

The Struggle for Past Glories:  
Pope Pius XI's Use of Terminology to Combat Anti-Clericalism

Amanda Weickert  
History 586-B, Undergraduate Research Seminar on the Crusades  
Kansas State University  
Spring 2013  
Instructor: Prof. David Defries

## Abstract

In 1936 Pope Pius XI published *Vigilanti Cura*, an encyclical letter that criticized the morality of the motion picture industry. Though the terms *certamen* and crusade do not mean the same thing, there were multiple instances where Pius XI had *certamen* officially translated into “holy crusade” in multiple languages within his encyclicals, including *Vigilanti Cura*. One possible reason for this is that the nineteenth century saw a significant rise in popularity of the Crusades, possibly influencing Pius’s view of his social and religious campaigns. The encyclical *Vigilanti Cura* uses the term crusade multiple times, implying Pius’s conviction that the campaign against the film industry was exactly that. Along with trying to associate his campaigns with the medieval Crusades to increase support and enthusiasm for them, Pope Pius XI was also trying to associate the enthusiasm for the medieval Crusades with the Catholic Church, taking advantage of the positive attitude toward righteous action and using it for his own ends.

## Introduction

In 1936, the Roman Catholic pope Pius XI (1922-1939) published *Vigilanti Cura*, an encyclical letter in which he criticized the motion picture industry. In the encyclical, Pius elaborated on previous warnings he had issued to Catholics and on previous reprimands to film producers about the evils of immoral cinema. Because he believed that the surge in popularity and accessibility of movies in the early twentieth century had significant impacts on the public, especially youths, his goal was “to make of the cinema a valuable auxiliary of instruction and education rather than of destruction and ruin of souls.”<sup>1</sup> In order to do that, the pope called on all Catholics across the globe, but especially in America where movie studios had recently been established in Hollywood. When describing the movement he envisioned, Pius highlighted the work of the Legion of Decency, a Catholic group interested in the moral fiber of the movie industry. He claimed that their “*sanctissimum certamen*” (most holy struggle) was starting to bear fruit.<sup>2</sup> Though not the first time he had used the Latin term *certamen* (struggle) in an encyclical, this specific reference is interesting because in the official translations of the encyclical *certamen* is rendered as “holy crusade” in various languages. Although scholars have not called attention to this translation, it is an important indication of Pius's attempts to associate his social campaigns with the medieval Crusades. In light of the still-prevalent anti-clericalism in Europe at the time, Pope Pius XI was also trying to associate the enthusiasm for the medieval Crusades with the Catholic Church, taking advantage of the positive attitude toward righteous action and using it for his own ends. Though Pius has been studied primarily in the sidelines of a larger topic, neglected instead for his more famous predecessor and successor to the Holy City, his interesting terminology gives a unique perspective into a brief period of time in the twentieth century, immediately before World War II, that the crusading culture was met with enthusiasm rather than revulsion and cynicism.

## The Crusades and the Term “crusade”

It is difficult to define a crusade. When Pope Urban II (1088-1099) toured France in 1095, speaking at conventions and calling for Christians to journey to Jerusalem in order to take back the Holy Land from Muslim Turks, there had been no crusading culture to reference, leaving Urban only the biblical wars to use to stir enthusiasm for the campaign.<sup>3</sup> The justification for the war, then, became summarized in the famous chant, “God wills it!”<sup>4</sup> Despite Urban’s reluctance to associate his call for armed excursion into the Holy Land from the religious idea of a pilgrimage, within the first few years of the First Crusade the idea of the crusade became closely associated with a pilgrimage, the spiritual journey to Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> It was possibly the difference between Urban’s idea of that first crusade and the general attitude toward it that led to no one term being used to

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Pius XI. “Vigilanti Cura (On Motion Pictures).” (Encyclical of Pope Pius XI from a speech given in St. Peter’s Square, Rome, June 29, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Pius XI. “Vigilanti Cura.”

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2011), 22.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Tyerman, *The Crusades: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12. The original French saying was, “Deus lo volt!”

<sup>5</sup> Tyerman. *Debate on the Crusades*. 23.

describe a crusade. To Urban's dismay, the terms *peregrinatio* (pilgrimage) and *militia* (military or campaign) were often tied together and were even used to describe participation in a crusade, though there were many others, as well.<sup>6</sup> It was not until the thirteenth century that any real study was done on the Crusades, identifying the series of battles as part of the same phenomenon, each subsequent holy war relying on the first as a legal precedent, a moral imperative, and providing the basis for one centralized term to describe the entire collection of holy wars.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that there was not one term to describe a crusade until the late 1200s is one of the biggest reasons why so many historians have different criteria to determine which battles fit inside the definition of a crusade. In fact, even after the thirteenth century, popes still called for holy wars. According to Christopher Tyerman, a prominent modern crusade historian, crusades were initiated well into the seventeenth century and that the majority of the crusading text available today is from the fifteenth century rather than from any other previous time period, further confusing the definition of crusades.<sup>8</sup> There was not necessarily one guideline for what made a crusade a crusade since the participants, enemies, geography and even instigators of the crusades changed throughout time, reaching from the Middle East to the Baltic, ranging from paid mercenaries to volunteer "pilgrims," and called by both popes and kings as they saw fit.

Yet another factor in the confusion was the tendency, in the nineteenth century, to associate the zeal that the participants in the Crusades were known for and apply it instead to a social campaign.<sup>9</sup> This added to ambiguity of the term, which expanded to reference either a medieval penitential war or an impassioned campaign for social, religious, or political change. Though it might seem reasonable to assume Pius XI was referring to the latter definition in his encyclical, *Vigilanti Cura*, since he was referencing an ideological struggle rather than a literal battle, this is not an adequate conclusion. Due to Pius's respect for the Catholic Church's living tradition, the means by which the Church justified its authority - that is through "law, precedent, scriptural authority and reason," his reliance on a new popular use of the term rather than referring to a war waged to combat immorality that he wanted his own campaign to mirror.<sup>10</sup>

The two major groups of historians in regard to the criteria by which they judge a medieval holy war as a crusade are the conservative historians and the pluralist historians. While the conservative historians have a more restrictive definition, generally regarding only the First Crusade through the Fifth Crusade as true crusades, the pluralist historians often accept many more obscure battles into the fold.<sup>11</sup> Tyerman is considered a pluralist, and he points out that, in his opinion, historians are too quick to restrict the definition of crusade and limit the amount of battles considered to be a crusade today.<sup>12</sup> According to Tyerman, the best inclusive definition of a crusade is a war whose objectives had been identified and sanctioned by the pope in the name of "answering God's command." He also stated that those who took part in the Crusades were defined by their willingness to

---

<sup>6</sup> Tyerman. *Debate on the Crusades*. 23.

<sup>7</sup> H. E. J. Cowdrey, "Pope Urban II's Preaching of the First Crusade," *History* Vol. 55 Iss. 184 (1970): 18, accessed March 22, 2013, doi: 10.1111.

<sup>8</sup> Tyerman. *Debate on the Crusades*. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Tyerman. *Introduction*. 3, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Tyerman. *The Debate on the Crusades*. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Tyerman. *Introduction*. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Tyerman. *Introduction*. 16.

be *crucesignati* (signed with the cross) by taking an oath or “a vow symbolized in a ritual adoption of a cross, blessed by a priest.” Tyerman contends that within the propaganda dispersed throughout the duration of the Crusades were multiple references of the Crusades as a commitment to the ideal Christian life.<sup>13</sup> While there are many other definitions to use, this case study will rely on Tyerman’s interpretation of the term because it is interesting that, even within a broad range of characteristics, Pius XI’s social campaigns seem to fit the bill for almost all of them.

While historians still debate over the definition of a crusade, according to Giles Constable, a well-respected medieval historian, the popular perceptions of the Crusades can be separated into four time periods. The first period occurred between the First Crusade in 1095 and the sixteenth century, when the holy wars were still framed by a crusading culture; the second occurred between the sixteenth century and the early nineteenth century, involving the Enlightenment and anti-clericalism and which looked rather harshly on the Crusades; and the third period, beginning after the second in the early 1800s with a rising enthusiasm for the idea of a holy war and then a falling of that enthusiasm during and immediately after World War II in the twentieth century. The fourth period is described as a vague distinction between historians and popular perceptions reaching all the way to the present.<sup>14</sup> Thomas Madden, another prominent crusade historian, agrees, contending that Napoleon Bonaparte’s Egyptian campaign in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century was the primary factor in the increased popularity of the Crusades during that time.<sup>15</sup> Madden claims that the renewed enthusiasm led to the first in-depth scholarly interest in the Crusades. To this point, Tyerman also agrees, crediting the scholarly interest in the beginning of the Golden Age of Research when it became important – unlike in the literary-thematic age of the eighteenth century – to thoroughly study of history before placing judgments on the actions or motivations of those in the past.<sup>16</sup> Whether it was because of historians’ earnest study or because of the generally positive attitude at this time, the Crusades were well regarded in both the histories and the fiction surrounding the Crusades in the nineteenth century. However, as Constable pointed out, though the study was more in-depth, the treatment of the Crusades was “not always impartial.”<sup>17</sup> Crusading propaganda issued by European governments during times of political turmoil cast a gleam on the holy wars, using the popular imagination for their own agendas.

Since the surge in interest in the 1800s, the romantic side of the Crusades inspired creative depictions of the holy wars in poems, novels and paintings among others. This became a foundation of nationalist pride, filtering modern concerns through the romantic and chivalrous lens of the Crusades.<sup>18</sup> It was not unprecedented, then, when crusading propaganda became common in the war effort during World War I (1914-1918). Since the Ottoman empire was involved in the war during this period of interest in the

---

<sup>13</sup> Tyerman. *Introduction*. 14-16.

<sup>14</sup> Giles Constable, “The Historiography of the Crusades,” in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Madden, *Crusades: The Illustrated History* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 202.

<sup>16</sup> Tyerman. *Debate on Crusades*. 125.

<sup>17</sup> Constable. “Historiography.” 4.

<sup>18</sup> Madden. *Crusades*. 202.

Crusades, the war became, to many, a clash of cultures and some even relied on religious aspects to define the situation. This depiction was sometimes subtle and sometimes blatant. Upon the British General Allenby's victory over the Turks in Jerusalem in 1917, a cartoon was made and circulated representing Richard I, or "Richard the Lionheart" who famously fought in the First Crusade, standing over Jerusalem – with the Union Jack, England's national flag, waving - in triumph saying, "At last my dream come true."<sup>19</sup> It was from this type of enthusiasm that Pius XI drew from in his encyclicals, possibly hoping for the same support from his citizens as was seen during the First World War.

However brief the lull in popular disapproval of the Crusades, until after World War II and the second Vatican Council which helped spur the apology for inappropriate actions taken by the Church, issued by Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) during his pontificate, the attitude of the Catholic Church was rather matter-of-fact in regard to the Crusades. Though John Paul II did not apologize for the Crusades in their entirety, the fact that apologies were issued to certain groups who felt they were wronged by the Catholic Church-sanctioned holy wars (including Jewish communities and the Eastern Orthodox Church) says a great deal about the switch in attitude. This is especially true considering the living tradition of the Church in light of doctrine claiming the infallibility of the Church. So even before Pius XI began his pontificate the Catholic Church viewed the Crusades much as they had been viewed at the time of the battles, throughout even the extreme anti-clericalism that developed in wake of the Enlightenment prior to the nineteenth century.

In a manual of Church history written by a German Professor of Theology for the use of students at seminaries and colleges, a particular look into the Crusades and the popes who called them shows that the Crusades were generally well-regarded by the Church.<sup>20</sup> Professor Heinrich Brück's *History of the Catholic Church, vol. 1* (1884) devotes an entire chapter to the success of the holy wars, specifically the moral justification and triumph of the Church before, during, and after each separate crusade. According to the manual, the period between 1073 and 1313 was one of the best times for the Church with increased influence, piety and triumph.<sup>21</sup> Rather than apologize for any corruption or less-than-pious motivations, the book defends the righteousness of the movements and, though it does not necessarily include criteria other than the time period for what constitutes a crusade, in the description of the holy wars, it does seem to agree with Tyerman's definition, although admittedly focusing much more on the actual warfare. The manual was so well received by the Catholic communities in America and by the Holy Office, that a translated edition was published and distributed to seminaries and colleges for English-speaking students by Benzinger Brothers Publishers, the official Apostolic Holy See's publishing company in the United States. The manual's conclusion to its history of the Crusades:

The Church had acquired her freedom, and with it the supreme power in society; she used it for the purpose of subjugating to the laws of Christ individuals alike with nations. .... The indefatigable zeal of the Apostolic See and of the clergy for the cause of God

---

<sup>19</sup> Madden. *Crusades*. p 204

<sup>20</sup> Tyerman. *Introduction*. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Heinrich Brück, *History of the Catholic Church*, Translated. (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1884), 367.

displays itself. It was faith in Christ and the love to him that called forth these processions of whole nations. .... Of all the various charges trumped up to disparage the Crusades, none are more contrary to historical facts, none more unfounded, than the assertion that the motive which led to them was fanaticism, and that the consequence was intolerance.<sup>22</sup>

then, was the official Catholic stance on the Crusades in America as well as Europe, pre-dating the surge of support for the Crusades and Constable's 'third period.'

## Pope Pius XI

Pope Pius XI was born Ambrogio Damiano Achille Ratti in 1857 in a province of Milan, Italy. By the time he was twenty-five he had already earned three separate doctorates, in theology, philosophy, and canon law at the Gregorian University in Rome.<sup>23</sup> When he became a professor at a seminary college his emphasis was in medieval Church documents, knowledge he took with him in his later career.<sup>24</sup> With his excellent education, Ratti found a more comfortable place for his research as a librarian at the Ambrosian Library in Milan and in 1914 he was made a prefect at the Vatican Library in Rome. According to the author and teacher, Anthony Rhodes, Ratti did not just excel at research but was a literary man whose background in medieval Church manuscripts gave him a special insight into the living tradition of the Catholic Church and the terminology of previous popes.<sup>25</sup>

In 1922, when Achille Ratti began his seventeen-year pontificate, Rome was not a sovereign, independent state. In the previous century, during the reign of Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), the newly formed Italian government sent troops to seize and occupy papal territories, and one year later declared Rome as the Italian capital.<sup>26</sup> By way of defying the forcible confiscation of his lands, Pius IX confined himself to the Catholic buildings left unoccupied. He even went so far as to forbid Catholics within Italy from voting at elections or running for office in the Italian Parliament.<sup>27</sup> The Italian government claimed rights to the land in which the Holy See was located but in return offered Pius IX the Guarantee Laws, which would guarantee his ability to reside in Rome along with granting him a sizeable amount of money.<sup>28</sup> Recognizing that to accept the offer would be to recognize the authority of Italy over the papacy as well as losing his own authority over the lands of the Church, Pius IX refused.

Pius XI's apprehensions weren't completely unfounded. Before the romanticism of the late nineteenth century, the Crusades, the Catholic Church, and organized religion in general were under attack by popular writers and philosophers. One such popular

---

<sup>22</sup> Brüeck. *History*. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Eugène Cardinal Tisserant, "Pius XI as Librarian," *The Library Quarterly* Vol. 9, No. 4 (1939): 389, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4302636>.

<sup>24</sup> Tisserant. "Pius XI." 391.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators 1922-1945* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), 17-18.

<sup>26</sup> Mark F. Gilbert and K Robert Nilsson, "Lateran Pacts," in *Historical Dictionary of Modern Italy*, No. 34, ed. Jon Woronoff (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1999), 195.

<sup>27</sup> Pope Pius IX. "Rescriptes (Protesting the Taking of the Pontifical States)." (Encyclical of Pope Pius IX from a speech given in St. Peter's Square, Rome, November 1).

<sup>28</sup> Gilbert. "Lateran Pacts." 195.

philosophical writer was Voltaire (d. 1787), a hugely influential – and according to the Catholic Church, heretical – writer whose political works included the opinion that:

Religion must clearly be purged; the whole of Europe is crying out for it. This great work was started almost two hundred and fifty years ago; but men are only enlightened gradually. Who would have believed then that people would analyse the sun's rays, produce electricity with lighting, discover gravity, that law which governs the universe? It is time for men who are so enlightened to stop being slaves to the blind. I laugh every time I see an academic of science forced to defer to the decision of a congregation of the Holy Office.<sup>29</sup>

This treatment did not stop at the beginning of the nineteenth century with romanticism, but continued to some degree until 1870. With Enlightenment writers still a major influence in Europe and such potent words lambasting the papacy in such a public, secular fashion, it was far easier for men not quite so brave to brazenly ridicule the pope and the Church. Even other European countries with ties to the Catholic Church looked on with interest, unable or unwilling to intervene, speaking not only to the political uncertainty of papal authority but also to the inclination toward anti-clericalism in countries that originally had been closely allied with the Church.

The status of the Pope and the Church's authority then became known as the "Roman Question," one that did not have a simple answer. Italy explicitly requested that other countries not intervene and, moreover, stated that even diplomatic communication with the Vatican would be detrimental to the situation, as that would demonstrate the sovereignty of the Holy See.<sup>30</sup> Despite Pius IX's refusal to recognize the Guarantee Laws, the Italian government proceeded to enforce them. This meant that Pope Pius IX and his successors continued to live in the Vatican buildings within Rome and the Eternal City.<sup>31</sup> However, their primacy there was constantly in question and it was not until the Lateran Treaty in 1929, seven years after Pius XI's pontificate began, that the "Roman Question" was answered and the anti-clericalism within Italy was addressed, though not eliminated.

At the very beginning of Pope Pius XI's pontificate he expressed a surprising and, in regard to his three previous predecessors beginning with Pope Leo XIII, unique sympathy toward Italy. Pius XI broke from the mold by being the first pope since Pope Pius IX to give benediction from the outer balcony of St. Peter's basilica.<sup>32</sup> Despite the still-present anti-clerical sentiments in Italy by the time Pius XI began his pontificate, his benediction inspired enthusiasm from the crowds that gathered in surprise and excitement in St. Peter's Square below him. Not since Rome had been securely in the hands of the Holy See had a pope given a benediction so far from the confines of the inner Vatican building. Pius XI did not stop there, however. In a carefully worded encyclical, he expressed his desire for Italy to be represented once again at the Vatican while still maintaining the need for the Holy See to be independent and sovereign in its own right.<sup>33</sup> In 1929 the Holy See and the Fascist Italian Government solved the "Roman Question." The Lateran Agreements were signed in February of that year, finally ending the tension

---

<sup>29</sup> David Williams, *Voltaire: Political Writings* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 147.

<sup>30</sup> Rhodes. *Vatican*. 25.

<sup>31</sup> Gilbert. "Lateran Pacts."

<sup>32</sup> J. Derek Holmes, *The Papacy in the Modern World: 1914-1978* (London: Burns & Oats, 1981), 33.

<sup>33</sup> Holmes. *Papacy*. 33.



between the two states.<sup>34</sup> Despite Pius XI's anti-nationalist policy, after the Lateran Agreements, "it was no longer unpatriotic to be a priest" or part of the Church.<sup>35</sup> Though the political capacity of the Italian Catholics was reinstated during the pontificate of Benedict XV, for Pius XI and the majority of the Cardinals at the Vatican, Italy was their home they "were now able to participate in their national life and be respected as Italians as well as churchmen."<sup>36</sup> This was the first action Pius XI was able to take against the anti-clericalism in Europe at the time, though in *Vigilanti Cura* he once again took advantage of the opinions of his audience and the political atmosphere to generate support for the Church.

### *Vigilanti Cura* and the Motion Picture Industry in America

There has been some focus on the Church's interference in the Hollywood Studios and the film industry and Pius XI due to his involvement with the Legion of Decency. Though these authors, such as Gregory Black who has written about this period in Hollywood, focus on the tyrannical presence of censor boards, before and after the Catholic Church's involvement, the fear of moral decay was certainly not unique at the time. Film produced before such censor boards involved sexual licentiousness, anti-authority and "chronic cynicism," which alarmed more than just the far-right Catholics in the 1930s.<sup>37</sup> Even Black discusses the scandals surrounding actors, film producers and the depictions of crime inside of the films themselves, that many thought was responsible for an increase in juvenile delinquency.<sup>38</sup> It is clear that Black, a professor of Communication Studies, has done his research on the effects of the film industry in the twentieth century. Cited as one of the foremost experts on the subject, Black is unfortunately quick to condemn the motivations of the Catholic Church, stating that Martin Quigley, the man Black claims is the "driving force behind the Legion of Decency," used his magazine *Motion Picture Herald* "as a bully pulpit to blast films, producers, and studios." Though Black has obviously studied the subject at length and has accurately identified the campaign as a "crusade" and a "war" against immorality, he has missed a rather large part of the puzzle, focusing almost solely on the American studios and quite nearly ignoring Pope Pius XI or the Catholic Church whose campaign he titles as a "Catholic Coup."<sup>39</sup> Pius seems to be ignored more often than not, in favor for his predecessor, Benedict XV, or successor, Pius XII, both of whom respectively reigned during both of the world wars. In this same fashion, it seems, the Church itself and its motivations seem to be a sideline of a more important aspect of the Hollywood studios.

With the advent of talking pictures, the film industry was able to convey a more realistic and stylistic experience to its viewers. However, the challenges of "talkies" also

---

<sup>34</sup> Gilbert. "Lateran Pacts." 195-196.

<sup>35</sup> Peter C. Kent. "A Tale of Two Popes: Pius XI, Pius XII and the Roman-Berlin Axis." *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 23, No. 4 (1988); 591. Accessed April 25, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Kent. "Tale of Two Popes." 591.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Vaughn, "Morality and Entertainment: The Origins of the Motion Picture Production Code," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 77, No. 1 (1990): 40, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2078638>.

<sup>38</sup> Gregory Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 16-17.

<sup>39</sup> Black. *Catholic Crusade*. 4.

involved a religious and moral backlash from conservative groups who viewed the new realism and subtly conveyed ideas as dangerous to the morality of the public. Censorship of movies in America began in the early twentieth century in Ohio with a board of censors that was created by the State of Ohio for the purposes of allowing “only such films as are in the judgment and discretion of the Board of Censors of a moral, educational or amusing and harmless character [to] be passed and approved...”<sup>40</sup> Though only three of the forty-eight states had such boards, due to the industry of film and the nature of the reels on which the films were produced, every board’s criteria then affected each state’s movie experience – whether there was a board in that state or not. In 1939 the Yale Law Review published an article titled, “Censorship of Motion Pictures,” in which the author discussed the issues of producing the film reels for distribution and how edits for one state would be made on each reel, effectively combining each of the censor boards and exacerbating their censorship throughout the country.<sup>41</sup> In 1922 the MPPDA, The Modern Pictures Producers and Distributors of America, was established as a self-regulating committee of the film industry.<sup>42</sup> In a meeting with Pope Pius XI the organization had made assurances that they would remain vigilant, allowing no depravity to appear on public screens. However, when Pius XI became aware that the committee was either unwilling or unable to keep their previous promises, *Vigilanti Cura* was published in 1936 as a means of encouraging the Catholic Legion of Decency and of shaming the MPPDA for not following through.<sup>43</sup>

The Legion of Decency was founded in 1933 from a speech made by Archbishop Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, and authorized by Pope Pius XI, in New York in which he stated, "Catholics are called by God, the Pope, the bishops, and the priests to a united front and vigorous campaign for the purification of the cinema, which has become a deadly menace to morals."<sup>44</sup> In order to join The Legion, as it was sometime called, Catholics – though there was some involvement from Protestant and Jewish members – would have to make a pledge that read: “I condemn absolutely those debauching motion pictures which, with other degrading agencies, are corrupting public morals and promoting a sex mania in our land. Considering these evils, I hereby promise to remain away from all motion pictures except those which do not offend decency and Christian morality.”<sup>45</sup> These pledges were written down as well as spoken, signed by the person being inducted into The Legion, and both the member and the presiding priest kept copies of the pledge. The written pledge was published in short manuals that were distributed amongst all Catholic Action groups in America, schools, Sunday Mass, meetings of the Knights of Columbus and even outside of movie theaters.<sup>46</sup> As Thomas Dougherty wrote in his article, “A Code is Born,” discussing The Legion of Decency and Hollywood’s

---

<sup>40</sup> Yale Law Journal, “Censorship of Motion Pictures,” *The Yale Law Journal* Vol. 49, No. 1 (1939): 88, accessed April 25, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/792274>.

<sup>41</sup> Yale Law Journal. “Censorship.” 91-92.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Vaughn, “Morality and Entertainment: The Origins of the Motion Picture Production Code,” *The Journal of American History* Vol. 77, No. 1 (1990): 42, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2078638>.

<sup>43</sup> Pope Pius XI. “Vigilanti Cura.”

<sup>44</sup> Pope Pius XI. “Vigilanti Cura.”

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Doherty, “A Code is Born,” *Reason* Vol. 39 Iss. 8 (2008): 2, accessed April 25, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/>.

<sup>46</sup> Doherty. “A Code is Born.” 2-3.

ensorship in the 1930s, though it was impossible to know the exact amount of people who made – and kept – the pledge, an estimated ten million Catholic Americans could “be counted upon as enlisted crusaders.”<sup>47</sup>

The affect of these crusaders was also significant at this time. Occurring immediately after the Great Depression in America, the millions of potential moviegoers boycotting films was enough to significantly hurt the film industry. In 1936, *Vigilanti Cura* contained Pius XI’s sentiment that The Legion of Decency was so effective in America that other countries wishing to censor film for the better moral fiber of their nation could model their systems off of The Legion.<sup>48</sup> It is easy to see the similarities between The Legion’s followers and Tyerman’s definition of a crusader. Despite the lack of violence, an oath made upon promises of spiritual rewards and framed by moral justification of the Church in order to combat immorality rings of Tyerman’s interpretation and even Black classified the movement as a war.<sup>49</sup> This, then, was not a statement based off of a popular use of the term crusade in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, but rather a calculated proclamation for a crusade, as literally as he could instigate without actual armed conflict.

## Certamen as a Term

Just as in many languages, one Latin word does not necessarily have only one meaning. It is difficult to literally translate the term *certamen* into English because there are multiple words that it could mean. A struggle, either as an internal conflict or as an outward use of force, is the best way to define *certamen*, though the exact meaning of the word is closely associated in the context with which it is used. The term *certamen* is found multiple times in the Vulgate Bible, the most accurate translation from Hebrew and Greek into Latin at the time of Pius XI’s education. Given his thorough education, the Vulgate Bible would have likely been the edition that he studied as a young adult.

In the Old Testament, the place where *certamen* is most prominent, the term usually refers to a battle or armed conflict between the Lord’s chosen people and a dangerous, often Godless, foe. In the second book of Samuel the Latin Vulgate Bible describes Joab as the leader of the Israelites. In the second and tenth chapters, respectively, Joab is described as the defender of God’s people, blowing on a horn to scare away Israel’s pursuers and approaching Syrian armies only to have them turn around and flee. In both of these passages (2 Samuel 2:28; 10:13), the term *certamen* is used to describe fighting and a battle.<sup>50</sup> In the second book of Chronicles *certamen* is actually referring to a battle between “men of valor,” indicating a certain approval of the soldiers and their motives.<sup>51</sup> It isn’t until the book of Philippians that the idea of a literal battle with regard to the term *certamen* is even brought into question. Until then every time *certamen* is used it is referring to an armed conflict, inspired by the will of God and

---

<sup>47</sup> Doherty. “A Code is Born.” 3, Pope Pius XI also speaks about the millions of participants in “*Vigilanti Cura*.”

<sup>48</sup> Pope Pius XI. “*Vigilanti Cura*.”

<sup>49</sup> Gregory D. Black, “Hollywood Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry,” *Film History* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1989): 167-89, accessed April 16, 2013, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814976>.

<sup>50</sup> Gregory Martin, trans., *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* (Public Domain, 1899), (2 Samuel 2:28; 10:13)

<sup>51</sup> Gregory Martin, trans., *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* (Public Domain, 1899), (2 Samuel 10:13)

perpetrated by valiant soldiers. However, in Philippians 1:30, the passage states, “Having the same *conflict* which ye saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.”<sup>52</sup> The *certamen* in this instance is an internal struggle, fought with faith, rather than a righteous battle fought with swords. In the first book of Timothy (1 Timothy 6:12), a passage that is often cited in modern papal documents, the phrase “fight the good fight” is used to describe the internal battle waged against sin.<sup>53</sup>

Since each of the terms used in the Middle Ages to assign an excursion as a crusade implied literal movement involving extensive travel, often hundreds of miles from their home, words such as *iter* (journey), *peregrinatio* (pilgrimage), and *expeditio* (expedition) would not fit the bill for the ideological struggle the Church was fighting.<sup>54</sup> Pius XI greatly valued not only literary context in his word-use but he was also a strong proponent of the living tradition of the Catholic Church. So while *certamen* was a charged term in regard to the ways it is used within the Vulgate Bible, Pius XI’s predecessors used *certamen* in many different ways, sometimes referencing combat training, sometimes misfortune brought about by weather cycles, or even a constant conflict between heretics and clergy. Given the diverse history of the term, by the time Pius XI came to use it, *certamen* in reference to a literal battle was not unprecedented. It certainly would not have been a stretch to view *certamen* as a term that could be used for literal warfare.

The encyclical *Vigilanti Cura* uses the term crusade multiple times, implying Pius XI’s conviction that the campaign was exactly that. However, Pius XI did not stop at using a word that just alluded to warfare. Upon publishing the encyclical into English, German, and other languages, the *sanctissimum certamen* changed, not to “most holy struggle” but instead to “holy crusade.” If *certamen* had ever been used in reference to the Crusades prior to the publication of *Vigilanti Cura* this might not have been such an interesting moment in Church history. However, if it used this way by any of Pius XI’s predecessors it is not easily found, giving the impression that the term would not have been in the forefront of his mind when making a connection to the Crusades. This is interesting given his attitude toward living tradition.

In the same way that the actions of the American Catholics and the Legion of Decency seemed to display characteristics of Tyerman’s interpretation of a crusade, so too did the language of Pius’s encyclical, *Vigilanti Cura*, use language that made his intentions for a crusade clear. He stated, “There must be no weariness in combating whatever contributes to the lessening of the people’s sense of decency and of honour,” claiming that immorality in movies was “evil” and in “continual conflict with Christian morality.”<sup>55</sup> Though he also focuses on how the industry could be changed to bring about “the salvation of souls,” which certainly was not an option during the Crusades in regard to the immutable evil of the Ottoman Turks, the language of the document shows a tendency for aggressive words, such as the quotations above.<sup>56</sup> The terms *certamen* and, in English translations, crusade, is prominent throughout the document, leaving no doubt about his conscious incorporation of the terms and concept.

---

<sup>52</sup> Gregory Martin, trans., *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* (Public Domain, 1899), (Philippians 1:30)

<sup>53</sup> Gregory Martin, trans., *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* (Public Domain, 1899), (1 Timothy 6:12)

<sup>54</sup> Tyerman. *Introduction*. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Pope Pius XI. “*Vigilanti Cura*.”

<sup>56</sup> Pope Pius XI. “*Vigilanti Cura*.”

## Conclusion

While it is important to study Pius XI within the context of his time, it is interesting to note that he was elected into the Holy Office during a brief period in history where the Crusades were considered a positive event. With the Enlightenment and the general anti-clericalism of Europe before, and the aversion to violent warfare due to the Second World War immediately after his pontificate, it was a short-lived lull in disapproval for the Crusades. However, with the crusading propaganda infused with nationalist patriotism during World War I still fresh in the minds of the public, it was perhaps one of the best times for Pius to use such appreciation to inspire enthusiasm for his own campaigns that he intentionally termed “crusades.” With such direct action taken by the American Catholics and the Legion of Decency the “crusade” against the moves cannot be considered much of anything else. However, if it was Pius’s intention to both raise support for his campaigns as well as for the Catholic Church by associating both of them more closely to the Crusades, he was not entirely successful. Initial support of his campaigns was obvious but immediately after World War II popular opinion of the Crusades plummeted, ironically bringing with it the opinion of the Catholic Church. Despite his best efforts to estrange the Church from Nazi Germany, his successor, Pius XII was later called “Hitler’s Pope” and the reaction to the horrors of the Holocaust led to a more cynical view of both the Crusades and the Catholic Church who seemed to be a backbone to both periods of bloodshed. It will be interesting to see, given the recent war in the Middle East and the popularity of crusading themes such as those seen in Ridley Scott’s film, *The Kingdom of Heaven*, the wildly popular Knights Templar video games, “Assassin’s Creed”, and Dan Brown’s novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, if any new opinions of the Crusades and the Catholic Church will develop, possibly instigating a fifth period in Tyerman’s history of popular perceptions or at least developing further the fourth.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Martin, Gregory, trans. *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*. Public Domain, 1899. Online Douay Version. Accessed April 16, 2013. <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/Douay-Rheims-1899-American-Edition-DRA-Bible/>.

Heinrich Brück, *History of the Catholic Church*, Translated into English. New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1884.

Pope Innocent III. *Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III*. Translated and edited by C. R. Cheney and W. H. Semple. New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons LTD, 1953.

Pope Pius IX. “Respicentes (Protesting the Taking of the Pontifical States).” Encyclical of Pope Pius IX from a speech given in St. Peter’s Square, Rome, November 1, 1870.

Pope Pius XI. “Vigilanti Cura (On Motion Pictures).” Encyclical of Pope Pius XI from a speech given in St. Peter’s Square, Rome, June 29, 1936.

### Secondary Sources

Black, Gregory D. “Hollywood Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940.” *Film History* Vol. 3 No. 3 (1989): 167–89. Accessed April 16, 2013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814976>.

Black, Gregory. *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Constable, Giles. “The Historiography of the Crusades.” In *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, edited by Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh, 1-22. Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001.

Cowdrey, H. E. J. “Pope Urban II’s Preaching of the First Crusade.” *History* Vol. 55 Iss. 184 (1970): 177–88. Accessed March 22, 2013. doi: 10.1111.

Doherty, Thomas. “A Code is Born.” *Reason* Vol. 39 Iss. 8 (2008): 1-9. Accessed April 25, 2013. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/>.

Gilbert, Mark F., K. Robert Nilsson. “Lateran Pacts.” In *Historical Dictionary of Modern Italy*, No. 34, edited by Jon Woronoff, 195-196. London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1999.

- Holmes, J. Derek. *The Papacy in the Modern World: 1914-1978*. London: Burns & Oats, 1981.
- Kent, Peter C. "A Tale of Two Popes: Pius XI, Pius XII and the Roman-Berlin Axis." *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 23, No. 4 (1988); 586-608. Accessed April 25, 2013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260836>
- Madden, Thomas, trans. *Crusades: The Illustrated History*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007.
- Rhodes, Anthony. *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators 1922-1945*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973.
- Tisserant, Eugène Cardinal. "Pius XI as Librarian." *The Library Quarterly* Vol. 9, No. 4 (1939): 389-403. Accessed April 16, 2013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4302636>.
- Tyerman, Christopher. *The Crusades: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Tyerman, Christopher. *The Debate on the Crusades*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2011.
- Vaughn, Stephen. "Morality and Entertainment: The Origins of the Motion Picture Production Code." *The Journal of American History* Vol. 77, No. 1 (1990): 39-67. Accessed April 16, 2013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2078638>.
- Williams, David, trans. *Voltaire: Political Writings*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Yale Law Journal. "Censorship of Motion Pictures." *The Yale Law Journal* Vol. 49, No. 1 (1939): 87-113. Accessed April 25, 2013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/792274>.