

DE MOLAY

My interest in Jacques DeMolay began with initiation into the Order of DeMolay at the age of fourteen. Now after all these years my interest has been renewed, particularly after listening to Bro. Hochmuth in the 30th degree.

The story of the martyrdom of DeMolay has all the elements, such as treachery, murder, greed, torture, corruption, valor and courage that any modern writer would need for a successful novel or movie.

One intriguing aspect of DeMolay's martyrdom is that it was accomplished with the consent and participation of the king's government and with cooperation of organized religion.

To understand the events that took place so many years ago requires some understanding of medieval Europe, its kings and wars, the papacy and Inquisition and the Knights Templars.

Medieval Europe was a frightening and dangerous world. There were terrible epidemics due to diseases such as black death and small pox which caused fear and hysteria. Disease along with crop failures resulted in starvation for many and marginal nutrition for many more. As it was an agriculture based economy crop failure resulted in massive unemployment and runaway inflation.

Wars were constantly being waged. This caused many deaths directly and indirectly many more because of all the resources that were directed to the war effort instead of being used to help the people. Taxes were raised to higher and higher levels. Men who had

been free were placed back into bondage and serfdom by the government.

Cruelty by the government, church and individuals was unbelievable and the norm. Heresy, which was any disagreement with the Church, was said by the pope to be the most heinous crime under heaven and the heretic deserved the most painful death imaginable. People lived in terror because any one accused of aiding a heretic would lose their property and be tortured. There was no defense against heresy.

King Philip IV of France, also called Philip the Fair because of his physical appearance, was deeply in debt because of his extravagance and years of ruinous wars with England and King Edward I. It was Philip's efforts to eliminate his crushing debt as well as his greed and avarice that put in motion the events that would lead to the downfall of DeMolay and the Knights Templars.

Philip knew DeMolay well enough that he named him as his son's god father. He even loaned money for Philip's daughter's dowry. Also DeMolay served as a pall bearer for his sister-in-law. The Knights Templars had provided protection for Philip and had safeguarded the French treasury on several occasions. Therefore it is not surprising that DeMolay came to France when summoned by Philip. DeMolay also envisioned a return of the Templars to a crusade. Little did he know what would soon happen to him and the Templars.

The events that led to the elevation of Clement V as pope are an equally intriguing story. King Philip played a vital role in the election of Clement V and the re-location of the Holy See to France where it

would remain for the next seventy five years. Clement was equally crafty, cruel and greedy.

Clement and Philip unfortunately were similar in many ways. Both of them needed and used each other to further their own despicable ends. They were rightly suspicious and mistrusted each other.

The Knights Templars were a militant monastic order composed of knights, priests, soldiers, sergeants and servants whose purpose was to fight in the Crusades. They owed their allegiance to and were answerable only to the pope and were under the leadership of their Grand Master, Jacques de Molari (DeMolay) who was from a family of lower nobility in Burgundy. He served well on the battlefield and was the 23rd and last Grand Master serving from 1297 until his death on Mar. 11, 1314.

Over many years they had acquired large tracts of land, farms, businesses, and industries. As a result they had immense wealth and power. The Knights Templar's had a merchant navy, they transported valuable goods and cargo, as well as providing personal protection and transportation for royalty and the wealthy. They also loaned large sums of money to kings and individuals. In short they were the Fed Ex, international bankers, merchant marine, armed car service and communications companies of medieval Europe.

Despite all of their power and desire to full fill their noble purposes they would ultimately be destroyed, along with their Grand Master Jacques DeMolay, by the treachery and power of government and organized religion.

Now that the stage has been set we will look at the disastrous sequence of events that destroyed the Templars and DeMolay. In modern parlance they were framed, but of course it was done with the nicety of laws and rules of the king and church. These events have been well described in *BORN IN BLOOD and FIRE, SWORD AND DUNGEON* written by the late Bro. John J. Robinson. The following is a summary of his books.

Charges of heresy would need to be established so the Templar's property could be seized. The Knights Templars reported only to the pope and existed on the basis of their charter from the Church so charges of heresy would have to be brought before ecclesiastic tribunals. As there was no body of evidence to back up the charges the Inquisition would need to force confessions. The plan would require the cooperation of the new pope. Out right seizure of all of their property would be a risky project. But Philip had skilled counselors, well versed in the law and adept at confusing the law. Philip had a firm grip on the French clergy whose pulpits allowed him to control the people.

Philip who desperately needed money watched the great wealth flowing into the Templar treasury. He then laid out a plan that was a dress rehearsal for the suppression of the Templars. The target was the French Jews, who had few defenders. Secret orders were sent that every Jew in France was to be arrested and imprisoned on July 22, 1306. Their records and properties were to be seized to become the property of the crown and the Jews were sent destitute into exile. All documents regarding debts owed to the crown were destroyed and all monies owed to Jews were ordered payable to the king.

This is exactly what Philip had in mind for the Templars but it was much more complicated because Christians had legal protection not available to Jews and the Templars were exempt from all secular law, as they were responsible only to the pope. Their suppression would have to be based on offences against God and the customs and canons of the Church.

A charge of heresy was the way, because it called for the confiscation of property. Other sins such as accusations of sodomy, blasphemy and witchcraft would also be used.

It was not enough to prove guilt of individual Templars since they had no property to confiscate. It was vital that the order itself be found guilty of sins and crimes. It must be shown that the individual Templars were forced to engage in heretical practices by the Templar superior officers, so that the order itself was the guilty party and that the individual Templar was simply the victim of an evil organization.

Philip felt that the crime of heresy which allowed confiscation of property, would be the easiest to prove regardless of guilt or innocence. The Church approved and sometimes insisted on the use of torture to extract confessions.

The Inquisition was based on the legal point that the most conclusive evidence was a confession and that torture was a legitimate means to extract a confession, since God would enable the innocent to bear any amount of pain. Another legal point was that a confession extracted under torture was valid and non-retractable. Any person who confessed under torture and then retracted that confession when torture stopped was called a "relapsed heretic". The relapsed heretic was conclusively and irretrievably guilty and would be

burned at the stake. Another legal aspect of the Inquisition was that the accused had no right to know the identity of the accuser or any of the evidence against him.

There was only one obstacle. As a religious order the Templars were exempt from the application of torture. Philip's way around this was to use the technique that had been successfully used against the Jews: arrest the French Templars all once. Then apply torture immediately to extract a confession before anyone could make a formal complaint. Cooperation of the Inquisition was easily arranged as, Dominican Guillaume Imbert, the grand master, was Philip's friend and personal confessor.

An elaborate scheme was put in place by de Nogaret, the king's Chamberlain, who employed an Italian criminal informer Arnolfo Deghli and Esquiu de Florian, a renegade ex-Templar who had murdered his Templar superior. A drama was staged that would have the appearance of bringing the crimes of the Templars to the king's attention totally by accident. Deghli and de Florian were placed in a prison cell together. The two prisoners by arrangement were denied the services of a priest, thereby taking advantage of a Church rule that permitted a Catholic with no access to a priest to confess to another Catholic layman. They heard each other's confessions. As a former Templar, de Florian, unburdened himself of Templar sins based on greed, treachery, sorcery, homosexuality, and heresy. Deghli feigned shock and revulsion at the accusations and demanded that the prison officials send the information to the king.

Now de Norgaret had a document, a witness and a reason to arrest the Templars and question them under torture. His authority was drawn from the decrees of the Second Lateran Council.

Early in 1307 DeMolay sailed with his fleet, knights, squires, horses and 150,000 gold florins into Marseilles. He went to see the king. He also went to the papal court to present his plans for the next Crusade and to argue against the merging of his order with the Hospitalars. Meanwhile plans against De Moaly and the Templars were proceeding. Philip went to the pope with a great show of reluctance, regretting that it was his duty to present to the Holy Father shameful evidence of Templar corruption and a variety of unspeakable sins against the Church. The pope promised that he would start a formal inquiry. de Nogaret began addressing the logistics for the mass arrest. He completed plans to provide prisons and chains for 15,000 men. Scribes were making copies of the allegations against the Templars that would be circulated throughout France on the day of arrest to calm the fears of the people and gain their sympathy.

At dawn on Friday 13, 1307 every Templar, knight, priest, sergeant and servant in France was arrested and put in chains. Their torture began that same day.

Clement was furious when he learned of the Templars arrest as this order flouted his papal authority as the Templars answered only to him. He turned lose the full furry of papal wrath on Philip.

Philip responded by launching a propaganda assault against Clement condemning him for his lenient treatment of heretics and his intentions to take all of the Templar's wealth for himself.

The two argued for several weeks then made a secret deal. Clement issued a bull praising Philip as a true son the Church and recognized the charges against the Templars.

There were two types of medieval torture. First was the use of torture as punishment and the victim had no way to stop it. The other type of torture was that applied to extract information or a confession. When the answer was obtained the torture would stop. Legally, torture by the Inquisition was to be limited to a single session, but the friars developed the concept of adjournment that would permit them to torture a man for weeks under the claim that the whole time was just one session.

The medieval prison itself was a part of the torture. These prisons and the methods of torture have been described in great and awful detail. The prisoners were made to watch and hear the torture of others.

Three days after the confessed heretic made a confession to stop the torture he was brought back to the Inquisition and his confession was read back to him. If he objected he was subjected to further torture. If he renounced his confession he would be deemed a relapsed heretic and burned at the stake.

Clement called a council of the Church to convene in 1310 at Vienne. A papal commission in Paris convened Aug. 7, 1309 and expressed a willingness to listen to any Templar who wanted to defend the Order.

DeMolay appeared before the papal representatives and denied the accusations and the truth of his confession. He challenged their jurisdiction over the Order which was under the sole authority of the

pope so only he could judge. DeMolay was illiterate and had no training in ecclesiastic law so he requested funds for legal representation. The bishops denied his request and since this was a crime of heresy said he had no legal rights to representation.

DeMolay appeared before the commission again on Nov. 28 and demanded to be called before the pope where he would defend the Order. Since he firmly refused to act as defender of the Order except to the pope himself the council took a long recess to contact Templars to see if any of them would act as a defender of the Order.

The Templar knights after 2 ½ years of imprisonment fully believed that the pope would acknowledge their innocence. But they were told that DeMolay would talk to no one other than the pope. Consequently Peter de Boulgne, who had been a Templar preceptor in Rome acted in their defense. He stated that the confessions had been forged, falsified and obtained under torture, and that Templar rule had been approved by a succession of popes. He was thwarted at every turn in the trial that began April 11, 1310. Despite this it was clear that the king was growing concerned and that drastic action was necessary.

The answer came with the death of the archbishop of Sens. Philip pressured Clement to appoint a 22 year old as the new archbishop who was a loyal supporter of Philip and eager to please him.

The papal commission made it clear that its mission was to investigate only the Templar Order and that it had no authority in matters involving individual Templars. However, popes had long ago given archbishops full authority to deal with individual heretics. That

meant that Philip, through the new archbishop, had complete authority over every individual Templar.

The new archbishop moved swiftly and called a council of bishops on May 22 for the purpose of declaring the guilt of the Templars and imposing their sentences. The Templar defense had been to no avail

The next morning the papal commission reconvened and announced that the Templar prisoners would be assigned to four different categories. Those who confessed to minor offenses would, after suitable penance be set free. Those who confessed to more serious crimes would be sentenced to prison terms of varying lengths. The Templars who stood up under torture and made no confession would be sentenced to life in prison. A group of 54 knights who had confessed and had retracted their confessions would be labeled relapsed heretics and burned at the stake.

Philip acted swiftly to carry out the orders of the Archbishop of Sens. The next day the 54 Templars were then taken from their dungeons and moved to a Paris field where stakes and bundles of faggots were waiting.

Most of the condemned knights were from noble families. Philip had invited their families to come and watch them being burned to death. Each knight was given the opportunity to save his life by confirming his original confession. Remarkably, not a single Templar would save his life by an act of treason against the Order and his sacred vows. Then the horrible spectacle and sounds of men being burned to death began.

Other archbishops clearly saw what the king expected of them. Also the bishops resented the Templars privileges, especially those that exempted them from tithes to themselves and the fact that any gift of property to the order and the profits they might earn might have otherwise been give to them. Also they were concerned that the laws of the Church that protected them from torture by the Inquisition had been ignored for the Templars who were a religious order and feared they too might feel the wrath of the Inquisition.

The Council of Vienne opened on Oct 1, 1311 with over 2,000 confessions of guilt classified into 127 charges so their guilt could not possibly be questioned.

Clement raged that the Templars were so guilty that they merited no defense. The Council said the Templars did have a right to defend themselves. Clement retorted that the Templars had been unwilling to defend themselves. His solution to this dilemma was to adjourn the Council until April 3, 1312.

Philip and Clement reached a secret agreement whereby the Council disbanded the Templar order by revoking its charter and without finding it guilty of any crime. The stage was set to dispose of the Templar property. The decision to suppress the Templars by parliamentary proceedings meant that their property would be dispersed by the pope instead of Philip. This was a major compromise by Philip. But he already had all of the Templars treasure and freedom from his Templar debts. But he wanted more. He wanted the pope to order that he should be paid for the cost of arresting, feeding and maintaining the Templar's property. Suddenly this cost became very high.

On May 6th a papal bull dealt with the fates of individual Templars. The pope reserved for himself the judgement and sentencing of Grand Master DeMolay, Geoffrey de Chranay, Geoffrey Gonneville, and Hugh de Peraud. All other Templars would be judged and sentenced by provincial councils.

In spite of the decree that destroyed his Order, DeMolay continued to insist on his right to put his case directly to the pope. Clement had no intention of meeting with DeMolay, instead he appointed a commission of 3 Cardinals to conduct a final examination and pronounce judgement

In plea bargaining the officers who had agreed to hold fast to their earlier confession in exchange for which they would be shown mercy and leniency by the pope. They were horrified to hear that they had been condemned to life in prison.

DeMolay, who had been in prison for 6 years clung to the idea that if he could get to the pope he could have the charges removed. In his advanced years he had been certain that the torture would kill him and had confessed falsely to blasphemy and spitting near a cross three times. Now past 70, he knew that he had not acted like a leader during the years the Order needed him most. He could only wallow in deep depression of his failure as a Templar and as its Grand Master.

To put rumors that the Templars had been suppressed in an act of greed to obtain their treasury and properties to rest, the king and pope called an assembly of the people of Paris so that they could hear for themselves the confessions of the crimes and sins from the highest officers of the Templars.

A platform was built in front of the cathedral of Notre Dame to put the Templar criminals in full view of the clergy, nobles and commoners to watch their final degradation. On March 11, 1314 the Templar officers, dressed in their Templar robes for unmistakable identification and in chains to clearly mark them as criminals, were brought to the steps of the platform.

This was Jacques DeMolay's last chance to vindicate himself and the Order. If he attempted to recant his confession it would result in certain death in the most painful manner known to the medieval mind. As he stepped forward in obedience to the command that he publicly confess to the crowd. He seized the moment and then spoke: "I think it only right that at so solemn a moment when my life has so little time to run I should reveal the deception which has been practiced and speak up for the truth. Before heaven and earth and all of you here as my witness, I admit that I am guilty of the grossest iniquity. But the iniquity is that I have lied in admitting charges laid against the Order. I declare, that the Order is innocent. Its purity and saintliness are beyond question. I have indeed confessed that the Order is guilty, but have done so only to save myself from terrible tortures by saying what my enemies wished me to say. Other knights who have retracted their confessions have been led to the stake, yet the thought of dying is not so awful that I shall confess to foul crimes which have never been committed. Life is offered to me, but at the price of infamy. At such a price, life is not worth living. I do not grieve that I must die if life can be bought only by piling one lie upon another."

Inspired by the example of his Grand Master, Geoffery de Charnay stepped forward to retract his confession and declare the

innocence of the Templars. The crowd seemed to have believed what they had just heard from these two condemned Templars. The king's officers and the friars of the Inquisition were surprised by the sudden turn of events that upset their carefully planned drama. They hurried the Templars off the platform and told the people to go home.

Philip was outraged that this had happened after all the trouble that had been taken to convince the people of the Templar's guilt. There would be no delay in putting them to death on the little island of du Palais in the Seine river which would be far from the milling crowds. However, word leaked out and the river was full of boats of those waiting to see the death of DeMolay.

Two stakes were set up for deCharnay and DeMolay. They were stripped of their Templar robes and chained to the stakes while the executioners surrounded them with carefully selected wood and charcoal to produce a slow burning fire of intense heat that would roast them from the ground up to prolong their lives and agony for as long as possible. Also the fire should produce as little smoke as possible as that might make them unconscious and thus spare them some agony.

As the fire took hold DeMolay and de Charnay shouted out the innocence of the Templars and called on God for justice.

A legend grew up that DeMolay called down a curse on the king and his family for 13 generations and on the pope to meet with him in a year before the throne of God to answer for their crimes. The pope died the following year, followed 7 months later by Philip.

After the execution Philip received a formal complaint from the Augustinian monks who owned the island on which the execution took

place. They didn't object to the burning of DeMolay. Their complaint was that of trespassing and that they were not paid for its use.

I believe the world is a better place now than in medieval times. True many of man's problems remain with us but we have within our grasp the means of correcting many of them.

The following Americans point out the role Masonry might play in this effort. Bro. Gen. Douglas MacArthur said "Freemasonry embraces the highest moral laws and will bear the test of any system of ethics or philosophy ever promulgated for the uplift of man." Pres. Dwight D. Eisenhower said "what couldn't a million Masons do if they made a concerted effort to change the world. We could approximate brotherhood in the twinkling of an eye." Bro. Rev. Norman Vincent Peale stated "to me Freemasonry is one form of dedication to God and to humanity."

Sources:

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