace and favour upon his chosen people. In short, although war remained a time of penance, it was increasingly conceived as a time of grace as well.

The Church, alongside the monarchy and the nobility, constituted one of the three pillars of the Visigothic kingdom.[109] These institutions both shared and contested power, and it is within the framework of their mutual tensions that the Church's seemingly contradictory relationship with war must be understood. The Church's level of influence varied depending on the monarch who occupied the throne. The reigns of Chindasuinth and Recceswinth were marked by significant restrictions on ecclesiastical power.[110] Both kings sought

[109] On the role as counterpowers of the Church and the nobility, see Valverde Castro, *Ideología, simbolismo y ejercicio del poder real*, 255–75.

[110] On the reigns of Chindasuinth and Recceswinth, see E. A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 190–217; F. J. Guzmán Armario, "Los reinados de Chindasvinto y Recesvinto. Un misterio hagiográfico sobre el concepto de segregación social en la *Hispania* visigoda," in *Marginados sociales y religiosos en la Hispania tardorromana*

to consolidate royal authority at the expense of the Church, which was the true hegemonic institution. During these central decades of the seventh century, the political tension between the kings, the nobility and the Church gave rise to a broader social preoccupation with peace.[111] Wamba, for his part, was opposed by certain sectors of the Church because of his particularly interventionist approach to ecclesiastical affairs.[112] However, the rise of Erwig was a real turning point for the Church. This king was particularly weak in exercising his power and needed all possible support from the bishops to secure his position.[113] The price he paid was the subordination of the crown to the Church. Not surprisingly, this period coincided with the episcopate of Julian of Toledo, who wielded the highest degree of influence of any Hispano-Visigothic bishop in the *regnum*.[114]

It is within this context, I believe, that we must situate the Church's specific development of its perspective on war. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, warfare was an essential instrument of political legitimation for the warrior aristocracies of the Visigothic kingdom. The Church, however, was unable to participate directly in this power struggle through its clergy due to its own moral and spiritual principles. In this sense, war was – *a priori* – a domain in which only the king and the nobility could assert and reinforce their authority.

This, in short, was part of the development of the politico-religious theory that had begun with the Third and Fourth Councils of Toledo. Through the sacralization of the monarch, the Church had already secured a role in legitimising one magnate over others. Now, by sanctifying war itself, it positioned itself as an authority capable of bestowing religious legitimacy on the campaigns waged by kings. This did not mean, of course, that the king lost his own authority. On more than a few occasions, the Church yielded to the will of the monarch, as had occurred repeatedly throughout the seventh century. Nevertheless, through the development of liturgical rites and the

y visigoda, ed. Raúl González Salinero, Thema mundi 5 (Madrid and Salamanca: Signifer, 2013), 317-38; D. Ungvary, "The Voice of the Dead King Chindasuinth: Poetry, Politics, and the Discourse of Penance in Visigothic Spain," *Early Medieval Europe* 26.3 (2018): 327–54.

[111] Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings*, 112–17.

[112] Among the main causes of friction would be his military law or his attempts to create new episcopates in *Aquae* or in the basilica of the Holy Apostles in Toledo, see Thompson, *The Goths in Spain*, 228–31.

[113] The subordinate role of Erwig to the Church is reflected in the acts of the XII Council of Toledo, both in the *tomus regius* and in c. 1 (ed. Martínez Díez and Rodríguez, 140-55), in which the bishops reaffirm their ability to sanction the legitimacy of a monarch.

[114] L. A. García Moreno, "Disenso religioso y hegemonía política," *Ilu* 2 (1999): 59-63.

adoption of a benevolent view of warfare, the Church was entering the political arena. At the ideological level, the Church would participate in the monopoly of state violence. It provided the basis for the monarchy to justify its monopoly on war and to consolidate its power in cooperation with the Church, without the Church being completely involved in the act of war.

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