

WHO ARE THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR?

By S.K. Richard W. Van Doren

One of the most distinctive organizations of Freemasonry is that of the Knights Templar. But who are they? Why the distinctive uniform? What is their purpose? To answer those questions, we turn to the history of the original Knights.

The First Crusade ended with the fall of the City of Jerusalem in the year 1099 AD. Following that cataclysmic event, Christian pilgrims from all over Europe started a flood of visitation into the lands where Jesus had trod. Their religious enthusiasm, coupled with being in places that they had only read or heard about, led to a natural euphoria and the belief that they were under God's direct protection. They could not have been more wrong. Other than the Christian-held cities, the Middle East was a no-man's land of robbers and war lords. Innocent, unarmed pilgrims were soon robbed, pillaged and sold into slavery.

Early in the reign of King Baldwin II, a group of knights under Hugh De Payens approached with the concept to form a corps of protective military men-at-arms whose sole purpose was to protect the Christian Pilgrims and the Christian Church. Unlike other medieval knights, who essentially were mercenaries out for themselves, these knights took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedient service. They were given a part of the Temple Mount as their headquarters. With the assistance of Bernard of Clairveaux, the organization became a dedicated order of warrior-monks who reported directly to the Pope. They became the Knights of fame that we now read about – or see in the movies.

On Friday, October 13, 1307, the Order was betrayed and attacked by Pope Clement V and King Philip the Fair of France. Their motive was the vast sums of money that the Templar Order had amassed. Recent release of heretofore secret documents held by the Vatican has totally vindicated the Templars of the crimes of which they were accused and of which they were subject to torture and execution by the Holy Inquisition. Their last Grand Master, Jacques DeMolay, was executed in 1312 by burning at the stake while protesting the innocence of the Order.

What happened to the Order in the intervening years is open to much speculation. Some believe that they led to the formation of a revolutionary part of the Age of Enlightenment – the organization of Freemasons. What we do know, is that in as early a year as 1769, a freemason named Davis was receiving the Order of the Temple in Boston. In 1802, this organization became known as Boston Encampment, or Boston Commandery of Knights Templar.

Today, their mission is a strong echo of that of the original Knights – to protect those who are helpless and less fortunate; to advance and defend the cause of Christianity against religious persecution; to be kind and of service to all of humanity. Upon their breast is a red cross, reminiscent of the red cross which emblazoned the white tunics of the original Knights, and a Maltese cross of the last defending Mediterranean fortress of Christendom which never fell to the advancing Islamic fleet.

We gather this morning in your congregation, as fellow Christians, to ask God's blessing upon the works of Boston Commandery, upon their Commander and Officers and all who travel with them as they sojourn to Greece and Rhodes later this month. There, they will conduct the first Templar rites and rituals on the Island of Rhodes in nearly 600 years.

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