

The Albigensian Crusade: Precursor Of The Templar Suppression

By

Roger M. Firestone, PM

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Despite the efforts and desires of many to prove that Freemasonry was descended from the Knights Templar, whose Order flourished during the Crusades until it was extirpated by a greedy and corrupt King of France, aided by an equally corrupt and also weak Pope, there is no evidence of any such connection. The linkage between Templars and Masons appears no earlier than the mid-18th century lectures by Chevalier Michael Ramsay, and seems to be entirely his invention. For whatever reason, the Templar Romanticism, with its tales of lost treasure, fleets of corsairs and pirates, secret transmission of authority, and other elements more often found in fictional adventures, captured the imagination of many Brothers of the Craft. Countless trees have been felled and pulped to feed the presses churning out books and articles pretending to establish beyond doubt that a class of military knights, certainly intolerant of all religions but their own, somehow came to adopt the symbols of stone workers and architects as a means of concealment of their continued existence, while abandoning all of the peculiar characteristics of the chivalric nature of their Order.

The lure of romance and secret lore cannot be denied, and Hollywood found it worthwhile to base a movie, *National Treasure*, on much of what has developed from the foregoing, even to the point of adding a sequel to what might have seemed a finished portrayal. As Albert Pike noted, some number of men become Masons

because of the supposed secrets of the Craft and its equally fictional connection to antiquity.

That said, there is no doubt that the story of the Templars is instructive for Masons, just as is the legend written sometime in the 1720s based on the completion of Solomon's Temple and used in the Third Degree. The tale of the betrayal of De Molay and his fellows produced a number of additional Masonic degrees with their own peculiar lessons. Moreover, the incorporation of Templar history into the degrees provided a basis for the assimilation of chivalric elements with the York and Scottish Rites, in terms of the many admirable duties and obligations to which those knighted had to swear.

To be sure, the actual practices of knights errant in mediaeval times seldom comported with the beneficence recounted in the various ballads and romances of the time: Many used their positions of power and command of men-at-arms to engage in oppression and brutality. One of the Scottish Rite degrees alludes in passing to the "Robber Knights," bands of such miscreants common in the Germanic countries of the Middle Ages¹. Crusaders on their way to the Holy Land to free it from Paynim domination did not hesitate to stop along the way to loot, pillage, and even slaughter entire villages of non-Christians. Like the Templar Romanticism, knightly virtues were far more often the stuff of fiction than of real world practice. Mediaeval times were harsh, even barbarous, although it is only modern scholarship that has replaced the sentimentality

¹ Frank, Niklas. *Raubritter (Robber Knights)*. Bertelsmann, 2002 February.

of the 19th and earlier centuries in viewing this history. (Norman Cantor, mediaeval historian, wrote, “Any bright American college sophomore who today takes a good survey course on medieval history has a better understanding of the components of the medieval world than anyone who wrote before 1895.”² See also the works of Barbara Tuchman.) The real Knights Templar were, by today’s standards, as brutal as any of the other armed groups of the times; absent the Romanticism of the treachery of the French King and the supposed involvement in Scotland, they would be unlikely role models for Freemasons.

However, for Albert Pike, Freemasonry had important lessons to teach in the realm of political science. The notion that neither politics nor religion may be discussed at all in a Masonic Lodge would have puzzled him, and many others of the first two centuries of modern Freemasonry. Certainly there is an objection to sectarian religion and partisan politics, as these are sure to create disharmony among the Brethren. But there is surely no obstacle to Masons preferring liberty to tyranny or freethinking to orthodoxy. Pike particularly would have called attention, in the history of the Templars and the treachery of the French Crown, to the role of the combination between the church and the state in the crime. Neither institution alone could have brought down so powerful an Order as the Knights Templar. The Templar inclusion in the degrees teaches us not so much whom to emulate, but what to defend against.

² Cantor, Norman Fl, *Inventing the Middle Ages*, Wm. Morrow & Co., 1991, p. 37.

³ The Manichaean heresy was to suppose that Satan had the power to create, rather than merely to imitate; according to Church orthodoxy, creativity rested in the Deity alone, but was shared with humankind. Manichaeism arose in Persia around the 3rd century C.E., and is strongly derived from the principles of Zoroaster, who taught that the

How did Philip IV dare to believe he would be successful in crushing this nearly two hundred year old Order, wealthy, well armed, and politically powerful, even with the aid of a Church that was under his thumb at Avignon? The answer is that he had the instruction of historical precedent on his side.

A century and more predating the suppression of the Templars, in the same country of France, there occurred a series of events that culminated in the only Crusade to take place entirely within a single country. In the 12th century, a sect referred to by outsiders as “Cathars” began to acquire massive numbers of adherents (or converts, from the point of view of the Church), particularly in the southern French province of Languedoc. The Cathars were also known as Albigensians, although historians dispute the precise reason for the association of the sect with the city of Albi; again, this is a term used by others than the members of the group, who simply called themselves “Good People.”

The beliefs of the Cathars are not fully known, because the Church destroyed whatever texts and writings could be found, in order to suppress the “heresy” therein, leaving few for historical analysis. Their theology appears to have been Manichaean to some extent, with creativity not the province of a single God and his human creations alone, but also apportioned to another supernatural figure, possibly Satanic, or at least worldly and materialistic, in nature³. But like leaders of the Reformation three and more centuries later, the Cathars were apparently repelled by the corruption and self-indulgence of

supernatural world was poised in conflict between the forces of good/light (Ahura-mazda) and evil/darkness (Ahrimanes). Ideas from Zoroastrianism infiltrated Judaism during and after the Babylonian Exile (the concept of Satan—from a Hebrew word meaning “adversary”—is not found in Jewish works until that period), and from there entered Christianity. The struggle to integrate such ideas without engaging in dualistic heresy lasted centuries. Even so late a work as Browning’s “Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister” refers to the danger of Manichaeism.

the clergy of the time⁴ and sought a more egalitarian basis for their lives; the Elders (or “perfects”) of the Cathar community practiced asceticism, rather than taking advantage of their positions to lead lives of luxury. Herein we begin to see parallels to the Templars, who may have controlled considerable wealth, but were individually sworn to lives of poverty and simplicity (recall the Templar symbol of two knights with but a single horse between them for both to ride at once).

Catharism derived from various ideas having their start in Eastern Europe (and before that, the Middle East, particularly Persia), with travelers bringing the concepts westward with trade. It appeared first in France in the early 11th century. For close to 200 years, the Church made only half-hearted efforts at suppression of the Cathars, until the Third Lateran Council (1179) finally declared their beliefs heretical. Innocent III became Pope in 1198, and he resolved to address the heresy with finality. When legates sent to convert the Cathars failed to reconcile them to the Church’s authority, Innocent III sought military action. Philip II, King of France, declined to act, seeing warfare only as a profitless drain on his treasury. Thereupon the Pope declared a Crusade (1209), promising the lands of the heretics as booty for the conquerors, should they be successful. This offer brought to the field most of the local feudal lords of northern France.

The power of the Church combined with the power of the state was decisive. The Albigensian Crusade lasted some twenty years and was the

⁴ *The Name of the Rose*, by Umberto Eco, has a depiction of the decadent leaders of the Inquisition, resplendent in their ornate bejeweled garments, compared to the simple habits of the monks they are investigating.

⁵ As has been noted with regard to the “perfects” already, it is not especially accurate to refer to the Cathars themselves as wealthy, as Catharism was very much anti-materialistic in its theology, considering the physical world to belong to the side of evil in the dualistic model. In pre-modern times, land was the predominant form of wealth,

most dreadful bloodbath Europe had ever seen to that time. Some authors say that “genocide” would be an applicable term. In Beziers, the entire population, including refugees who had fled to that city, was exterminated, with a death toll of some twenty thousand. It was there that the infamous reply of the Abbot of Citeaux was given to the Crusader who asked how to distinguish between Cathar and good Catholic: “Kill them all! God will know His own.”

By 1229, the war had been reduced to a matter of mopping up, as remaining Cathar towns and strongholds were picked off one by one. The entirety of France was under the control of the French throne, then occupied by a child, Louis IX, whose mother served as Queen Regent. The wealth and power of the Cathars and the nobles who had supported them had become the property of the lords who had joined with the Church to conduct the Crusade.⁵ Louis IX would eventually be canonized by the Church⁶; the last of the Cathars would be burned as heretics a few decades later, although the Inquisition would continue its witch hunts for many more years.

In looking back at this history of his own country, Philip IV could not fail to have noted that the power of the Church to condemn heretics, added to the power of the throne, combined with the promise of abundant spoils had been an outstandingly successful combination in achieving conquest and expanding the dominance of the throne. Having the Templars denounced for heresy made them legitimate prey for his plundering. Some Masonic authors⁷ have

however, and it was land that was the reward of conquest. (One cannot eat gold, silver, or precious stones.) Likewise, tales of a supposed Cathar treasure, hypothetically somehow conveyed to the Templars in some accounts, are as fictional as those of the Templar treasure.

⁶ A city in Missouri is named for him, as well as a county in Minnesota, and various other locations and entities around the world.

⁷ E.g., Baigent and Leigh, who also include the Merovingians and others, such as were supposed in the

supposed an organizational connection between the Cathars and the Templars, for which there is no particular evidence; the charges of heresy against De Molay and the others were obvious fictions and had little connection to what is known of Cathar belief. The suggestion presented here—that Philip IV was following the historical example of the Albigensian Crusade—is sufficient to reinforce the lessons that Albert Pike would draw: That connection of the power of religion to that of the state is invariably destructive of freedom, and that the ability of the state to confiscate property for the venal purposes of its leaders must be opposed.

definitely fictional *DaVinci Code* by Dan Brown. Reznikov provides evidence to the contrary of any such linkage, other than via the historical parallel discussed here.

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