

THE CREATION AND DEMISE OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the Order of the Knights Templar by examining the varied phenomena that led to the formation of the Order in the early twelfth century and its dissolution nearly two hundred years later. Since the demise of the Order has recently received a great deal of attention in both historical scholarship and popular culture, I analyze and critique numerous theories concerning the trial of the Templars and contextualize it by revealing the causes for the Order's creation. I use an array of primary and secondary sources to explain why each event occurred despite being unpopular with a significant portion of Christian officials. I ultimately contend that most of the aforementioned theories are insufficient to explain the rise and fall of the Order because they fail to grasp the complexity of each event. The Templars' creation resulted from a lengthy theological justification for a unique form of Christian holy war, papal ambitions, and a palpable ethos of fear and violence within Christendom that was redirected against an external enemy. Their demise stemmed from secular ambitions, relative papal weakness, and a unique blend of social fears, legal standards, and organizational rules that proved extremely deleterious in their trial.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern scholarship and popular culture have recently taken a significant interest in the demise of the Knights Templar. But an analysis of the Order's creation is also necessary to contextualize the Templars' trials as well as the events surrounding the Order's dissolution. By examining both the creation and demise of the Knights Templar, one can more fully understand the Order and thereby gain the necessary tools to either accept or criticize the numerous theories surrounding one of history's most mysterious organizations and the source of endless historical debates. The Templars' unexpected rise to power during the twelfth century was overshadowed by its far more surprising fall at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Both events disrupted the status quo and stunned contemporaries, but each event needs to be understood through an examination of the direct and indirect contributory factors that culminated in each phenomenon. These causal elements must be analyzed with respect to how they related to each other as well as the circumstances of their respective historical settings.

The creation of a military order surprised and offended many medieval contemporaries by overthrowing the traditional dichotomy of knights and monks. Although initially criticized, the Order quickly expanded because certain elements had already combined to pave the way for the Templars' ascension. During the century preceding the genesis of the Order, Gregorian reform, the development of the peace movement, and a heightened fear of Christendom's external foes primed Latin Christendom for the creation of a military order that would serve the papacy, protect Christians, and eliminate heretical threats. The Order's creation capped centuries of theological debate concerning the role of violence within the faith. As the embodiment of

Christian militancy, the Order of the Knights Templar became a widely-praised chimera of just war doctrine, holy war ideology, and crusade mentality. The Templars defended Christendom with a brutal fervor that can only be understood within the context of the crusading era. Due in large part to the Order's successes, reputation, papal favor, and wealth, the Knights Templar became one of the most famous institutions in all of Latin Christendom, which is what makes the Order's now-infamous downfall so shocking and controversial.

Unlike its creation, which although novel was a gradual and foreseeable conclusion considering the historical circumstances, the demise of the Knights Templar occurred swiftly, shocked the medieval world, and has continued to confound scholars to this very day. The downfall of the Knights Templar has inspired a lengthy debate among historians as well as countless conspiracy theories, and a couple of best-selling novels turned into cinematic portrayals. The highly varied explanations for this phenomenon testify to how difficult it is to explain the rapid downfall of such a powerful and popular institution. Some of these arguments are valid, others are unfounded, but most are incomplete. It is impossible to trace the demise of the Knights Templar back to a single cause or even a primary cause, because one cannot judge the relevance of one cause independently of the others. The fall of the Knights Templar was the result of a fervent persecution undertaken by a powerful monarch during a time period that was *extremely* unfavorable to the Templars' plight. Much like the Order's formation, its demise required a special blend of social, cultural, historical, political, financial, legal, and religious factors. Examining how these elements changed in the two centuries of the Order's

existence sheds considerable light on the veracity of contentions made concerning the demise of the Knights Templar.

THE RISE OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

The creation of the Knights Templar in 1119 CE¹ was the culmination of the evolution of Christian holy war theory, Gregorian reform, the peace movement, and a heightened fear of Christendom's external enemies. The path from early Christianity's strict devotion to pacifism to the creation of a sanctified military order charged with killing the enemies of Christ may seem intractable at first, but after an examination of the aforementioned factors, a linear transition between the two can be drawn. Theologians from St. Augustine to Pope Urban II to St. Bernard of Clairvaux can be credited with contributing to and developing a theory of Christian just war, which culminated in its ultimate expressions—the crusades and religious knighthoods. Eleventh-century reforms led to the formation of a papal monarchy that increasingly promoted violence in the name of the Church and for the first time elevated the papacy to the level of secular authorities with respect to power over Latin Christendom.² Meanwhile, the peace movement—expressed through the Peace and Truce of God—further enhanced the power of the Church, defined the characteristics of a 'good' knight, and greatly contributed to Pope Urban II's desire to redirect Christian violence against foreign rather than domestic foes. The fact that these developments coincided with the expansion of Muslim armies into

¹ Some sources cite 1118 as the foundation year of the Order, but most sources agree upon 1119 as the year the Order was established.

² The papal reforms that took place during the latter half of the eleventh century came about suddenly and almost immediately established the papacy as a fiercely anti-imperialist institution, which contradicted centuries of previous papal-secular relations. For more on the development of the papal monarchy, see Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050-1250*, Oxford History of the Christian Church (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 1-133.

Christian lands further agitated and unified Christians alike against a common enemy. Finally, once circumstances had progressed sufficiently to justify the creation of a military order, a series of treatises written by the leading theologians of the twelfth century, including St. Bernard, gave the order an identity, defended it from any lingering criticisms, and attracted a multitude of new recruits. In hindsight, considering the abundance of contributory factors, the formation of the Knights Templar may seem like a foregone conclusion, but during the fragile years both before and after the Order's inception, it was anything but.

The creation of the Knights Templar marked a defining moment in the history of Christianity, as it was the first Christian initiative to intertwine secular soldiers and religious orders.³ It was not, however, the first combination of clergymen and war. In the *Song of Roland*, an archbishop named Turpin fought valiantly against the Muslim invaders and at one point exclaimed, "A traitor is he who does not smite!"⁴ This single poetic excerpt compels one to ask: If fighting clergymen were neither novel nor generally opposed, then why was the creation of a military order—like the Knights Templar—so controversial amongst contemporaries? The foundation of the new order was so controversial partly because it was new. Any form of novelty during this age was immediate cause for suspicion and opposition.⁵ Most resistance, however, derived from the Order's violation of the traditional distinction between the honor associated with

³ The Knights Hospitaller of St. John was technically the first crusading order, but it was far slower than the Knights Templar to assume a warlike role and never undertook it exclusively [Peter Partner, *The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and their Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 11].

⁴ The *Song of Roland* was a poetic tale about Charlemagne's war against the Moorish invasion of the eighth century, but was actually written during the eleventh century. It demonstrates that there were fighting clergy prior to the creation of the Knights Templar [S.J. Allen and Emilie Amt, ed., *The Crusades: A Reader* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003), 25]. In fact, one of the goals of the reform movement was to prevent clerics from engaging in violence.

⁵ Alan Forey, "The Military Orders: 1120-1312," in *Oxford History of the Crusades*, ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 177.

religious devotion and the disreputable stigma attached to militaristic brutality. With the dawning of military orders, a secular knight could become a cleric while remaining a knight, which—to many Christian contemporaries—was an abomination of traditional Christian roles.⁶ In sharp contrast to twenty-first-century romanticized notions of chivalrous knights, medieval contemporaries prior to the crusades referred to knightly life as “lawless, licentious, and bloody.”⁷ Aelfric of Cerne, an English monk, voiced the opinion of many tenth-century clerics when he said, “God’s champions in the spiritual battle [are those] who fight with prayers not swords; it is they who are the soldiers of Christ.”⁸ Although an order of bellicose ecclesiastics was new, it was not without its own historical background. Both an examination of the development of Christianity’s militant ideology and an analysis of the historical circumstances leading up to the late eleventh century are paramount to understanding the theological and circumstantial justifications for the Order’s creation.

A Roman history of military might, biblical precedent, and the reasoning of Christian theologians set the framework for the construction of a warrior monk. For the first few centuries after its creation, Christianity was a *religio illicita* and as such its adherents were subjected to official state persecution at the hands of the Romans. Most early Christians, however, adopted a strict policy of nonviolence towards their Roman persecutors. The early Church fathers like Origen of Alexandria and Tertullian cited biblical messages of peace and insisted that the wars and bloodshed of the Old Testament

⁶ William C. Jordan, *Unceasing Strife, Unending Fear: Jacques de Therines and the Freedom of the Church in the Age of the Last Capetians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 30.

⁷ Partner, *The Murdered Magicians*, 6.

⁸ Quoted in Christopher Tyerman, *God’s War: A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 40.

should be read as allegorical models of spiritual struggles.⁹ Apologists claimed and early Christians believed that their faith prohibited them from taking human life, which in turn prevented them from serving in the Roman army—a punishable offense in Roman law—and thus, their pacifism actually increased their own persecution.¹⁰ Prior to the adoption of Christianity by the Roman state, violence was rejected almost unilaterally by Christians. Even if they had the will to fight back, early Christians did not have the means to do so. Since their faith prevented them from ending their own persecution either by acquiescing to military service or fighting back against their persecutors, early Church leaders turned a negative into a positive by depicting the paradigms of true Christian faith as martyrs who willingly laid down their life without struggle. It is important to note how this paradigm changed as the Christian faith became more and more assimilated into Roman society and culture.

Despite their persecution, many Christians were still Roman citizens, and as such they inherited a sense of Roman duty to protect the state. This duty was reinforced by Roman orators and poets, who gave the highest praises to those who fought for the fatherland.¹¹ The famous Roman orator Cicero was the first person to document a theory of *just war*. The Ciceronian model of just war differed from the heroic wars of Greek and Roman epics in that it did not romanticize warfare and violence, but rather portrayed them as a means to an end—the protection of the state. Cicero created rules to evaluate

⁹ Tyerman, *God's War*, 32.

¹⁰ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 25.

¹¹ Virgil's *Aeneid* is littered with heroic examples of men and women fighting and dying for their countries. In Book VI, Aeneas comes to the Groves of Blessedness in the underworld where a portion is reserved for "those who suffered wounds, fighting for their homeland" [Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Dell, 2004), 151-2]. Furthermore, the great Roman poet Horace famously wrote, "Dulce et Decorum est Pro patria mori," which translates as "It is sweet and honorable to die for the fatherland." For more on the evolution of this concept in the Middle Ages, see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, "Pro Patria Mori in Medieval Political Thought," *The American Historical Review* 56, no. 3 (1951), 472-92.

both the justifiability of going to war—*jus ad bellum*—and the morality of certain types of warfare—*jus in bello*—in an attempt to govern and restrain the use of force.¹² These rules and requirements laid the groundwork for future models of just war, most notably St. Augustine's, but nevertheless failed to persuade non-violent Christians as a whole, that is, until their faith became the faith of the fatherland.

Christian nonviolence began to wane when Constantine seized complete control over the Roman Empire in 324 C.E. and made Christianity a state-sponsored religion. Eusebius' account of Constantine's conversion to Christianity provided the pacifistic faith with the ultimate example of divinely sanctioned violence. Eusebius described how the soon-to-be emperor was not only encouraged to fight by the Christian God, but also guaranteed victory by His divination. Eusebius highlighted the fact that Constantine's final victories came after his acceptance of Christianity and in so doing vindicated the emperor's actions and proved to non-combatant Christians that their God did not exclusively prohibit violence.¹³ This account ironically transformed a symbol of the Christian faith into a battle standard of the Roman army: "The emperor constantly made use of this sign of salvation as a safeguard against every adverse and hostile power, and commanded that others similar to it should be carried at the head of all his armies."¹⁴

After Constantine's acceptance of Christianity, Roman officials made a small concession to Christian pacifism by exempting clergymen from warfare, but they

¹² Lloyd Steffen, *Holy War, Just War: Exploring the Moral Meaning of Religious Violence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 236.

¹³ Grant R. Shafer, "Hell, Martyrdom, and War: Violence in Early Christianity," in *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, vol. 3, *Models and Cases of Violence in Religion*, ed. J. Harold Ellens (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 236.

¹⁴ Eusebius, "The Conversion of Constantine," ca. 330, in *Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1990), 1: 489-91; also available online: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/conv-const.html> (Accessed March 7, 2009).

maintained that the faith's laity must fight on behalf of the newly-Christian empire.¹⁵ Subsequently, most objections to military service declined and violence in the name of Christ quickly began to rise, especially amongst different Christian sects.¹⁶ This quick turnaround on such a key issue suggests that as long as it was a sectarian and minority religion, survival necessitated that the new faith maintain its pacifist nature, but once it became officially linked to the Roman state, its members were compelled to establish orthodoxy and defend the faith's doctrines from heretical threats.¹⁷

Christians now had the means and the will to conduct violence on behalf of their faith, but still lacked the theological justification to do so. Christian apologists rectified this dilemma by citing biblical examples of sanctioned violence in order to formulate a reasoned argument defending violence committed on behalf of the faith. The most prominent of these theologians was St. Augustine of Hippo, who is often referred to as the father of just war theory. Augustine used scripture from both the Old and New Testaments to support his contentions of justifiable warfare.¹⁸ His model of just war followed the Ciceronian example of using violence as a means to an end: "Christians will engage in war to secure the earthly peace and will suffer war as a means to heavenly peace."¹⁹ Augustine proposed that violence was morally neutral and its justifiability rested on the conflict's adherence to certain conditions.²⁰ He formulated four essential characteristics of just war: 1) it required just cause; 2) its aim must be defensive or for the

¹⁵ Tyerman, *God's War*, 33.

¹⁶ Shafer, "Hell, Martyrdom, and War," in *The Destructive Power*, 236.

¹⁷ Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003), 26.

¹⁸ Citing biblical parables, Augustine praised men like Abraham, Moses, Saul, John the Baptist, Joshua, Gideon, and David for their willingness to commit violence and in some cases kill, in the name of God [Tyerman, *God's War*, 30; see also Augustine, "Augustine of Hippo on the Just War," in *The Crusades: A Reader*, 7].

¹⁹ Quoted in Shafer, "Hell, Martyrdom and War," in *The Destructive Power*, 237-8.

²⁰ Marcus Bull, "Origins," in *Oxford History*, 18.

recovery of a rightful position; 3) it must be sanctioned by a legitimate authority; and 4) it must be fought by purely motivated warriors.²¹ Augustine also believed that war could be justifiably waged if the number of lives lost in the conflict would be less than the number of lives that would be saved from fighting it.²² Augustine's biblical paradigms and necessary conditions became the foundation of Christianity's just war ideology. The Augustine model directed Christian militancy for centuries until it eventually evolved into a new concept...*holy war*.

The Church's stance toward warfare followed the just war doctrine until the eleventh century when reformist popes took the small step of reframing war as not only justifiable, but also as an outright duty of Christian piety.²³ This new kind of warfare was exclusively religious. To many contemporary theologians, holy war was the fulfillment of God's wishes because it was fought on behalf of the Church and Christendom which were the products of God's will.²⁴ Holy war charged Christians with the religious duty—sanctified by God Himself—to wage war against the infidel. It was fought for faith-based ideals and waged by warriors executing God's will, on His authority, and as such they were able to redefine Augustine's necessary condition of only waging a purely defensive war.²⁵ In addition, whereas just war theory attempted to restrain violence, in a holy war,

²¹ Tyerman, *God's War*, 44.

²² Pope Urban II cited this justification in his 1095 call for a crusade, "If you permit them to continue thus for a while with impunity, the faithful of God will be much more widely attacked by them" [Fulcher of Chartres, "Urban II's Call for a Crusade, 1095," in *The Crusades: A Reader*, 39].

²³ Tomaz Mastnak, *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2002), 64.

²⁴ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), 16-17.

²⁵ Despite formulating the defensive condition of a just war, St. Augustine's vehement condemnations of heretics, namely the Donatists—an early Christian heretical sect—provided future proponents of holy war with the justification to extend the meaning of 'defensive' when it came to heretics. 'Defense' was no longer tied to a particular country or empire, but rather to Christendom, the Church, and Christ himself. Therefore, conducting violence against heretics and pagans was permissible because it protected the purity of the Church within and encouraged the spread of the faith without [Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 60-4; see also Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?*, 29].

victory sometimes meant the extermination of the enemy, particularly if the enemy occupied a sacred place.²⁶ Holy war may have descended from just war theory, but it clearly differed in some fundamental respects.

While Roman military theory and just war ideology made progress in bridging the gap between pacifism and holy war, the Church was slow to embrace the combination of secular wars with Christian causes.²⁷ That being said, the popes of the latter half of the eleventh century changed everything. These popes initiated a massive reorganization of the Church on the central, regional, and local levels—placing their vocation at the top of this hierarchy.²⁸ They aimed to deliver the Church from its current state of divisive chaos by granting supervisory powers to papal legates, bringing senior churchmen together regularly, expanding and organizing canon law, as well as emphasizing the pope’s judicial authority.²⁹ Their collective priority, however, was to create a unified Christian population under papal leadership, which transcended the authority of secular rulers due to the pontiff’s endorsement by God.³⁰ Eventually, their efforts established the papacy as the head of the Church and Christendom as a whole, and thereby allowed pontiffs to make their agendas those of Latin Christendom as a whole.

Due to the Gregorian reforms, the pope became the ruler of his very own papal monarchy, but that would never mean much so long as the papacy’s power was

²⁶ This ideal was exemplified in the Christian sacking of Jerusalem in 1099 when the blood from slaughtered pagans in the Temple of Solomon rose to the knees of mounted Christians [Raymond of Aguilers’ account of the fall of Jerusalem, 1099, quoted in Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 60].

²⁷ Tyerman, *God’s War*, 40.

²⁸ These popes were commonly referred to as the reform popes or popes of the Gregorian reform—named after the most prominent and influential reform pope—because of their attempts to cleanse the Church of the abuses of simony and clerical sexual activity as well as liberate it from the control of secular rulers [Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 38].

²⁹ Bull, “Origins,” in *Oxford History*, 27.

³⁰ Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 17.

secondary to that of secular authorities. Despite the significant resistance of numerous clerics to the reform movement, restructuring the Church was easy compared to transcending the power of secular rulers. Reform popes worked tirelessly to eliminate papal limitations on secular affairs. They increasingly claimed authority over states and laymen, which resulted in militaristic opposition, thereby compelling popes to fight that opposition with temporal weapons.³¹ Starting with Pope Leo IX³² the reform popes became increasingly militaristic.³³ They saw holy war as a means to restore their vocation to religious supremacy and secular autonomy. In the developments of Christian militancy and holy war, no reform pope was more influential than Pope Gregory VII.

Pope Gregory VII was the most aggressive of the reform popes, and it was because of his actions and accomplishments that the era of the reform popes is now referred to as the Gregorian reform era.³⁴ He claimed that the power of the pontiff superseded that of all secular powers and as such he and others of his office had the right to depose even the highest of temporal authorities if they infringed upon the power and autonomy of the Church.³⁵ Many contemporary accounts depicted Gregory VII as a warmongering pope who, more than anybody, broke the Church's traditional stance against war and secular knights.³⁶ He redefined the term *milites Christi*—which had previously applied to monks exclusively—to apply to laymen fighting with material

³¹ Tyerman, *God's War*, 46.

³² Pope Leo IX (1048-54) personally led the war against the Normans in southern Italy in 1053 [Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 28].

³³ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 39-40.

³⁴ James A. Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law* (London: Longman, 1995), 40.

³⁵ Unsurprisingly, Gregory VII's bold claims led to a series of confrontations with the German emperor Henry IV, which ultimately forced the pontiff to abandon Rome. It was only after the First Crusade was launched in 1095-6 that the pontiff—now Pope Urban II—was actually able to reside in Rome [*Ibid.*, 40-1].

³⁶ Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 79-80.

weapons on behalf of the Church's interest.³⁷ This act made the widely-despised secular knights a part of holy war and thus opened the doors of salvation to laymen who were previously barred from obtaining it unless they entered a monastic circle.³⁸ Through his edicts and actions, Gregory VII sanctified warfare and its association with the Church.³⁹ Due in large part to Gregorian reform and rhetoric, Latin Christians became increasingly receptive to any force that would combat Christ's enemies. Included among these enemies were knights, who committed various acts of violence against clerics. These clerics, however, made reducing violence into a duty of knights by initiating the peace movement.

The peace movement refers to a program directed at pacifying Europe that was carried out during the eleventh century by means of numerous agreements reached on the local level—primarily in modern day France—broadly labeled the Peace of God and Truce of God. These agreements, respectively, forbade attacking non-military groups and established specific periods of time during which violence was prohibited. These pacts were initiated by local clerics who allied themselves with knights as well as the masses to oppose the violence of lay magnates.⁴⁰ To attract a large and sympathetic audience, the clerics would use relics and would enforce their peace agreements both physically (via sworn arms bearers) and spiritually (via the threat of excommunication).⁴¹ The physical defenders of these agreements created an awareness of secular brotherhoods organized to enforce the will and doctrines of Church officials.⁴² These brotherhoods fighting to

³⁷ *The Rule of the Templars: The French Text of the Rule of the Order of the Knights Templar*, ed. and trans. J.M. Upton-Ward (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992), 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁹ Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 32-3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴² Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 39.

maintain the peace distinguished themselves from the wicked knights who fought to disturb it. Thus, the knights of the peace movement became a key antecedent to the creation of military orders because they created a class of “good” knights who strove to protect the churches, the poor, and the oppressed.⁴³

The Peace and Truce of God were parts of a larger movement to restrain and control violence in Europe, but they were not as altruistic as one might imagine.⁴⁴ Helping the poor and oppressed was ancillary to protecting the Church and its interests.⁴⁵ Despite being unsuccessful in a practical sense of maintaining peace in Latin Christendom, the Peace and Truce of God were extremely beneficial for the Church for a variety of reasons. The peace movement relegated the duty of secular agents—to protect the people—to the Church, thus making ecclesiastical forces the perceived sheriffs of Europe. Violence and chaos were defining characteristics of the tenth and eleventh centuries and as such people were generally receptive to initiatives for peace; if the severely weakened secular authorities were incapable of providing it, then the people became indebted to the Church for having given it.⁴⁶ Thus, the peace movement was a catalyst of change that transferred some secular powers to the Church and thereby critically altered power relations in Western Europe.⁴⁷ It opened the door for the Church to direct both secular forces and violence by implicitly giving it “the authority to determine who could employ arms, for what purpose, on whose command, against whom,

⁴³ Areyh Grabois, “*Militia and Malitia: The Bernardine Vision of Chivalry*,” in *The Second Crusade and the Cistercians*, ed. Michael Gervers (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 49-56. Online at <http://www.deremilitari.org/resources/articles/grabois.htm> (Accessed 26 February 2009).

⁴⁴ Declaration of the Truce of God, 1083, in *The Crusades: A Reader*, 28.

⁴⁵ Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

and when.”⁴⁸ By prohibiting Christians from fighting each other, the peace movement of the eleventh century also redirected Christian militancy and violence toward external foes.⁴⁹ This in turn led to an entirely new state of Christian militancy...*the crusade*.

The crusade was a hybrid of holy war and just war.⁵⁰ It was just because it was fought by purely motivated warriors in defense of Christ and His Church. It could also be classified as a subset of holy war in that it called for not only religious subjects, but also secular armies and knights to wage war in the name of the Church.⁵¹ A crusade sought to extend the peace movement by bringing it to the east and thereby, not only rechanneling Christian militancy toward an eternal foe, but also virtually eliminating internecine wars in the west.⁵² Unlike its paternal predecessors, however, a crusade could *only* be legitimated by the pope, and participation in it served as penance and remission of sins, unlike in previous holy wars where one must die in order to be absolved.⁵³ Since fighting itself constituted penance for one’s sins, many secular knights and laymen took up arms to fight in the crusades because penance was otherwise extremely difficult to obtain for someone outside of ecclesiastic circles.⁵⁴ The ideological transition from just war to holy war to crusade explains the theoretical justification for the creation of a military order, but an analysis of the historical circumstances surrounding the Templars’ inception is critical to understanding the full causation of the Order’s genesis.

When the Muslim armies conquered Persia in the mid-seventh century and then pressed their invasion west, they conquered a vast area of Christian lands—including

⁴⁸ Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵¹ Robert the Monk, “Urban II’s Call for a Crusade,” in *The Crusades: A Reader*, 40.

⁵² Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 49.

⁵³ Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades*, 12-3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

Jerusalem in 638 C.E. and most of the Iberian Peninsula by the early eighth century. This invasion severely drained an already weakened Byzantine Empire in almost every respect and subsequent invasions continued to do so for centuries.⁵⁵ In time, however, the Muslim forces became severely weakened and divided by internecine disputes, which made it easy for the Seljuk Turks to invade Islamic lands from Central Asia and conquer Baghdad in 1055.⁵⁶ Later on during the same century, Latin armies reclaimed formerly held Christian lands—namely parts of Spain and Sicily—from Islamic control. These successes encouraged the reform popes to press for a campaign into the Holy Land in order to reclaim the lands lost to the Muslims during the seventh century.⁵⁷ The conflicts on both sides of the Mediterranean fostered an ethos of contempt between Christians and Muslims, but these territorial disputes had yet to manifest themselves in a completely religious nature.

By 1095, the Turks' campaign in Asia Minor had lasted more than twenty years and nearly brought them to the very walls of Constantinople.⁵⁸ Contrarily, defending the empire from Muslim invaders for over three-hundred years had depleted both the treasury and military-strength of the Byzantines. After crushing defeats at the hands of the Turks, the Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus sent ambassadors to the west in 1074 and 1095 to request help from the papacy. The papacy had always wanted to bring the Eastern Church and Byzantine Empire under its influence. Emperor Alexius' request in 1095 for

⁵⁵ Tyerman, *God's War*, 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁸ Riley-Smith, "The Crusading Movement and Historians," in *Oxford History*, 2.

Catholic military assistance provided Pope Urban II with a golden opportunity to consolidate the faith under one Church.⁵⁹

Gregorian desire to assert control over the Eastern Church and establish independence from secular rulers in the west played a significant role in Pope Urban II's call to arms. Pope Urban II built upon Gregory VII's militarism, but differed in a notable way. Gregory VII's principle enemies were 'bad' Christians and he directed his holy war against the Church's internal enemies, whereas Pope Urban II channeled holy war against the Church's external enemies.⁶⁰ He used the crusade as a means to fight the Muslim threat as well as reduce high levels of internecine warfare in Latin Christendom.⁶¹ During various and extremely graphic speeches between 1095-6, Pope Urban II enflamed Christian outrage over the infidel's capture of the Holy City and imposed on Christians the obligation to undertake a military campaign in order to reclaim the Holy Land, crush the infidel, and in doing so redeem all of their sins.⁶² The propagandist nature of Urban II's speeches was extremely important in amassing support for the crusades by unifying Christians against a demonized enemy.

In his request for a crusade, Pope Urban II frequently referred to the "barbaric fury" of the infidels who abused innocent Christians. According to Robert the Monk, Urban II called the Muslims, "a people absolutely alien to God [who had] invaded the land of Christians [and had] reduced the people with sword, rapine, and flame."⁶³ He described the tortuous treatments that Christian captives were allegedly receiving from

⁵⁹ In 1204, crusaders sacked Constantinople and expelled the Byzantines from their capital. After denouncing these acts, Pope Innocent III established a Latin patriarch in Constantinople [Tyerman, *God's War*, 524-5].

⁶⁰ Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 83-9.

⁶¹ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 40.

⁶² Tyerman, *God's War*, 27.

⁶³ Robert the Monk, "Urban II's Call," in *The Crusades: A Reader*, 40-1.

the Muslims, including forced circumcision, sliced open entrails, decapitation, and rape.⁶⁴ He thus beseeched Latin Christians to take up arms and “destroy that vile race from the lands of our friends...[because] Christ commands it.”⁶⁵ By declaring it the duty of all Christians to fight the now demonized external foe, Pope Urban II rallied the masses to support his new crusade, which turned out to be a military success.

Crusading armies from the west captured Jerusalem in 1099 during the First Crusade, but these Latin Christians lacked sufficient manpower and resources to ensure the safety of Christians within the Holy Land. After the First Crusade, many crusaders went back to the west and became monks of a peaceful nature, but others who enjoyed their status as temporary ecclesiastics stayed behind. Many of those who remained in the Holy Land banded together in order to protect themselves, their privileges, and their Christian brethren. Stories about Christian pilgrims being attacked by infidels circulated throughout Christendom shortly after the capture of Jerusalem. Reports of these attacks offended the medieval Christian emphasis on protecting its weak and defenseless brethren.⁶⁶ In 1119, the Templars were created for the purpose of protecting Christian pilgrims traveling to and within the Holy Land. Three documents concerning the formation of the Order were written a decade or more after that event. *The Rule of the Templars*, Hugh the Sinner’s “Letter to the Knights of Christ in the Temple at Jerusalem,” and St. Bernard’s “In Praise of the New Knighthood” detailed the Order’s purpose, extolled its members, and played a large role in the rapid expansion of the Knights Templar. These documents were pivotal to the Order’s ascendancy from

⁶⁴ Robert the Monk, “Urban II’s Call,” in *The Crusades: A Reader*, 41.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁶ Paul Crawford, “The Military Orders: Introduction,” ORB Encyclopedia, <http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/monastic/milintro.html>.

obscurity. Each text complimented the others⁶⁷ and became a reference guide to the vocation's duties and purposes.⁶⁸

The “Primitive Rule of the Templars” was established in 1128-9 at the Council of Troyes.⁶⁹ After an extensive discussion by both ecclesiastics and secular authorities, the rule of the first military order was drafted.⁷⁰ It borrowed heavily from the Cistercian rule—especially with respect to creating a novitiate—but later served as the model for other military orders.⁷¹ The Rule contained elements of just and holy war ideology as well as Gregorian Reform and the peace movement. First and foremost, the Rule established an identity for the new order, which differentiated it from other peace enforcing brotherhoods that were spawned from the peace movement. Each law of the Rule was created to unify its members and transform them into an obedient and efficient brotherhood of Christ's soldiers.

The Rule began in accordance with the Gregorian model of recruiting secular knights to join a crusade in the defense of the Church.⁷² It acknowledged the past sinfulness of these knights in terms directly pulled from the peace movement's definition of a good knight: “This [secular] knighthood despised the love of justice that constitutes its duties and did not do what it should, that is defend the poor, widows, orphans and churches, but strove to plunder, despoil and kill.”⁷³ Nevertheless, the Rule “commanded”

⁶⁷ In fact, the manuscript of Hugh's letter was discovered in a Templar house between a copy of *The Rule* and “In Praise” [*The Rule of the Templars*, ed. and trans. Upton-Ward, 5].

⁶⁸ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 44.

⁶⁹ The entire “Rule of the Templars” was amended multiple times throughout the Order's existence, but for the purpose of examining the rise of the Order, the “Primitive” or first Rule is the only part that will be referenced and from now on will simply be referred to as the Rule.

⁷⁰ *The Templars: Selected Sources*, ed. and trans. Malcolm Barber and Keith Bate (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 31.

⁷¹ Alan Forey, *Military Orders and the Crusades* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994), III 1-2.

⁷² *The Rule of the Templars*, ed. and trans. Upton-Ward, 19.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Templars to seek out secular knights—even those who had been excommunicated—and allow them to join the Order.⁷⁴ Each recruit was essential since, according to the Rule, the Church’s enemies were “without number.”⁷⁵ In various passages, the Rule established the Templars as the progeny of Augustine’s just war doctrine and the Gregorian model of *milites Christi* who “defended the land from the unbelieving pagans that are the enemies of [Christ]” and as such “may [be] kill[ed]...without sinning.”⁷⁶ More important than the Order’s ideological and moral merit, however, was the literal code of conduct and regulations set forth in the Rule.

The numerous guidelines within the Rule served to make the Templars better monks and soldiers. Templars were permanent crusaders who were subjected to monastic discipline.⁷⁷ The Rule regulated everything from a Templar’s diet to the shape of his shoes. Each regulation served to instill the Templars with one or more of the following qualities: uniformity, comradery, and obedience. The Templars’ dress code prohibited ostentatious attire and also regulated the shape, size, and color of almost every article of clothing. The Rule also set forth a strict grooming standard on the Templars. A military uniform and grooming standard are still utilized in twenty-first-century armies for the same reason that the Templars used them: they encourage uniformity, which by its very definition trumps individuality in favor of the greater good. In addition to uniformity, other provisions promoted comradery by mandating that the Templars eat together, share utensils, and “firmly keep the communal life.”⁷⁸ As a military order, it was important to retain a sense of comradery because on the battlefield, a soldier is much

⁷⁴ *The Rule of the Templars*, ed. and trans. Upton-Ward, 20.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 156.

⁷⁸ *The Rule of the Templars*, ed. and trans. Upton-Ward, 25-8.

more likely to kill or be killed for a friend than he would be for a stranger.⁷⁹ Finally, a number of rules were created for the sole purpose of fostering obedience among the Templars, which was a difficult task considering that medieval knights were not accustomed to taking orders. The Rule plainly stated that, “All brothers who are professed strictly obey their Master. For nothing is dearer to Jesus Christ than obedience.”⁸⁰ Templars were to obey their master as they would Christ Himself and refrain from talking lest they should be led toward fostering dissent amongst themselves. The Rule ended with a series of regulations forbidding Templars from fornicating with women and raising children.⁸¹ The thought process behind these latter provisions was the same that supported the justification of castrating eunuchs or becoming a cleric: when a man’s ability to marry and reproduce is stripped from him, he sacrifices his worldly ambitions and becomes exclusively devoted to that which he sacrificed so much for. Even after the Rule defined the Templars as a unified brotherhood of obedient warrior monks and in accordance with the prevailing mentality of the era, however, the Order still faced a plethora of criticism.

The greatest evidence that the new order faced widespread criticisms stemmed from a letter addressed to the Knights Templar (ca. 1130) by a man referred to as Hugh the Sinner.⁸² Hugh’s letter demonstrated that many of the Templars were becoming

⁷⁹ During the Civil War, Confederate troops were organized and grouped into divisions from the same hometown for this very reason [Dora L. Costa and Matthew E. Kahn, “Cowards and Heroes: Group Loyalty in the American Civil War,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118, no. 2 (2003), 529].

⁸⁰ *The Rule of the Templars*, ed. and trans. Upton-Ward, 29.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸² There is some debate about who exactly wrote this letter (the theologian Hugh of St. Victor or Hugh de Payns, first master of the Temple), but—according to Helen Nicholson—based on the poor quality of the original Latin and praise of the knights and their active life, an increasing number of scholars now believe that the letter was written by Hugh de Payns [Hugh the Sinner, “Letter to the Knights of Christ in the Temple at Jerusalem,” trans. Helen Nicholson, <http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/monastic/hughssin.html>; see also Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, 40].

demoralized and abandoning the Order because—despite their many sacrifices fighting in the Holy Land—they were still subjected to contemporary criticisms and an overall lack of both financial and moral support by greater Christendom:

We are talking on this subject, brothers, because we have heard that some of you have been alarmed by certain indiscreet persons, as if your profession—in which you dedicate your life to bearing weapons against the enemies of the faith and of the peace and for the defense of Christians—[...] was illicit or harmful, a sin or an obstacle to greater progress!⁸³

This letter was clearly drafted to encourage the Templars to remain in the Order. The author cited numerous biblical passages to demonstrate the importance of remaining true to one's vocation and calling.⁸⁴ Most importantly, however, Hugh encouraged Templars to stay by attacking the Order's criticisms on two fronts: first, he discredited the critics collectively by associating them with the devil; and second, he offered direct, logical rebuttals to specific attacks against the Order.

Hugh's defense of the Order revolved around an association of its critics with the devil. The author opened his letter by claiming that the devil was working tirelessly to prevent the knights from fulfilling their God given duty and tempt them into sin.⁸⁵ He characterized criticisms of the Order as nothing more than the devil's disguised effort to make them abandon their just endeavors: "...now [the devil] tells the knights of Christ to lay down their weapons, not to wage wars, to run away from uproar, to seek the secret place—so that he can take away their true humility while pretending to offer an appearance of humility."⁸⁶ To accomplish this, the devil would have to mask his true

⁸³ Hugh the Sinner, "Letter to the Knights of Christ."

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

identity and attempt to persuade the Templars “under the guise of piety.”⁸⁷ Thus, he hid in the hearts and words of the Templars’ critics. It was the devil who claimed that the Templars were an unjust order with cruel intentions. It was the devil who attempted to convert the Templars into a passive lifestyle. Put simply, it was the devil who was responsible for all of the Templars’ self-doubt and criticisms. Therefore, to heed these criticisms and leave the Order was to give into the devil’s will, while to ignore them and remain in the vocation was to defy Satan and uphold “God’s command.”⁸⁸ Having discredited the critics as a whole, Hugh attacked their main points individually.

In general, clerics during this period idealized a contemplative life rather than an active one—such as the Templars followed.⁸⁹ Even those who viewed the active life as a legitimate means to salvation ranked it below contemplative, non-violent devotion to God.⁹⁰ Hugh refuted this widely held belief because he felt that a man’s actions rather than his vocation made him righteous. After all, “If your vocation could save you, the devil would not have fallen from Heaven.”⁹¹ Hugh’s letter further praised the active life as a necessary compliment to the purely meditative one. Metaphorically, Hugh likened the Templars to a shelter defending its inhabitants—contemplative orders—from a great storm—attacks on Christendom.⁹² Literally, Hugh claimed that without adherents to the active life, “there would be no religious orders left in God’s Church.”⁹³ Finally, in response to the claim that the Templars were ill-natured murderers and plunderers, Hugh responded that the knights were purely motivated warriors of God, fighting His enemies

⁸⁷ Hugh the Sinner, “Letter to the Knights of Christ.”

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Helen Nicholson, *The Knights Templar: A New History* (Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 2001), 41-2.

⁹⁰ Forey, “The Military Orders,” in *Oxford History*, 177.

⁹¹ Hugh the Sinner, “Letter to the Knights of Christ.”

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

and thus justified in destroying their wickedness and plundering their possessions as payment for their labor.⁹⁴ Hugh's letter was clearly directed at justifying the Order in the eyes of its members; but a letter written to the Templars years later not only targeted current members, but also critics and potential members alike.

Hugh's letter was not sufficient to quell the external criticisms and internal doubts of the Order, so he⁹⁵ wrote to St. Bernard of Clairvaux three times beseeching him to write the Templars a letter in order to boost their moral.⁹⁶ St. Bernard of Clairvaux was the most influential Cistercian monk and one of the most influential Church officials during the twelfth century.⁹⁷ Due to his fame and tireless efforts, as a correspondent, to ensure that his message was heard, St. Bernard's involvement guaranteed that the new order would be brought to the attention of monastic circles in a positive light.⁹⁸ The resulting document, "In Praise of the New Knighthood"—*De laude novae militiae* (ca. 1136)—simultaneously defended the Order from its critics, augmented Templar morale, and inspired others to join the ranks of the new knighthood.

Almost all of the contributory factors that made the creation of the Knights Templar possible—just war, holy war, the peace movement, the crusade, and an increased perception of a Muslim threat—were present in St. Bernard's defense of the Order. He portrayed the Templars as the embodiment of Augustine's just war doctrine: having been sanctioned by a righteous authority, they had pure intentions to aid in the just causes of recovering and defending the Holy Land. In addition to just warriors, the Templars were warriors of God who were charged with killing infidels in the name of

⁹⁴ Hugh the Sinner, "Letter to the Knights of Christ."

⁹⁵ Assuming that Hugh the Sinner was in fact Hugh de Payns.

⁹⁶ Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 156-7.

⁹⁷ Jordan, *Unceasing Strife*, 23.

⁹⁸ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 49.

Christ. He also specifically invoked both the peace movement's goal of eradicating violence from Latin Europe and the crusade's objective of redirecting that violence against Christ's enemies in the east:

...unbelieving scoundrels, sacrilegious plunderers, homicides, perjurers, adulterers, whose departure from Europe is certainly a double benefit, seeing that people in Europe are glad to see the back of them, and the people to whose assistance they are going in the Holy Land are delighted to see them! It is certainly beneficial to those who live on both sides of the sea, since they protect one side and desist from molesting the other!⁹⁹

He repeatedly reminded his readers of the increased threat that the pagans *now* posed to Christianity. It was better to avoid slaughtering pagans whenever it was possible to do so while still protecting the faithful, but "it *now* seems better to destroy them than let the rod of sinners be lifted over the lot of the just."¹⁰⁰ Bernard utilized past events and developments in the Christian faith to justify the Order's creation, but he also addressed the two, major, recurrent criticisms of the new knighthood specifically.

By 1119 when the Order of the Knights Templar was first created, killing pagans and waging holy war were commonly accepted practices. Most criticism of the Templars stemmed from the fact that they were *monks* fighting with *secular* weapons. Again, this point offended many Christian officials because it broke with Augustine's just war limitations on ecclesiastic participation and associated clergymen with the despicable characteristics of secular soldiers. Rather than denying these points, Bernard accepted their validity and used his brilliant rhetorical skills to reshape them in support of his own argument favoring the Templars. He argued that the concept of a warrior monk should be celebrated rather than scorned, and he also openly acknowledged that secular knights

⁹⁹ St. Bernard of Clairvaux, "In Praise of the New Knighthood," trans. Conrad Greenia, <http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/monastic/bernard.html>.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

were wicked, but strove to distinguish the Templars from those knights and in so doing he defused a central argument against the Order.

Bernard believed that neither the deeds of soldiers nor of monks were remarkable because they were all too common and had failed to eradicate God's enemies thus far. But, the combination of the two vocations was truly praiseworthy if only for its novelty and potential.¹⁰¹ As both monks and soldiers, the Templars embodied the best of both vocations, because the latter did not sully the former—as their critics suggested—but rather complimented it: “They lack[ed] neither monastic meekness nor military might.”¹⁰² The Templars were soldiers elevated to monks rather than monks reduced to soldiers.¹⁰³ By reversing the negative connotation of warrior monks, Bernard dealt a serious blow to one of the main criticisms of the Templars.

In addition to dismissing the supposedly contradictory nature of a warrior monk, Bernard deflated another main critique of the Templars by stressing the vast differences between them and secular knights. St. Bernard used a clever play on words in Latin to categorize knights into two groups: *militia*—to refer to military orders like the Knights Templar who fought selflessly for God—and *malitia*—to refer to secular knights whose narcissistic obsession with their appearance and commitment to self-interest made them deplorable.¹⁰⁴ The very title implied that the Templars were an entirely *new* type of knight, but in case his readers either missed or ignored his frequent repetition of the word ‘new,’ Bernard devoted an entire chapter of his letter to explicitly listing the distinctions

¹⁰¹ St. Bernard, “In Praise.”

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 159.

¹⁰⁴ Grabois, “*Militia* and *Malitia*,” in *The Second Crusade*. Online at <http://www.deremilitari.org/resources/articles/grabois.htm> (Accessed 2 February 2009).

between the lives of secular knights and of the Templars—as portrayed in the Rule.¹⁰⁵ Bernard’s extensive condemnation of secular knights and polarization of the new knighthood from the old had a twofold benefit to his argument: it demonstrated that his view of secular knights was synonymous with, if not more contemptuous than, the Templars’ critics, and it allowed him to define the new knights as the antithesis of those wicked men that were so widely despised throughout Christendom.

Bernard also included several points addressing the hesitations that many would-be Templars might have. Multiple reformist popes had already promised those who fought for the recovery of the Holy Land that their sins would be absolved and they would be granted eternal salvation. In addition to repeating this guarantee extensively, Bernard assured his readers that killing in the name of God was as meritorious as any other pursuit in His name, which must have remained a major cause of doubt among Templars and Templar recruits alike, despite the developments of the eleventh century. He wrote, “But the Knights of Christ may safely fight the battles of their Lord, fearing neither sin if they smite the enemy, nor danger at their own death; since to inflict death or to die for Christ is no sin, but rather, an abundant claim to glory.”¹⁰⁶ Bernard based this claim on the belief that infidels and pagans are not people, but rather the incarnation of evil.¹⁰⁷

If any lingering doubts still remained about the Order’s purpose in the Holy Land, Bernard answered them with a sort of medieval version of ‘What Would Jesus Do?’ Near the end of his letter, Bernard referenced Christ’s violent expulsion of the merchants from

¹⁰⁵ One such point differentiated between the Templars’ battle attire, which was simple and would strike fear into their enemies, and that of secular knights, which was ostentatious and would strike affection into their enemies [St. Bernard, “In Praise”].

¹⁰⁶ St. Bernard, “In Praise.”

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

the Temple as an example that the Templars should follow because driving off pagans from a holy place was surely more important than driving off merchants.¹⁰⁸ Finally, to those men swayed by more practical arguments, Bernard demonstrated that military service for salvation was a “good deal.”¹⁰⁹ He elaborated by demonstrating that service in the Holy Land was a practical way to bring one closer to God, especially for those who had neither the means nor the ability to study and live as a cloistered monk.¹¹⁰

After hopefully quelling any and all doubts surrounding the Order, Bernard stroked the Templars’ egos by calling them “the picked troops of God, who he has recruited from the ends of the earth.”¹¹¹ Suffice it to say, Bernard’s “Praise of the New Knighthood” must have achieved everything that Hugh de Payns had hoped it would. The saint’s authority and passionate praise of the Templars greatly enhanced the Order’s reputation both within the Order and amongst its critics, which in turn led to its rapid expansion.¹¹² In a relatively short document, Bernard was able to portray the Order of the Knights Templar as the capstone to centuries of development in Christian militancy, dismiss its critics, inspire its members, and attract droves of new recruits.

After obtaining the endorsement of a theologian as prolific and respected as St. Bernard, the Order had little trouble enrolling new members. Despite its humble origins, the Order’s manpower, wealth, and influence increased dramatically within a very short period of time during the twelfth century. Records indicate that by the late-thirteenth century, the Order had grown to more than 20,000 members,¹¹³ and owned around 870

¹⁰⁸ St. Bernard, “In Praise.”

¹⁰⁹ Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, 166.

¹¹⁰ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 47.

¹¹¹ St. Bernard, “In Praise.”

¹¹² Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 50.

¹¹³ Helmut Nickel, “Chivalry, Orders of,” in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 2, ed. Joseph R. Strayer, (New York: Scribner, 1982), 304.

properties scattered throughout Latin Christendom.¹¹⁴ As their size and military strength grew, the Templars extended their duties from protecting pilgrims to capturing and defending cities in the Holy Land itself. This new objective and various papal bulls¹¹⁵ allowed the Templars to enlarge their monetary funds and acquire numerous properties. Anyone who did not recognize or respect the Templars' privileges would be given two warnings by the papacy and, if the misconduct persisted, the offender would be excommunicated by the Church.¹¹⁶ Through donations, business ventures—namely banking¹¹⁷—and loot from their expeditions, the Knights Templar became an enormously wealthy organization. This wealth and privilege attracted numerous enemies, but the Order remained—arguably—Christianity's second most influential institution, behind only the papacy, throughout the thirteenth century. Yet, in a move that was as audacious as it was stunning, King Philip IV of France had the Templars within his realm arrested on October 13, 1307 and within five years, the Order of the Knights Templar ceased to exist, thus instigating one of history's greatest mysteries.

¹¹⁴ Malcolm Barber, "Military Orders: The Templars," in *Crusades Encyclopedia online*, s.v. "Knights Templars," <http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/monastic/templar.html> [accessed October 11, 2008].

¹¹⁵ These bulls included: the *Omne Datum optimum* (29 March, 1139), which conferred upon the Order official papal sanction and protection; the *Milites Templi* (9 January, 1144), which encouraged Christians to donate whatever they could to the Templars in exchange for indulgences; and the *Milicia Dei* (7 April, 1145), which granted the Templars certain rights that increased their autonomy from the Church [Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 10-11].

¹¹⁶ Pope Innocent II's bull *Omne Datum Optimum*, 29 March 1139, in *The Templars: Selected Sources*, ed. and trans. Barber and Bate, 64.

¹¹⁷ Due to their military strength and privileges sanctioned by the papacy, the Templars were used by lay people and kings alike as a sort of medieval banking system. They were paid and entrusted to guard valuables and lent money to those capable of paying it back. The Order was entrusted as treasurers and money carriers by kings, including Philip IV, because of their ability to store and transport large sums of money between the West and East [Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, 188].

THE DEMISE OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

As the tide of the crusades gradually shifted against the Christian armies,¹¹⁸ many of the Templars' enemies blamed the loss of the Holy Land on the prominent Templars. King Philip IV issued a series of allegations—most notably sodomy, blasphemy, and heresy—against the Templars in 1307. The Templars in France were subsequently arrested and many of them quickly confessed to the charges under the threat or pain of torture.¹¹⁹ These confessions pressured Pope Clement V to request that other European leaders follow suit and arrest the Templars within their own borders. Some leaders and even the pope himself tried to interject on the Templars' behalf, but to no avail.¹²⁰ The Order was officially disbanded in March 1312 when Pope Clement V recanted his support for the Templars and issued the bull *Vox in excelso*, which officially disbanded the Order.¹²¹ In the aftermath, the Templars' wealth and possessions were transferred to the Hospitallers—another military order and rival of the Templars—with a substantial portion going to King Philip IV to reimburse him for the costs of the trial.

There are contending theories about the fundamental cause for the fall of the Knights Templar, but ultimately their demise stemmed from a unique blend of social context, historical circumstance, and bad luck. Unfortunately, the Templars' defeats and consequential proprietary losses to the Muslims in the thirteenth century, as well as the papal suppression of the Order in 1311 effectively eliminated the vast majority of

¹¹⁸ This transition took quite a while, but the most notable and important Christian defeats came with the loss of Jerusalem in 1187—after the Battle of Hattin—and the loss of Acre in 1291.

¹¹⁹ Some of the tortures performed on the Templars included: burning their feet until the bones fell out, hanging weights from their genitals, and dropping them from rooftops [Jordan, *Unceasing Strife*, 28].

¹²⁰ The Pope tried to defend the Order at the Council of Vienne in 1311.

¹²¹ Clement V's bull *Vox in excelso*, 22 March 1312, in *The Templars: Selected Sources*, ed. and trans. Barber and Bate, 309-318.

documents relating to the Order's existence and deeds in the east prior to their trial.¹²² Accordingly, it is difficult to determine to what degree the sources which survived were influenced by the events and consequences of the trial. Nevertheless, many historians have interpreted these sources and presented the fall of the Knights Templar as a cause and effect relationship. Some offer one fundamental cause as the source of the Templars' demise; others list a number of reasons why the Templars gradually declined and then dissolved. This method of reasoning, however, is too simplistic to explain why one of the most powerful military orders and prominent organizations in the Middle Ages was destroyed in only a few years. Historians—both academic and popular—have offered several theories to explain this puzzling phenomenon, some of which merit praise, while others are dismissible as unsubstantial conjecture.

It is more beneficial for modern readers to view the demise of the Templars as a complex formula rather than a simple cause and effect relationship. The conditions and cultural values of Latin Christendom at the start of the fourteenth century, combined with the Order's secretive nature, and the contemporary standards of inquisition and canon law created a powder keg of destruction for the Order. On October 13th, 1307, the French King Philip IV—motivated by a combination of greed and true Christian zeal—provided the spark that ignited that tinderbox. The inability of Pope Clement V to dissuade Philip IV from his persecution,¹²³ combined with numerous confessions of high ranking Templars, threw gasoline on the flames of the inquisition, which all but disbanded the Order of the Knights Templar.

¹²² Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 310.

¹²³ This was due to a combination of Philip IV's fervent commitment to the endeavor and the widespread ethos of guilt that surrounded the Order in the wake of high-ranking Templars' confessions and the king's own propaganda campaign.

One of the most monumental defeats for the Templars and the crusades as a whole came at Acre¹²⁴ in 1291, after which the Order's eastern headquarters moved to the island of Cyprus, which was just off the coast of the Levant. In 1306, the Templars deposed the Cyprian King Henry II and replaced him with a puppet ruler of their own, Amaury de Lusignan. Unfortunately for the Templars, Amaury was assassinated and Henry II returned to the throne in 1310. Upon his return King Henry II punished those who supported de Lusignan, including the Templars. He destroyed the Order's convent on the island and cast its members out of Cyprus. Helen Nicholson argued that the Templars' loss of Cyprus in 1310 would have destroyed the Order even without the actions of the French king and pope.¹²⁵ According to Nicholson, the Templars' banishment from Cyprus decapitated the Order's organizational head and eradicated their presence in the east. Nicholson said, "In a sense, the trial of the Templars was irrelevant. It was their involvement in the political affairs of Cyprus in the early fourteenth century that directly brought about the destruction of the Order."¹²⁶ Although Nicholson's argument is compelling, it is insufficient to explain the sudden demise of the Templars.

Nicholson's argument is flawed for a number of reasons. She attributed too much significance to the military importance and value of the personnel stationed on Cyprus. Cyprus was indeed one of the last strongholds of the Order in the east. After the fall of Acre, the Templars began to accumulate forces and supplies on Cyprus, which they planned to use as a staging point for another crusade.¹²⁷ The plan, according to the Templar Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, was to recapture the Holy Land by

¹²⁴ The last major Latin city in the Holy Land.

¹²⁵ Nicholson, *The Knights Templar: A New History*, 14-15.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹²⁷ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 20-21.

transporting a massive invasion force via ships from Cyprus.¹²⁸ While its proximity to the Holy Land made it ideal for staging another crusade, its geographic features hindered the possibility of such a bold act. The island was almost completely cut off from any other Christian state, it was in a constant state of political turmoil, and it lacked the natural resources to support either a large army or fleet.¹²⁹ Nicholson clearly overestimated the military significance of this small island.

Nicholson also attached too much significance to the degree of leadership that was present on Cyprus. Since Cyprus was to be the launching point of another crusade, the majority of Templars who resided on the island (64%) were young recruits who had only recently been inducted into the Order, while the majority of officers and high ranking Templars resided in Western Europe.¹³⁰ The most important elements of the Order's leadership, including the Grand Master himself, were in France at the time of the arrests, and the only reason why the Templar leadership on Cyprus might have had the amount of clout that Nicholson attributed to it is because the arrest of the Templar leaders in the west made Cypriot leaders the de facto heads of the Order.

Nicholson's claim that the trials were irrelevant to the demise of the Order in contrast to the loss of their possessions in Cyprus is unsubstantiated. After the fall of Cyprus, the Templars could have easily relocated to another island in the east, as the Hospitallers did when they left Cyprus for Rhodes in 1310; but the persecution of the Templars in the west made such a move impossible. This pogrom coupled with the Order's losses of other strongholds in the east, like Acre and Jerusalem, are what gave

¹²⁸ James Molay's report to Pope Clement V, 1306-7, in *The Templars: Selected Sources*, ed. and trans. Barber and Bate, 105-109.

¹²⁹ Cyprus was inhabited by a small number of unskilled Greek peasants, it had no ship-building ability or large ports, and it was in the midst of multiple bad harvests [Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 21-23].

¹³⁰ Barber, *Trial of the Templars*, 20-21.

Cyprus its significance. The Templars' expulsion from Cyprus, therefore, was an effect, rather than a cause of the Templars' demise. Cyprus was a strategically important island, but if the Templars' leadership in the west had not been imprisoned, if the Templar strongholds in the Holy Land had not been overrun, or if the Order had retained papal support, then the Templars could have continued as a military order and possibly even regained territory in the east, with or without the fall of Cyprus.

Some scholars, like Malcolm Barber, proposed that after the fall of Acre, the Templars became an outdated institution in a world where the crusader ideal was still important, but the priorities of the papacy and secular rulers had changed.¹³¹ It is a stretch, however, to claim that the Order no longer served a purpose. While retaking the Holy Land might, in hindsight, seem like an unrealistic dream for fourteenth-century Christians, most contemporaries, including Pope Clement V himself, enthusiastically favored such a plan and perceived it as not only attainable, but also inevitable.¹³² Prior to the arrest of Jacques de Molay, Pope Clement V was listening very carefully to the Grand Master's plan for a renewed crusading effort led by the Templars from Cyprus.¹³³ Even if Molay's proposed crusade was never carried out and even if the Order lost its military function, the Templars still could have survived with a modified purpose just as the Hospitallers did well into the eighteenth century.

Another modern theory is that the Templars' wealth and failures in defending the Holy Land caused a decline in their once immense popularity, thereby permitting Philip IV's persecution to continue unchecked, which directly brought about the destruction of

¹³¹ Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 312.

¹³² Sylvia Schein, *Fideles Crucis: The Papacy, the West, and the Recovery of the Holy Land 1274-1314* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 139.

¹³³ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 23.

the Order.¹³⁴ Since the Order of the Knights Templar was a single, identifiable entity it was easy for Christians to blame the Templars for the failure of the crusades. A poem written by Rostan Berenguer of Marseilles between the fall of Acre and the trial of the Templars criticized the Order harshly, "...since [the Templars] and the Hospital have for so long allowed the false Turks to remain in possession of Jerusalem and Acre; since they flee faster than the holy hawk; it is a pity, in my view, that we don't rid ourselves of them for good."¹³⁵ While it is true that the loss of Acre in 1291 concentrated criticism upon the Knights Templar and other military orders, they were not singled out in this criticism. Contemporaries also blamed the defeat on the sinful behavior of the city's inhabitants¹³⁶ as well as secular rulers and the papacy for not lending more support for the defense of the city. One anonymous medieval author reflected on the loss of Acre in a widely circulating document called *De Exidio Urbis Acconis*, which was written a few years after the defeat:

Cry over your chiefs, who abandoned you. Cry over your pope, cardinals, prelates and the clergy of the Church. Cry over the kings, the princes, the barons, the Christian knights, who call themselves great fighters, but...left this city full of Christians without defense and abandoned it, leaving it alone like a lamb among wolves.¹³⁷

There were numerous other contemporary criticisms of the Templars. William of Tyre¹³⁸ referred to the Templars as greedy and corrupt. He claimed that the Templars began as an honorable military order, but as they accumulated more power and wealth they became corrupted and consequently betrayed their original purpose to defend the

¹³⁴ Partner, *The Murdered Magicians*, 24-41.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Partner, *The Murdered Magicians*, 36.

¹³⁶ Blaming Christian defeats on impiety was a common practice in medieval Christendom [Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, 205].

¹³⁷ Quoted in Schein, *Fideles Crucis*, 115.

¹³⁸ The archbishop of Tyre and a very prominent chronicler of the crusading states during the twelfth century. He lived from ca. 1130-85.

Church and Holy Land.¹³⁹ Another chronicler, Mathew Paris,¹⁴⁰ claimed that the pride of the Templars was responsible for the loss of Jerusalem and he complained that the Order repeatedly placed its own ambition ahead of the Christian cause.¹⁴¹ Paris went so far as to accuse the Templars of sabotaging the crusades, because if the Christians were to conquer the Holy Land, then the Templars could no longer justify extracting such large profits from donations and taxes on the lands they owned for the purpose of fighting the infidels.¹⁴² Bishops and their staffs also denigrated the Order, but these attacks were spurned by a fierce jealousy and resentment of the Templars' exemptions and papal privilege.¹⁴³ After a dispute between Pope Clement IV and Templar Grand Master, Thomas Berard, concerning the papacy's authority over the Templars in 1265, the former wrote a vehement letter to the latter chastising him and his Order for their insolence. In his seemingly prophetic rebuke of the Templars, Clement IV wrote, "...if the Church removed for a short while the hand of its protection from you in the face of the prelates and the secular princes, you could not in any way subsist against the assaults of these prelates or the forces of the princes."¹⁴⁴ Later in the letter, the Pope reminded the Grand Master that he and his brothers were dependent on papal protection and advised him to display greater humility.¹⁴⁵ This letter lends credence to the decline in popular opinion theory, but it does not substantiate it. Despite the negative tone of these medieval sources,

¹³⁹ William of Tyre, *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*, XII, 7, *Patrologia Latina* 201, 526-27, in *The Crusades: A Documentary History*, Trans. James Brundage (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1962), 70-73.

¹⁴⁰ An English monk and chronicler of history who lived from ca. 1200-1259.

¹⁴¹ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, vol. 4, ed. H.R. Luard (RS 57: London, 1880), 148, in Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 18.

¹⁴² Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 18.

¹⁴³ Jordan, *Unceasing Strife*, 23.

¹⁴⁴ *Les Registres de Clement IV (1265-8)*, vol. 1, ed. E. Jordan (Bibliothèque des Ecoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, ser. 2: Paris, 1893), no. 836, 326-7, quoted in Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 17.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

they only reflect the sentiments of a few individuals at specific moments in history. Each of the aforementioned critics was either extremely biased against the Templars¹⁴⁶ or praised the Templars in documents written prior to these attacks.¹⁴⁷ It is likely that historians only attached significance to these particularly negative accounts because, in the omniscience of hindsight, these documents seemed to predict the eventual fate of the Order.

Criticisms of religious orders were not uncommon during the Middle Ages and criticism of the Templars was actually relatively minimal compared to that of the Cistercians and the Friars.¹⁴⁸ The fact that other military orders and religious groups—far less popular than the Templars—survived past the crusades is evidence against the decline in popularity theory.¹⁴⁹ The Templars' portrayal in medieval chronicles and most historical sources—both immediately preceding and following the Templars' trials—further demonstrates that the Order was still seen positively by its contemporaries despite the failures to defend the Holy Land. Contemporary epics and romantic literature concerned with knightly deeds portrayed the Templars as noble knights performing their duties valiantly.¹⁵⁰ Donations may have declined after 1225 due to the fact that the Templars began demanding huge taxes from their neighbors in order to make up for the ever-increasing cost of fighting in *Outremer*.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, at the time of their arrest

¹⁴⁶ Matthew Paris' villainous depictions of the Templars should be taken lightly because he obtained both his patronage and information from the family of German Emperor Frederick II, who openly despised the Order [Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 129-42]. Similarly, William of Tyre's "prejudice against the Templars is well known" [Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 16].

¹⁴⁷ Pope Clement IV's letter was directed primarily against the Grand Master himself and not at the Order as a whole, which he planned to use in a campaign to reclaim Sicily [Barber, *The New Knighthood*, 159-188].

¹⁴⁸ Nicholson, *The Knight's Templar*, 14.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁵⁰ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 18.

¹⁵¹ Malcolm Barber, *Crusaders and Heretics: 12th-14th Centuries* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), VIII 44-5.

the Templars were still receiving substantial gifts, and they were still a trusted and very profitable banking institution.¹⁵² The very propagandist nature of the accusations brought against the Templars proves that the Order was still very popular throughout Christendom.

The formal charges brought against the Templars were issued publicly in order to condemn them in the eyes of their supporters. One such list of charges, the “Articles of Accusation,” was drafted on August 12th, 1308 by a variety of authors employed by King Philip IV, but it was not just a list of accusations. “The Articles of Accusation” was an exaggerated and largely fabricated set of claims intended to alienate the Templars from other Christians by associating them with heresy, blasphemy, and greed. Considering both the Templars’ high level of popularity in medieval Christendom, and the Order’s religious nature, in order to obtain a conviction, the charges against the Templars had to not only violate canon law, but also eliminate the Order’s papal protection.

In addition to accusations of heresy, the “Articles of Accusation” included a series of crimes against clerical rights and papal privileges. For example, one accusation stated that the Grand Master and many other brothers absolved people from their sins, which was clearly an invasion of clerical rights and privileges.¹⁵³ This accusation also made them very unpopular with local churches and bishops. The list further stated that the Order, “neglected to inform Holy Mother Church [of its actions and practices],” thereby demonstrating that the Templars considered themselves to be, at least somewhat,

¹⁵² In fact, the Templars’ reputation for bravery, efficiency, and honesty—combined with the Order’s strength in Paris—compelled French kings to employ the Templars as royal treasurers throughout the entire thirteenth century and well into the reign of Philip IV himself [Jordan, *Unceasing Strife*, 23].

¹⁵³ *Le Procès des Templiers*, Vol. 1, Jules Michelet ed. (*Collection de Documents Inédits sur l’Histoire de France*: Paris, 1841–51), 89-96. In Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 248-9.

independent of papal control.¹⁵⁴ The Templars were, after all, a religious order, and Philip IV understood that if he was going to destroy them entirely, then he would have to convince the judges, delegated by the papacy to investigate the crimes, of their guilt.¹⁵⁵ Pope Clement V demonstrated his awareness of Philip IV's propaganda in a letter addressed to the king: "...how their reputation has suffered repeatedly at your hands in the eyes of us and some other temporal lords."¹⁵⁶ By damning the Templars for offending the Church, Philip IV not only portrayed himself as a good Christian concerned with the best interests of the Church, but he also cast the Templars as heretics and infidels.

The most important target audience of Philip IV's attacks was public opinion. Philip IV understood that he had essentially set himself up against the papacy by defying the pontiff's orders to leave the Templars alone and infringing on papal authority over military orders. He therefore needed to manifest a widespread assumption of the Templars' guilt. The French King and his aides also recognized that they needed to undercut the Order's popularity among nobles, knights, and other benefactors of the Order if they were to destroy it. Philip IV and his aides labored diligently to tarnish the name and reputation of the Templars. Philip IV instituted a propaganda campaign against the Templars and inspired his cousin—King Charles II of Naples—to do the same. These propagandists associated the Templars with enemies of Christendom, specifically Muslims and Jews. This tactic was so effective that the Court of Foix wrote a letter to

¹⁵⁴ *Procès*, Michelet ed., in Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 251.

¹⁵⁵ Barber, *Crusaders and Heretics*, VII 18.

¹⁵⁶ Letter of Clement V to Philip IV, 24 August 1307, in *The Templars: Selected Sources*, ed. and trans. Barber and Bate, 243.

King James II of Aragon inquiring as to whether or not it was true that the Templars had converted to Islam and planned on allying themselves with the Muslims and Jews.¹⁵⁷

Philip IV insisted that the accusations be announced to large crowds throughout his domain in order to assure that his subjects were also aware of the Templars' alleged transgressions.¹⁵⁸ This practice of public denunciation was not common, but it did encourage witnesses to come forward against the accused, and it also greatly reduced Philip IV's liability for false accusation.¹⁵⁹ One such public denunciation of the Templars stated, "[they said] that neither the receptors nor those being received had a hope of achieving salvation through Jesus."¹⁶⁰ The ultimate goal of the propaganda campaign was to separate the Templars from the laity, secular authorities, and ecclesiastical orders, thereby distinguishing them as a common enemy to Christendom

The most damning evidence against the Templars was the confessions of guilt made by so many members of the Order. In "The Articles of Accusation," many charges were immediately followed by admissions of guilt by one or more of the Templars. The concluding lines stated, "the Grand Master of the Order...as well as many other preceptors and some other brothers...have confessed what is written above, both in judicial inquiry and outside, in the presence of appointed persons and also before public persons in many places."¹⁶¹ This admission was then followed by the claim that these confessors also swore oaths of their guilt in front of religious officials.¹⁶² Their

¹⁵⁷ Piers Paul Read, *The Templars* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1999), 272.

¹⁵⁸ Barbara Frale, "The Chinon Chart Papal Absolution to the Last Templar, Master Jacques de Molay," *Journal of Medieval History* 30, no. 2 (2004): 109-34.

¹⁵⁹ Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law*, 143.

¹⁶⁰ *Procès*, Michelet ed., in Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 248.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

confessions led both contemporaries and modern scholars to wonder: ‘If the Templars were innocent, why did they admit to the charges against them?’

Upon initiation into the Order, soon-to-be Templars were sworn to an oath of secrecy. The vow of secrecy was explicitly created for the purpose of preventing strategic and tactical information from falling into the hands of either the Order’s or greater Christendom’s enemies, but outsiders perceived this practice as a means to hide more sinister activities.¹⁶³ The vow also meant that Templars in a certain region could neither confirm, nor deny, the actions of their brethren in another area, and outsiders were unable to testify on behalf of the Order. Medieval canon law was heavily rooted in oral proof, due to the high level of forgery in medieval documents and the fact that documentation in the middle ages was relatively scarce compared to future centuries. In order to prove a defendant’s guilt, the prosecution “must either induce the defendant to confess to the crime, or else produce two credible eyewitnesses who would testify that they had seen and heard the accused commit the offense.”¹⁶⁴ The only way to refute a heresy charge was to demonstrate that the person who brought the charge against the accused was a personal enemy, which was very difficult for a military order to demonstrate against ‘the most Christian king.’¹⁶⁵ Since the secrecy of the Order all but eliminated “credible eyewitnesses,” the case against the Templars rested heavily on the ability of inquisitors to extract confessions from them.

Medieval canon law worked heavily against the Templars’ defense. Under medieval law, the Order of the Knights Templar was considered to be the equivalent of a

¹⁶³ Jordan, *Unceasing Strife*, 25-6.

¹⁶⁴ The origins of this burden of proof come from the Bible (Matthew 18:16) ‘the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain any charge’ [Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law*, 142-3].

¹⁶⁵ Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, 209.

modern corporation. As such, if an individual Templar was found guilty, then that guilt constituted evidence against the Order as a whole; if multiple Templars were found guilty, then the whole Order was believed to be involved in a heretical conspiracy. The Grand Master was the head of the Order, and for all intents and purposes according to medieval canon law, he personified the Order.¹⁶⁶ On 24 October, 1307—less than two weeks after his initial arrest—Molay admitted to denying Christ and spitting on the Cross during his initiation ritual. He further damned his brethren when a letter of his was found addressed to all the Templars, in which he told them to admit to the same charges.¹⁶⁷ The confessions of the Grand Master and other leading Templars¹⁶⁸ influenced all facets of the inquisition.¹⁶⁹ Inquisitors continued until they obtained similar confessions, and Templars became more willing to give them. Confessions multiplied exponentially as torture was used more frequently and Templars began to lose hope in the future of their order.

Torture was authorized via the *Ad extirpanda* issued by Pope Innocent IV in 1252. The pontiff believed that heresy was a plague, which was sweeping Christendom and must be weeded out and eliminated. Heresy was considered to be the most atrocious canonical crime and as such a conviction warranted various forms of torture and execution—most commonly being burnt at the stake—by secular authorities.¹⁷⁰ Due to the crime’s severity and the fact that it was, for the most part, a ‘think crime’¹⁷¹—usually

¹⁶⁶ Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law*, 101.

¹⁶⁷ Alain Demurger, *The Last Templar: The Tragedy of Jacques de Molay, Last Grand Master of the Temple*, trans. Antonia Nevill (London: Profile Books, 2004), 209-10.

¹⁶⁸ These confessors included: the Preceptor in Normandy; the Treasurer of the Temple in Paris; and the Templar Visitor of France (second-in-command of the Order) [Read, *The Templars*, 267].

¹⁶⁹ Jonathan Riley-Smith, “Were the Templars Guilty?,” in *Medieval Crusade*, ed. Susan J. Ridyard (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), 109.

¹⁷⁰ Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law*, 153.

¹⁷¹ A term borrowed from George Orwell’s novel *1984*.

devoid of empirical evidence—the pontiff believed that the only way to extract it from offenders was to make them confess, and the best way to do that was via torture.¹⁷² The most popular methods of torture at the time were: the rack (stretching the suspect’s limbs to the point of dislocating his or her joints), the strapado (raising a suspect over a beam with a rope, which bound the person’s wrists behind his or her back), and by rubbing fat on a suspect’s feet and then placing them in front of a fire.¹⁷³ Torture was used only for notorious heretics who refused to confess, and most accused heretics were questioned without torture. The oath of secrecy taken by all Templars, however, inclined inquisitors to believe that confessions would only be made under the threat or pain of torture.¹⁷⁴

The exact number of Templars who were tortured is unknown, but it is likely that all of those questioned in France and parts of Italy were either tortured or threatened with torture. Primary-source accounts indicating the number of Templars who were reported to have died under torture ranged between twenty-five and thirty-four men.¹⁷⁵ Although torture was an effective method of obtaining a confession, it was far less efficient at acquiring the truth.¹⁷⁶ If a Templar denied the charges, he was subjected to torture and imprisonment, but if he confessed, his sins were absolved and he was subsequently freed. Thus, Templars were compelled to confess to any and all charges.¹⁷⁷ In his appearance

¹⁷² Pope Innocent IV’s papal bull *Ad Extirpanda*, 1252, from *Bullarum Privilegiorum Romanorum Pontificum Amplissima Collectio Cui accessere Pontificum omnium Vitae, Notae, & Indices Opportuni*, http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~draker/history/Ad_Extirpanda.html.

¹⁷³ Read, *The Templars*, 265.

¹⁷⁴ Riley-Smith, “Were the Templars Guilty?,” 115.

¹⁷⁵ Read, *The Templars*, 265-6.

¹⁷⁶ In a 2006 study conducted at Fairleigh Dickinson University, researchers concluded that torture is an inefficient method of attaining the truth. Since torturers cannot make a believable promise that the torture will cease and they would not be able to recognize the truth if they heard it, tortured persons are likely to hide the truth or say anything that they believe the torturer wants to hear [Roger Koppl, “Epistemic Systems,” *Episteme* 5, no. 2 (2005): 91-106].

¹⁷⁷ These seemed to be the only two options available to the Templars because Pope Clement V had requested that all Christian kings turn over the Templars in their realm and anyone found harboring a

before a papal commission in November, 1309, one Templar named Ponsard de Gizy renounced his confession and denied all of the accusations against the Templars vehemently, but nevertheless said that if he were tortured again he would admit to anything.¹⁷⁸ Malcolm Barber suggested that the confessions obtained by inquisitors indicated nothing except for mankind's overpowering will to escape pain.¹⁷⁹

Only in France and other nations under French influence did a considerable number of Templars actually confess.¹⁸⁰ The countries that did not use torture—Cyprus, Aragon, and England—were unable to obtain confessions from the interrogated Templars.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, once the papacy overtook the hearings after the initial arrests and confessions—thus effectively eliminating the threat of torture—many Templars renounced their confessions almost immediately, only to repeat them when threatened with torture once again by bishops closely associated with the French monarchy.¹⁸² Barber contended that the use of or abstention from torture in certain areas, and the corresponding numerical discrepancy of confessions, discredit the validity of those confessions because it is unlikely that the extent of the Templars' guilt varied geographically.¹⁸³ Other scholars, like Jonathan Riley-Smith, asserted that the confessions display a general pattern of guilt and are too frequent and specific to reject entirely. Riley-Smith believed that the Templars' confessions—especially that by Molay

Templar fugitive was be considered to be guilty by association, thereby making escape or hiding out nearby impossible for the Templars [Read, *The Templars*, 275-6].

¹⁷⁸ *Procès*, Michelet ed., in Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 283.

¹⁷⁹ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 283.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 283.

¹⁸² Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 2.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 283.

who was not tortured—verify the guilt of at least some Templars in regards to the charges of sodomy and blasphemy.¹⁸⁴

The most frequently confessed crime by the Templars was that in their initiation ceremony they had denounced Christ and desecrated the crucifix with their spit or urine under the direct command of their initiators.¹⁸⁵ The official document outlining the Templars' initiation ceremony does not allude to such a sacrilegious tradition,¹⁸⁶ but judging by the sheer quantity and detail of Templar confessions, it is likely that the official ceremonial rights¹⁸⁷ were disregarded in favor of customary traditions, at least some of which included blasphemous acts.¹⁸⁸ Either way, the papacy ordered the suppression of the Order in October 1311 because, in light of the Templar confessions and publicity of the trial, the Order's reputation was far too tarnished to allow it to continue as an extension of the Church.¹⁸⁹

The social and cultural context of fourteenth-century Christendom was an essential factor in the fall of the Templars. The failure of the crusades to retake and retain the Holy Land cast doubt on the supposed divine favor that military orders claimed to have. Christians routinely blamed the loss of a city or defeat of an army on the sinful behavior of the defeated. At the core of this blame, there appeared to be an assumption of guilt and justified punishment for those who incurred bad luck or unfortunate downfalls.

¹⁸⁴ Riley-Smith, "Were the Templars Guilty?," 116-124.

¹⁸⁵ Scholars theorize this practice was either an obedience test, preparation for a Muslim interrogation in the event of capture, or a sincere belief by some leading Templars that Jesus was not God [Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, 219].

¹⁸⁶ *The Rule of the Templars*, ed. and trans. Upton-Ward, 168-74.

¹⁸⁷ The official ceremony included a combination of promises made by the inductee and responsibilities, duties, and causes for punishment listed by the inductor in front of a small group of other Templars at night and with no outsiders present.

¹⁸⁸ The majority of Templars were illiterate, which might help to explain why these procedures were not universally followed.

¹⁸⁹ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 3.

If their successes were inspired by divine favor, then their failures must be the result of divine punishment. In this respect St. Bernard's portrayal of the Templars severely hurt the Order. In his praise of the Templars, Bernard asserted that the Templars were so devout and so cherished by God almighty that only "two [Templars could] put ten thousand to flight."¹⁹⁰ Ultimately, the Templars could simply not live up to their own hype. Furthermore, many Christians also believed in and feared demonic forces, which could make heretics of even the most pious individuals.¹⁹¹

In 1308, both theologians and secular princes were divided over the question of the Templars' heretical involvement, but regardless of the Order's guilt, the majority of European elites believed that heresy was widespread and increasing throughout Christendom.¹⁹² Heretics were the quintessential enemies of medieval Christians because their existence cut at the foundation of faith and social life in Christendom.¹⁹³ Heretics were so dangerous because their actions could both contaminate and condemn others around them. Heresy existed only in contrast to orthodoxy and thus, it was a separate set of beliefs that was capable of attracting followers away from orthodoxy and towards damnation.¹⁹⁴ Once a person or group was proven to be heretical, all other charges brought against that entity were assumed to be true, and any punishment could be enacted because the heretic had endangered the entirety of Christendom.

¹⁹⁰ St. Bernard, "In Praise."

¹⁹¹ Read, *The Templars*, 272-3.

¹⁹² Jordan, *Unceasing Strife*, 32.

¹⁹³ Partner, *The Murdered Magicians*, 49.

¹⁹⁴ Medieval Christians were most likely mindful of the biblical story of Aaron and the Golden Calf where a single man was able to convince multitudes of pious Jews to join his heresy, all of whom were consequently killed for their actions.

Medieval Christians believed that no person or entity was immune from the forces of evil.¹⁹⁵ These forces were quite literally associated with darkness, which is why the Templars' secret evening gatherings provided inquisitors with empirical evidence that the Order was associated with the devil.¹⁹⁶ The heretical charges against the Templars had a powerful influence on medieval Christians, who were constantly reminded of demonic forces by the artwork of medieval churches and cathedrals.¹⁹⁷ Increasingly numerous accusations of heresy and reports of disastrous Christian defeats in the Holy Land generated an ethos of fear among many Christians, who believed that the only means to stop demonic influences was by completely exterminating the infected portion.¹⁹⁸

Biblical scripture was often cited as evidence against the Templars in both their trials and Philip IV's propaganda campaign. Inquisitors justified the destruction of the Order by paraphrasing Matthew 5 and 18, "If your right eye or right limb offends you, cut them off and throw them away. For it is better that one of your limbs should be destroyed than the whole body."¹⁹⁹ Philip IV's propaganda associated the Templars with dark forces by drawing parallels between the Templars and the biblical tale of Sodom and Gomorrah, where an entire populace was destroyed because a few men committed the very same acts that the Templars were proven to be guilty of.²⁰⁰ Philip IV frequently referenced scripture in order to justify his persecution of the Templars, but exactly why he pursued this endeavor with such vigor is open to some debate.

¹⁹⁵ King Philip IV capitalized on this belief in 1302 by arresting his political enemy, Pope Boniface VIII, under charges of heresy, sodomy, and murder.

¹⁹⁶ Barber, *Crusaders and Heretics*, VII. 16.

¹⁹⁷ Read, *The Templars*, 272.

¹⁹⁸ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 290.

¹⁹⁹ Quoted in Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 290.

²⁰⁰ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 290.

The importance of King Philip IV's role in the demise of the Templars is undisputed by modern historians, but the cause for his attack against the Order is subject to some disagreement. Some historians suggest that Philip IV was motivated purely by financial concerns;²⁰¹ others suggest that he was compelled by a devout sense of duty to expel heretics from the Church,²⁰² but most likely, Philip's persecution of the Templars was driven by a combination of the two aforementioned theories.

As soon as Philip IV came to the throne in 1285, he was consumed by financial concerns, which continued throughout his reign. He inherited a massive debt from his predecessors,²⁰³ many of whom borrowed from and were indebted to the Order of the Knights Templar. Philip IV's wars against England and Flanders only compounded his financial woes.²⁰⁴ Philip IV expended every means, legitimate and illegitimate, to reduce his debt, but with minimal relief. In 1306, the king arrested 100,000 Jews in a single day and subsequently expelled all Jews from his kingdom, thereby seizing all of their property and wealth under a mask of religious piety.²⁰⁵ Soon after, he essentially devalued French currency by two-thirds, which caused riots in Paris, forcing the king to flee from his palace for the safety of the Paris Temple.²⁰⁶ Philip IV ran to the Templars because of their military strength, religious influence, and also because the Paris Temple was a fortress where the Royal Treasury was stored.²⁰⁷ Despite their help, or perhaps

²⁰¹ Demurger, *The Last Templar*, 164.

²⁰² Alan Forey suggests that Philip IV, who became increasingly religious after the death of his wife in 1305, truly believed the rumors of heresy concerning the Templars and may have doubted the pope's willingness to take the appropriate action [Forey, "Military Orders," in *The Oxford History*, 210].

²⁰³ His father's war against Aragon put the French treasury 1.5 million *livres tournois* in debt.

²⁰⁴ Read, *The Templars*, 255.

²⁰⁵ Jordan, *Unceasing Strife*, 12.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Demurger, *The Last Templar*, 164-5.

because of the embarrassment it had caused him,²⁰⁸ on October 13th, 1307—just sixteen months after his refuge at the Paris Temple—Philip IV arrested 15,000 Templars in a surprising, lightning-quick attack that echoed his 1306 pogrom of the Jews.²⁰⁹

Dissolving the Templars and seizing their wealth presented a twofold temptation to Philip IV. First, he could eliminate his debt with their Order, and second, their wealth—unlike that of the Hospitallers, which was tied up in communal holdings—was liquid and therefore easily accessible due to the Order’s involvement in banking. Financial concerns, however, were not the only cause for Philip IV’s persecution of the Knights Templar.

Despite his financial woes, King Philip IV was a sincerely devout Christian. Throughout his life, Philip IV demonstrated his piety by flogging and beating himself in order to redeem his sins.²¹⁰ Furthermore, the cost of pursuing an inquisition of heresy against an organization as large and powerful as the Knights Templars was massive. Thus, it is unlikely that a financially strapped Philip IV would have persecuted the Templars so persistently if he did not sincerely believe that they were heretics and he could prove it. Once Pope Clement V took over the inquisition, Philip IV only stood to gain compensation for his expenses incurred during his persecution of the Templars, and yet he persisted vehemently. Philip IV sincerely believed that the Templars were part of a diabolic force that threatened Christendom, which he had sworn to protect.²¹¹ As the king of France, Philip IV was referred to as the ‘most Christian king’ of Europe and believed

²⁰⁸ William Jordan suggested that the Templars at the Royal Treasury were financial experts and as such they undoubtedly criticized the recent financial reforms that had put the king in such a predicament. King Philip IV was a proud man who unquestionably resented the criticism and embarrassment he received while bunkered in with the Templars [Jordan, *Unceasing Strife*, 26-7].

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²¹⁰ Elizabeth A. R. Brown, “The Prince is Father of the King: The Character and Childhood of Philip the Fair,” *Mediaeval Studies* 49 (1987), 282-334.

²¹¹ Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, 290.

himself to be answerable only to God. As such, he was not afraid to persecute a clergyman, a religious order, or even the Pope himself, which he actually did in 1302 by arresting Pope Boniface VIII under charges of sodomy and heresy and continuing to argue his case even after the death of Pope Boniface VIII.²¹² His letters demonstrated that he justified his persecutions by referring to biblical precedence, like Moses' punishment of those who worshipped the golden calf.²¹³ Religious piety and a true belief in the Templars' guilt played a substantial role in motivating and carrying out Philip IV's persecution of the Templars.

When King Philip IV had the Templars arrested in October 1307, Pope Clement V was put in a very precarious situation. Philip IV's actions constituted a direct infringement on papal jurisdiction, but the pope could not respond with anything more than a verbal rebuke. Piers Paul Read captured the particularly difficult position that Pope Clement V found himself in when he wrote, "...the de jure powers of the Pope were paltry compared to the de facto powers of the King."²¹⁴ Nevertheless, the pontiff would have defended the Order had the number and heretical nature of the Templars' confessions not been so overwhelming. Only four Templars denied the charges completely, which was too paltry of a number to justify defending the Order and risk incriminating himself as a heretic in eyes of Philip IV.²¹⁵ In light of the overwhelming amount of evidence and the threat of another papal arrest at the hands of Philip IV, the pontiff had no choice but to suppress the Order. True to Pope Clement IV's warning to

²¹² Philip IV had less religious reasons for ordering the kidnapping and imprisonment, including a long feud over the king's rights to tax and reprimand clergymen as he saw fit; but, nevertheless, his defined purpose was overtly religious [Jordan, *Unceasing Strife*, 5-7].

²¹³ Barber, *Crusaders and Heretics*, VII 24.

²¹⁴ Read, *The Templars*, 269.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 268.

the Templar Grand Master in 1265, once the papacy removed its ecclesiastical recognition and protection from the Templars, the Order was completely defenseless to the attacks of secular rulers.

Philip IV was not the only king who stood to gain from the Templars' demise. Once the papacy revoked its support for the Order, other European kings—like King Jaime of Aragon—began demanding the Templars' wealth and property within their own borders.²¹⁶ After the papacy denounced the Order, it officially became a heretical organization, devoid of both leadership and any means of raising either funds or recruits. Thus, the Order of the Knights Templar ceased to exist almost overnight. Most of the brothers who were not executed were released from prison after denouncing a now nonexistent organization. Some of them matriculated into other orders, but most retired from crusading services and began various civilian careers. The bull *Ad Providum* allocated the Templars' possessions to the Order of the Hospital, which was to compensate Philip IV for his expenses in arresting and trying the Templars.²¹⁷ This bull, however, was not fully realized. In England, King Edward II used the Templars' property to reward his friends and finance his wars in Scotland; in Germany, some lands went to the Hospital, but many returned to the original owners; and on the Iberian Peninsula, the Templars' land and wealth was used to create two new military orders, neither of which ever attained the significance of the Knights Templar.²¹⁸

There is no single cause for the demise of the Knights Templar. While the lack of certain primary documents makes studying the Order somewhat difficult, much can be learned from the sources in existence. These sources, however, should not be given

²¹⁶ Alan Forey, *The Fall of the Templars in the Crown of Aragon* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 156.

²¹⁷ Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, 230.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 230-1.

varying degrees of value based on their congruence with the outcome of the Order. While some contemporary sources criticized the Templars, the majority perceived the Templars positively. Historians and scholars should not limit their research on the Templars to a simplistic cause and effect analysis. The Order of the Knights Templar was persecuted and dissolved due to an unfavorable combination of factors. The social context of Christendom in the early fourteenth century, the nature of medieval canon law, the practice of torture, the financial concerns and devout faith of King Philip, and the impotence of the papacy to prevent their fall combined to both set the stage for and execute the demise of Christianity's most powerful military order.

CONCLUSION

The Templars' fate was neither destined nor unavoidable. Both the Order's formation and dissolution required a series of internal and external forces that merged in such a way as to shock medieval contemporaries and fascinate modern-day historians and moviegoers alike. When examining the rise and fall of the Knights Templar, one must be careful not to attach too much significance to any single event or development based on hindsight. In both cases, some causes may appear more consequential than others, but one must analyze each contributory factor independently from the eventual outcome in order to gain a more complete appreciation of the Order as a whole. Only then can one begin to understand the complex way that various elements melded together to cause the surprising creation and demise of the Knights Templar. It is also interesting to consider

how many of the factors that contributed to the Templars' formation similarly resulted in their destruction.

The ambitions of the papal monarchy led to the formation of military orders, but they also fueled hostilities with secular powers in the west. These hostilities continued throughout the Order's existence and ultimately played a major role in the trial of the Templars. Furthermore, their inflated reputation and indoctrinated secrecy—created by the Order's foundation documents—proved impossible to live up to and deleterious to their defense respectively. Finally, the ethos of fear created by the perceived Islamic threat—a major justification for the Order's inception—evolved into a heightened fear of heresy within Christendom itself. An intensified fear of internal, heretical perversions combined with the failures of the crusades led to legal, social, and cultural changes that made the Templars extremely susceptible to Philip IV's charges.

In order to understand and analyze the recent plethora of theories concerning the demise of the Knights Templar, one must first contextualize the event. One must also understand why the avant-garde Order was created, how those reasons evolved and contributed to the events surrounding the Order's fall, and what other elements augmented those immediate causes. The formation of the Knights Templar was a side effect of close to a millennium of theological justification for violence within Christianity, which was accelerated by an ambitious papacy during an era of extreme violence and fear. Alternatively, the demise of the Order came after a century of crippling defeats for the crusaders and a shift in Latin Christendom's pendulum-of-power away from the papacy and towards secular rulers. Furthermore, it was carried out by a powerful and capable king during an era that was legally, socially, and culturally stacked against

any accused heretics—especially those sworn to secrecy and whose Grand Master had already publicly damned them in the eyes of medieval canon law. The causes for both the rise and fall of the Knights Templar are numerous and complex, but it is only through investigating each in its entirety and understanding how they relate to one another that any modern scholar, student, or moviegoer can fully appreciate the fate of the Knights Templar.

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