

A Brief Resume on the History of the Knights Templar

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Multitudes of pilgrims in the eleventh and twelfth centuries visited Jerusalem for the purpose of offering their devotions at the Holy Sepulcher of Christ and other Holy Places in Jerusalem. Many of these religious wanderers were weak, old, and mostly unarmed; and thousands of them were subjected to the hostilities of the hordes of Arabs who even after the capture of Jerusalem by the Christians continued to infest the sea coast of Palestine and the roads to Jerusalem. Nine French Knights, the followers of Baldwin, united in the year 1118 in a military brotherhood and entered into a solemn pact to aid each other in clearing the roads and defending pilgrims in their passage to the Holy City. Two of these Knights were Hugh de Payens and Godfrey de St. Aldemar. They, along with seven others, took the usual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience before the king of Jerusalem. They assumed the title Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ. The Abbot of Jerusalem gave to them, as a place to store their arms and supplies, portions of the old Temple Mount and the street between the palace of the king and the temple whence they derived the name Templars.

Hugh de Payens journeyed to Europe to solicit a new crusade on behalf of Baldwin, and he presented his companions to Pope Honorius II from whom he craved permission to form a religious military order. The Pontiff referred them to the ecclesiastical Council which was then in session. Having presented his vocation and that of his companions to the Fathers, their request was granted. St. Bernard was directed to prescribe a rule for the new Order. In this rule, the knights of the Order were called *Pauperes commilitis Christi et Templi Salomonis*, or The Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon.

Hugh de Payens returned to Jerusalem carrying with him many recruits from the noblest families of Europe. The Order prescribed for the professed knights white garments as a symbol of a pure life to which Pope Eugenius II later added a red cross to be worn on the left breast as a symbol of martyrdom. The Templars soon became preeminently distinguished as warriors of the cross. St. Bernard speaks in the warmest terms of their self denial, their frugality, their modesty, their piety, and their bravery, "Their arms are their only finery, and they use them with courage without dreading either the number or the strength of the barbarians. All their confidence is in the Lord of Hosts, and in fighting for his cause they seek a sure victory or a Christian and honorable death."

The banner or Beauseant of the order was half white and half black, indicative of peace to their friends but destruction to their foes. At their reception each Templar swore never to turn his back on his enemies but either to vanquish his foe or die. The word beau in medieval French meant a lofty state, for which translators have offered such terms as noble, glorious, and even magnificent. As a battle cry, the Beauseant was a charge to "Be noble" or "Be glorious."

The Order very quickly grew from its simple beginnings to a complicated organization. By the twelfth century it was divided into three classes; Knights, Chaplains, and Serving Brethren. In the case of the Knights, whoever presented himself for admission into the Order was required to prove that he was born from a knightly family and was born in lawful wedlock; that he was free from all previous obligations; that he was neither married nor betrothed; and that he had not made any vows of reception into another Order. That further, he was not in debt, and finally, that he was of a sound and healthy constitution of body.

The Chaplains consisted only of laymen. They were required to serve a novitiate of one year. They were required to take the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Their duties were to perform all religious offices and to officiate at all the ceremonies of the Order. The Serving Brethren's only qualification was that they should be free born and not slaves. They fought in the field under the Knights and performed at home, the menial offices of the household. Later this group was divided into two; Brethren at Arms and the Handicraft Brethren. The latter was the most esteemed group and remained in the preceptories to exercise their various trades.

Hugh de Payens had departed Jerusalem as one of a group of just nine knights bound together in an obscure, unofficial order. He returned later as Grand Master of an order which was only responsible to the Pope; possessed gold, silver, and property wealth; and was composed of three hundred knights sworn to stand and die if the master so ordered. Instant obedience to his superiors was required of every Templar, and since the order was responsible to no one but the Pope, it essentially created its own system of punishments up to and including the death penalty, for disobedience.

The Templar Rites of Initiation and Chapter Meetings were conducted in total secrecy. Any Templar revealing any proceeding, even to another Templar of lower rank than himself, was subject to punishment including expulsion from the order. To preserve secrecy, the meetings were guarded by knights who stood outside the door with their swords drawn. Although there is no documentation, legend has it that several times spies or perhaps merely the curious met their death the moment they were caught.

The reception of a knight into the order was a very solemn ceremony. Unlike the Knights of Malta whose form of reception was open and public, none but Templars were permitted entrance. Perhaps this difference between a public and secret

reception was attributed to the spirit of persecution exhibited by the Church toward the order in the later days.

Ultimately the Templars held over nine thousand manors all over Europe plus mills and markets. During its two-hundred-year history, over twenty thousand initiates brought land or money dowries to the order. They eventually owned ships to transport men and supplies to the East as well as fighting ships to guard the fleet. With their fleet, the Templars earned revenues by transporting material, secular Crusaders, and Pilgrims to the Holy Land. The Templar financial activities varied from serving as a "safe deposit" for traveling nobles, to administering the estates of the ailing nobility who wished for their heirs a safe inheritance. The Church at Rome contributed often and encouraged the same actions in its followers. The wealth of the Templars grew as did their reputation as perhaps the first "world bankers." Toward their later days, the glory and simplicity of the order began its slow decline through weaker Grand Masters.

With the fall of Acre in 1292, the Templars abandoned Palestine and the Holy Lands and returned to the comfort and wealth of their Preceptories across Europe. At the beginning of the 14th Century, the throne of France was occupied by Philip the Fair, an ambitious, vindictive, and avaricious prince. This prince had been in controversy with Pope Boniface. The Templars had, as was usual with them, sided with the Pope against the King. The King of France became envious of the extreme wealth of the order, and their power interfered with his designs of political control over Europe. He then secretly concerted with Pope Clement V, whom Philip had placed upon the throne of Peter. Their plan called for the destruction of the Templars and the seizure of their wealth and Preceptories.

Their plans having been made, Pope Clement V wrote to De Molay, the last of the Templar Grand Masters, inviting him to come and consult with him on matters of great importance to the order. De Molay obeyed and arrived in Paris early in the year 1307, accompanied by sixty knights and a large treasure, De Molay had made the voyage in the hope of one final crusade to retake the Holy Lands from the Muslim hoards. A date which even today children around the world consider an "unlucky day" had its roots in the occasion of this visit.

The day De Molay arrived in Paris was Friday, October 13, 1307, and he was immediately imprisoned as was every Templar in France. By secret order of the King. the Templars were arrested on the pretended charges of idolatry and other crimes against the throne of the King and the authority of the Church. The fires that the King and Pope ignited soon swept across all of Europe. On the 12th of May, 1310, fifty-four knights were publicly burned at the stake. Neither Knight nor Templar Chaplain was spared.

With the exception of a few nations in Europe, the Templars were forced to flee or perish. They found refuge in Spain and in England, and there warned of Philip's plans, they were able to flee into Scotland where the order went underground. DeMolay, the last Grand Master of the Templars, had obeyed the orders of his

superior the Pope hoping for the final crusade to free the Holy Lands. He was unaware of the political tides that flowed across Europe as each nation strove for dominance over the other.

It was decided that the Grand Master should be brought before public view to admit his guilt and that of his Templars. The nobility, the prelates of the church, and influential commoners were invited to witness the historic event. On March 14, 1314, a high platform had been erected before Notre Dame from which DeMolay would make his confession. The Grand Master was escorted to the platform with Geoffroi de Charney and two other officers of the order.

With the eyes of the world upon him and the blood of his beloved Templars on the hands of his accusers, DeMolay condemned himself to martyrdom. "I think it only right that at so solemn a moment when my life has so little time to run, I should reveal the deception which has been practiced and speak for the truth. Before heaven and earth and all of you here as my witnesses, I admit that I am guilty of the grossest iniquity. But the iniquity is that I have lied in admitting the disgusting charges laid against the order. I declare, and I must declare, that the order is innocent. Its purity and saintliness are beyond question. I have indeed confessed that the order is guilty, but I have done so only to save myself from terrible tortures by saying what my enemies wished me to say. Other knights who have retracted their confessions have been led to the stake, yet the thought of dying is not so awful that I shall confess to foul crimes which have never been committed. Life is offered to me but at the price of infamy. At such price, life is not worth having. I do not grieve that I must die if life can be bought only by piling one lie upon another."

The others with DeMolay quickly joined him in proclaiming the innocence of the order. By their own words, they had brought monumental embarrassment to both king and church to which the only answer was the stake. The verdict was announced for that same evening.

The executions were held on a small island in the River Seine, but a crowd still managed to gather by boat to witness the end of the last Templar Grand Master. Legend says that as Jacques DeMolay's flesh was being burned away he called down a curse upon Philip of France and all of his family, and he called upon both king and pope to meet him within the year for judgment at the throne of God. Clement V died the following month of April, followed by Philip's unexplained death in November of the same year. As the two nemeses of the Templars faded into history so did the remaining Templars fade into the shrouds of time; perhaps an invisible force protecting the destiny of man.