A little taste of philosophy perhaps moves one to atheism, but more of it leads back to religion.

(Francis Bacon)\(^1\)

The one knight of faith simply cannot help the other. Either the single individual becomes a knight of faith himself by putting on the paradox, or he never becomes one.

(Søren Kierkegaard)\(^2\)

1. Introduction

The subject of the crusade is one that speaks strongly to our imagination and it has proved to be a rewarding and inspiring subject for all sorts of artistic creativity. I would like to introduce my thoughts on this phenomenon by first drawing the reader’s attention to a famous copperplate made by Albrecht Dürer in 1513. It is called *Ritter, Tod und Teufel* and represents a solitary knight of faith on his way to the holy Jerusalem, on the hills of Zion, driven by the love of God. He is accompanied only by death and devil, maybe urging him to move even faster, maybe trying to withhold him from his cause. However, whatever their intentions are, he is not distracted and he looks sternly ahead of him, determined to free at all costs the holy places from the hands of the infidels.

The crusade is an extraordinary political-religious phenomenon. Before starting my philosophical investigations, let me give some examples, just to whet the appetite. Of course we immediately think of the

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bloody crusades of the twelfth century. Nevertheless, all sorts of modern and postmodern religious violence for the sake of any holy place may be compared to these ‘icons’ of the Middle Ages. Indeed, one might think of the battle for Jerusalem (the holy capital of three different religions), as well as of the recent holy wars in former Yugoslavia and Ireland. However, in the relatively short time that it ‘rules’, atheism also has been responsible for a fair share of mass murders. For their holy grail of realism, and in order to create an entirely rational society, atheists like Stalin and Mao planned and executed the murder of their own pagans.

Crusades are still an important item in contemporary public discourse. They are for most people the best proof that politics and religion do not mix and should stay separate, as the ideal of Enlightenment propagates. Claims to religious authority breed intolerance and bloody wars. This is why today’s religion is sometimes somewhat violently restricted to the private sphere. Now ‘the final truth’ of reason itself becomes a ground of oppression and violence; politics should cherish rational neutrality and be wary of any ‘absolute’, theological claims of truth and power. Therefore, contemporary Enlightenment fundamentalism too puts up many a crusade against the religious ‘non-believer’. And maybe, who knows, just as our knight of faith in the picture of Dürer, it is bound to stumble upon an empty grave; if not the empty grave of Jesus, then maybe the empty grave of democracy; which has its own fair share in transcendence, as we will come to see.

Before I continue, there is one more modern appearance of the crusade that I would like to mention here, just to point out that the phenomenon is almost omnipresent, in our days no less than it was in history. In the western world of today, we seem to witness a fanatical revitalization of religion. And we also witness a neoconservative call for a ‘civil religion’ that has lately inspired the US to start its wars against the axis of evil; wars that were understood (by friends and foes) as crusades; and these crusades were in their turn a response to the opposing religious terrorism that threatened and attacked the homeland of America – ‘Gods own country’ (Bush).

Again, I will not go into this multifaceted historical material any further. This rather superficial exploration is only a preliminary demarcation of our subject of investigation with respect to the violent relation between politics and religion. Before I go on, let me add that all parties of the crusade I just mentioned are united in their firm conviction that they have God on their side, and that it could be suggested that their