

ABOUT CHIVALRIC ORDERS AND THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

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In today's world, when one reads or hears about "knights" and "kighthood," many different mental pictures come to mind. These terms most often conjure up a certain "romantic mystique." Historical and romance writers over the years have created magnificent stories about such mythical figures as King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Much of today's ideas about "knights of old" center around such fantasies as the stories of the knight Parcival and his search for the Holy Grail.

Armies have existed in civilization for as long as men have been fighting each other. Knighthood, however, did not actually exist as an institution until the European feudal historic period. Men skilled at combat, essentially mercenaries in the armies of kings and noblemens service who had distinguished themselves in battle, were gifted with certain recognitions for their service. These were most often titles of nobility, as well as tracts of land. Over time, those who achieved these levels under kings and other nobles became known as being "Under King's Orders," from whence the term "Order" (of Knighthood) came about. These knights were extremely loyal to their masters, and were held in high esteem for their reputations as being loyal, upstanding and trustworthy in a time when loyalty was highly prized. As a man's word was his bond, knights were sworn to an "oath of fealty" to their king or master. No king or noble could ask for more of his servants and vassals.

In addition to kings and nobles, the ancient Christian Church of Rome also enjoyed a high position of power. Most often in feudal times, church and state became synonymous. Kings, princes and nobles bowed to the Pope in Rome, whom they believed held power over their immortal souls. Consequently, the Church of Rome became virtually a separate sovereign power unto itself, mostly political, often undermining the power of heads of state throughout the feudal world.

Organized Monasticism, the founding of the "religious houses," expanded greatly during this time. Groups of monks and priests formed into communes, residing in monasteries. As these were formed under Papal "Orders," they, too, became known as Orders, like their civil military counterparts. The Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, Cistercians and Jesuits are five of the major Church Orders active during and after the Crusade period. Of these, the Benedictines and Cistercians were the two largest, most vocal and widespread during the Crusade period. The Cistercians under the former Benedictine, St. Bernard of Clairvaux (ancient Citeaux, France), were the supporting Church Order that gave the Templars their monastic rule.

During the Crusade period of history, Christian religious fervency was at its peak. Evangelistic priests and monks of the religious houses stirred up their congregations with the zeal to make pilgrimages to the Holy Land. The Holy Land itself, held in Moslem hands, often became the target of these fiery preachings. Christian pilgrims from Europe were often attacked along their journeys by bands of Islamic marauders. Those who lived to return home told of their plight during their pilgrimage. Consequently, the Popes and other Church high officials of the period constantly

badgered kings and nobles to send their well-trained armies of knights to fight and take over the Holy Land. Jerusalem itself was finally captured after the First Crusade in A.D. 1099.

The important point is that Chivalric Orders, or Orders of Knighthood (both Military / Civil and Ecclesiastical [“of the Church”]) and the idea to create them arose predominantly out of the combined European monarchies’ and Church’s involvement in the Christian Crusades. The first Orders were those of the Church.

The three largest Ecclesiastical Orders of the Crusades were: 1) *The Order of Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon*, known as the “Knights Templar” or sometimes conversationally referred to simply as the “Temple,” due to their being quartered in the remains of King Solomon’s Temple in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem; 2) *The Knights Hospitaller of Saint John of Jerusalem, Palestine, Rhodes and Malta*, conversationally referred to as the “Hospital,” and today entitled the Hospitaller Order of St. John (some title variations between branches), or the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (exclusively Roman Catholic Church); and 3) *The Teutonic Knights of St. Mary the Blessed Virgin*, originating in and composed predominantly of Germanic Knights, the remnants of which are now compiled and maintained as a Religious House Order of the Roman Catholic Church. There were also some smaller Orders, but the three named above were the largest, and had the greatest impact on the Crusades and subsequent history itself.

To draw a comparison, perhaps the best-known Civil and Military Orders of Chivalry of today are those of the British Isles. Some of those still existent today are the **Order of the Bath**, the **Order of the Garter**, the **Order of St. Michael and St. George** and the **Order of the Thistle** (Scotland). Many Military and Civil knight-hoods are granted by the existing monarchies of countries with that type of government, but are not necessarily formed into *active* Chivalric Orders. They are more often highly-coveted rewards for “services to the Crown.” The best known of these are the Order of the British Empire (Military and Civil), the Victoria Cross of Great Britain and, up through World War Two, the Knight’s Cross (“Iron Cross”) of Germany, which was fashioned after the Teutonic Knight’s Cross (also used for a period by the Templars) of the Crusades.

The Ecclesiastical Chivalric Orders, extending originally from the ancient Church of Rome during the Crusades and in existence today, have membership more widespread throughout the world. These Orders are formed into viable organizations which continue their service to mankind through various charitable and philanthropic endeavors. These Orders now generally accept both men and women as Knights and Dames. Membership in these Orders, for the most part, is also as highly prized as their present-day Military and Civil knight-hood counterparts.

The *Order of Knights Templar* is the primary focus of this essay. The Order dates from 1118 A.D., the earlier time period of the second of the great Christian Crusades in the Holy Land. The Order grew from a small original group of nine knights to become the first and largest of the major military Orders of soldier / monks of the early Christian Church of Rome... indeed, a Religious House all its own.

The Order of Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon, or “Knights Templar,” was founded by the Frenchman *Hughes de Payens* in Jerusalem. It is generally accepted amongst historical scholars to have been formally founded and recognized in 1118 A.D., although there are some historical references in ecclesiastical letters of the period to the “Soldiers of Christ” patrolling in the Holy Land as early as 1114 A.D.

Without going into an extensive recitation of the Order’s history here (there are many volumes written on Templar history), suffice to say that, in the 200 years of the Crusades, the Templar Order had a larger impact on history and the development of civilization than any other single organization:

- First and foremost, as a Christian fighting force of the Crusades, developing many innovations and tactics used both on land and at sea;
- As a major influence in maritime trade in the Mediterranean during the same period, having built several seaports in various countries which are still in use today;
- Through their maritime trade influence, the Templars brought Eastern goods (silks and other materials, spices, foodstuffs, etc.) to Europe, and extended European trade into the East as well;
- Established the first “*Letters of Credit*” and other banking practices for trade purposes, which are still widely used in international trade today.

The Order suffered its first setback shortly after the last Crusade, during the period 1306-1314, at the hands of the tyrannical French King Phillippe IV, also called “Phillippe le Bel” (Phillippe the Fair, called so for his light complexion). Phillippe had already convinced the weak-willed Pope Clement V to move the Vatican out of Rome to Avignon, France... a move angering much of the Roman Church and referred to historically as the “Avignon Captivity.” Phillippe was deeply in debt from failed French wars, and had his eye on seizing the amassed wealth of the Templar Order, held at its chief headquarters of the Temple in Paris. Phillippe coerced Clement to issue a Papal Bull (decree), disbanding the Templars and accusing them of heretical acts against the teachings of Christianity, thereby legally being able to seize their wealth for the French Crown.

Over a seven-year period, under the Church’s infamous “Inquisition,” Templars were unlawfully seized and tortured; many were put to death if they did not admit to the lies they were accused of. Many “confessed” to stop the torture; many later recanted their confessions and were put to death anyway! They were forced to admit under torture to totally unbelievable atrocities against the very religion they had fought and died for over a two-hundred-year period!

The Templar Order, according to the Catholic Church, *officially* ceased to exist by virtue of the Papal Bull, *but did not actually die the death many believed*. Those who stayed in France doffed their religious habits, secularizing, and “went underground” to keep the Order alive. (It is these Knights in France, and those remnants in the Middle East on the island of Cyprus, to which we have the thanks of keeping the historical succession to today.) Many Knights simply transferred into other Religious House Orders, predominantly their sometimes-rival Order of St. John. Many left France and formed Templar-parallel Orders under different titles in other Christian countries not as

easily influenced by the false Papacy, where the Order was either not as severely suppressed as in France, or not suppressed at all. In Spain, the Orders of Our Lady of Montesa and Our Lady of Calatrava were formed out of many of the existing Templar Commanderies and Preceptories. In Portugal under King Denis, the Order simply changed its name to The Order of Christ and continued operating. Still other former Templars secularized, going to other countries and joining as trained Knights in the various European wars currently under way. In Scotland, the Papal Bull suppressing the Order was never read at all, due to King Robert the Bruce's excommunication from the Church at the time. Successors of fugitive Templars believed to have emigrated there are attributed by some historians to have been the forebears of today's *Masonic Orders* (Freemasonry).

The last of the Grand Masters of the Order's "First Period" was Jacques DeMolay, imprisoned in Paris by King Phillippe IV. ***Opposed to what most historians state as fact, the Order of the Temple DID NOT DIE with the Papal suppression and the martyrdom of whom historians call the "last Grand Master" of the Order, Jacques De Molay, in 1314!*** De Molay transmitted his Grand Mastership to Johannes Marcus Larmenius immediately before his death in 1314. Larmenius, aging and unable to continue as Grand Master, transmitted the Grand Mastership with the "Charter of Transmission" to Franciscus Theobaldus of Alexandria in 1324.

The Order continued "underground" with a succession of Grand Masters or General Secretariats in France and elsewhere for an unbelievable *400 years*, finally becoming semi-public with the election of the Philippe, Duke of Orleans (later to become the Regent of France), to the Grand Mastership in 1705. This Grand Master restructured and privately revitalized the Order, giving it a new set of Statutes at the Convent General convened in Versailles in 1705. The Order finally resurfaced into full public exposure during Napoleonic times in France in 1804, continuing through various restructurings and in various forms to today.

The **Order of the Temple** has suffered many unfortunate difficulties and historical schisms in its past. Consequently, today there are several organizations of many different genres in existence claiming to be "authentic 'Knights Templar.'" Most recently, difficulties and a schism within the Order in the United States in 1995 culminated in a Federal Court lawsuit over supposed Trademark violations, terminating in a Final Judgement and Court Order, with the largest branch separating themselves from the present recognized Grand Master and the International Order. This split-away Order has since established their own "Grand Magistry" and has placed their own "Grand Master" into office.

Consequently, other remaining legitimate American Templars desirous of maintaining the legitimate historical lineage have had to regroup themselves, choosing to revitalize and re-form the old original Templar Order under the *original* Crusade-period title: "***Ordo Pauperum Commilitum Christi et Templi Solomonis, Equites Templi***" (The Order of Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon, [sub-titled] Knights Templar) OPCCTS in its current incarnation in the United States is a true Ecclesiastical Order of Chivalry... a "Child" Order born out of its European "Parent" Templar Order, but remaining *autocephalous* (autonomous, but with "family" links).

OPCCTS maintains that *these* “Templar Families” are the legitimate and true Templar Chivalric Orders, being the only ones to claim *legitimate* historical proof of a “pedigree” to the world at large. The lineal history through the historic “Charter of Transmission” of Johannes Marcus Larmenius is maintained in this manner.

OPCCTS further legitimized itself under Chivalric law as an Ecclesiastical Order in 1997 by forming under the aegis of the Seat of the Bishop of the Diocese of Dallas (Texas, USA) of the Episcopal Church of the United States as the *Fons Honorum* (Font of Honors) of the Order. OPCCTS recognizes and honors the European International Order’s Grand Master (the *original* Grand Master, seated at Porto, Portugal). However, by virtue of necessity brought by the schismatic’s legal actions in the USA, OPCCTS is formed as a separate, autocephalous “peer” Order to the European International Order, separate from the direct control of the Grand Master. OPCCTS, by virtue of the condition of its being formed by members out of the European Parent Order, therefore claims and maintains its historical legitimacy as a true Templar Order by *sharing* the legitimate lineal descendency of the *Charta Transmissionis* with the International Order seated in Portugal.

OPCCTS is a *Chivalric* Order. It is *not* a Masonic Order, nor is it connected, other than historically, with any of the “Templar Bodies” of Freemasonry. The Order is also not a “theatrical / historical re-enactment” organization. Much about the Templars has been highly romanticized by various historians and writers throughout the centuries. Knights Templar have often been attributed with being in possession of arcane secrets and even magical powers! OPCCTS believes this is perhaps due to the long historic nature of the Order, and the ancient knights’ considerable exposure to Eastern religious philosophies encountered while in the Middle East. Neither OPCCTS nor its Parent Order in Europe makes any claim to possession of any arcane secrets or extra-human powers of any type. There is nothing secretive about OPCCTS in any manner. Investitures of the Order (the actual conferral of Knighthood) are religious ceremonies, and are generally open to any one wishing to view them. The Investiture is patterned largely after that of the ancient Templars.

Special Note: OPCCTS in North America stands alone, separate and autonomous, or rather, autocephalous. **The Order has no origination from nor association with any other Order** claiming any Knight Templar “pedigree” *in the United States*, most specifically the organization of schismatics who have *acquired the rights through the legal process* and presently use the Anglicized form of the European International Order’s Official Title, the Sovereign (or “Supreme”) Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem,” subtitled “The Autonomous Grand Priory of the United States of America.” OPCCTS also has **no origination from nor association with this group**, nor with yet *another* schismatic organization which *also* uses the original Latin title of the European International Order and wrongfully uses that title today: “Ordo Supremus Militaris Templi Hierosolymitani.” This title is used by *three* separate and distinct Templar groups: The *original* and legitimate European International Order whose legitimate Grand Master is seated in Porto, Portugal, and the two separate schismatic groups. All three groups use the same “double bar” Cross and ancient motto of the Order as well.

OPCCTS also has no association with a particular “Templar” organization originally based in Spain utilizing the same Latin title as the International Order and subtitled itself “The International Federated Alliance.” Similar instances of separation from the European International Order have occurred with smaller groups in Europe and Great Britain. Most of the leadership of virtually all these *other* Templar organizations were originally admitted into the Order by the current European Grand Master, but chose to split away in schism for their own various reasons and form their own “Templar Orders.” It is the general opinion held in many Chivalric circles that these Orders have broken their historical lineage, and therefore are considered *illegitimate* as “self-styled” Templars.

The Order of the Temple was originally a formal Religious House Monastic Order of the original Latin Christian (“Catholic”) Church of Rome, and OPCCTS now emulates this historical practice. Preceptories of the OPCCTS in North America and others around the world have established lay monastic societies within their structures. The International Order of Knights Templar in Europe, and OPCCTS in North America, are independent Templar Chivalric Orders, and are religiously “Christian-Ecumenical” in nature. Membership in today’s Order of the Temple is granted to those chosen who are baptized Christians, but is *not* limited to one’s membership in any particular Christian denomination.

It is now over 900 years since the first Crusade in the Holy Land. Fortunately, today’s Christian Soldiers are no longer swinging swords in the name of religious zeal! No longer are “infidels” being killed in the name of Christ. The Knights and Dames of the Knights Templar of today are fighting a larger battle. They are now “waging war” against much different elements: disease, pestilence, hatred, ignorance, and religious intolerance... in fact, against all things that duntrod humanity and threaten its very existence.

Knighthood (or Damehood) as a Knight or Dame Templar of OPCCTS (or of the International Order based in Portugal, with *legitimate* Grand or Magisterial Pories in many countries) is the most prestigious of today’s Crusade-period historical Ecclesiastical Chivalric Orders. Knighthood is highly selective, and is generally granted for reasons: 1) To recognize and honor a person for their Christian traits and charitable, philanthropic and humanity-uplifting endeavors; 2) To provide a not-for-profit organizational structure through which a Knight or Dame may channel these efforts, and 3) To provide an additional religious avenue for members desirous of aligning with the internal lay monastic structure, should they wish. Additionally, the Order of the Temple also provides a unique avenue through which a person may indulge themselves with a part of world history peculiar to their interests.