

ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

Read More About It: History

First Edition
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INTRODUCTION



History

Since the early 8th century, Christian Europe had been under attack from Islamic forces. By the 10th century, most of the Iberian Peninsula, Sicily and southern Italy had fallen under Moslem control. Rome itself was besieged by a Saracen force. Seljuk Turks in their conquest of Palestine, replaced the Arab tolerance of Christian pilgrims with intolerance and violence. With Constantinople under threat, the Byzantine Emperor appealed to the Pope for aid. Urban II seized the opportunity and called the First Crusade in 1095, directing it against the Turks. The goal was to save the Byzantine Empire and to recover the Holy Land.

This publication provides a brief overview by Dr. Robert J. Kovarik GCTJ GOTJ of the history of the Order from its founding to the present.

Founding

By the end of July 1099, the First Crusade had achieved its final objective: the capture of Jerusalem. The Holy Land quickly fragmented into feudal states, with the King of Jerusalem possessing only a vague suzerainty. An immediate problem confronted these disaggregated rulers - the lack of a reliable fighting force to defend against Islamic reaction. Having fulfilled their vows, many crusaders returned home, leaving these feudal lords to rely on their own limited resources. The Knights Templar would provide a solution by becoming a standing army dedicated to the defense of Christian interests in the Holy Land.



Michael the Syrian

died 1199 AD, also known as Michael the Great or Michael Syrus or Michael the Elder was a patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church from 1166 to 1199. He is best known today as the author of the largest medieval *Chronicle*, which he composed in Syriac language.

The more immediate threat was to the large number of pilgrims and travelers arriving from Europe. Roving bands of bandits and Saracens attacked them as they traveled from the port of Jaffa to Jerusalem, and on to the Jordan River where Christ was baptized. Two knights who had come as pilgrims, Hugh of Payens (Hugues de Payens) and Godfrey of Saint-Omer (Geoffrey de Saint-Omer), saw the need. They recruited fellow knights and offered their service to protect pilgrims and travelers. Having such a band of warriors on call was appealing to the King of Jerusalem and the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Impressed with their zeal, King Baldwin II offered them part of his residence, the al-Aqsa Mosque on Temple Mount, the site of Solomon's Temple. Both the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the former Islamic shrine of the Dome of the Rock, now the Temple of Christ (*Templum Christi*), were administered by canons, following the rule of St.

Augustine. Knights associated with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre were already protecting the shrine and its pilgrims. Like them, Hugh of Payens and his band took monastic vows, observing the Rule of St. Augustine. These first Templars, living on Temple Mount and fulfilling their religious duties at the Temple of Christ, called themselves "The Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon" (*Pauperus commilitones Christi templique Salomonici*). Late in the 12th century, two chroniclers provided the first information about these Templars. While tradition numbered them as nine, Michael the Syrian, Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, noted that the Templars grew to "thirty companions". Both he and William of Tyre, agreed that their purpose was to provide protection for pilgrims and travelers.

It appears that Hugh of Payens escorted the prior of the Temple of Christ to the Council of Nablus, called in part to deal with the endemic violence outside urban areas. Perhaps it was at that Council in 1120 the Templars were recognized and received their mandate.



Figure 1 Hugues de Payens by Henri Lehmann 1841 Oil on Canvas



William of Tyre

(c. 1130 – September 29, 1186) was a medieval prelate and chronicler. He grew up in Jerusalem at the height of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, which had been established in 1099 after the First Crusade, and he spent twenty years studying the liberal arts and canon law in the universities of Europe. Following William's return to Jerusalem in 1165, King Amalric made him an ambassador to the Byzantine Empire. William became tutor to the king's son, the future King Baldwin IV, whom William discovered to be a leper. After Amalric's death, William became chancellor and archbishop of Tyre, two of the highest offices in the kingdom, and in 1179 William led the eastern delegation to the Third Council of the Lateran. As he was involved in the dynastic struggle that developed during Baldwin IV's reign, his importance waned when a rival faction gained control of royal affairs. He was passed over for the prestigious Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and died in obscurity, probably in 1186.

In 1127 with approval from the King of Jerusalem, Hugh of Payens with several of his brothers toured western Europe to recruit members and gain economic support. Bernard, the influential Cistercian Abbot of Clairvaux, recognized in them the potential for a permanent force to defend the Holy Land. In 1129 at the Council of Troyes, the Order of the Temple was recognized and provided with a Rule, drafted under Bernard's guidance and based on the Benedictine/Cistercian model. The Templars adopted the white mantle of the Cistercian, which symbolized simplicity and purity of life. Hugh of Payens became the first Master of the Temple. Pope Honorius II approved the acts of the Council. Later Bernard of Clairvaux wrote in "In Praise of a New Knighthood" (*De laude novae militiae*), that a new type of Order had been formed, consisting of laymen, who blended the knightly and monastic life into a military force mandated to protect Christianity. The first soldier-monks had arrived - the Knights Templar.

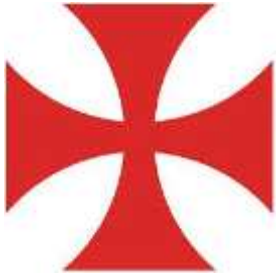
On the death of Hugh of Payens (c. 1139), Robert of Craon became Master. With a talent for organization, he succeeded in making the Knights Templar a permanent force on a global scale. A series of popes granted privileges and exemptions making the Templars an autonomous corporate body answerable only to the pope. Donations from the pope, nobility, and faithful made the Order economically independent. It was now able to support its military endeavors in great part through a network of manors and convents that extended from southern Italy to Ireland and Scotland. Ships were leased or purchased to transport equipment, horses, supplies, and recruits to *Outremer* or Europe Over-the-Seas. While the Italian commercial city-states had already developed banking based on a growing money economy, the Templars as an international Order contributed their innovations. Their convents/preceptories, particularly in London and Paris, became "clearing-houses" for the deposit, disbursement, and movement of funds between Europe and the Holy Land. The system's reliability, efficiency and honesty convinced both spiritual and temporal rulers (to include the kings of England and France) to entrust their funds and valuables to Templar security.



Figure 2 Painting of Robert de Craon by Boyan Yanev

Growth

The Knights Templars, in league with other military orders such as the Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights, provided the Crusader States with an effective defensive force. Important fortresses in frontier areas were entrusted to them. By the 13th century, the Order had around 7000 members including professed knights, sergeants, brothers, and chaplains. The Order had some 870 fortresses, convents, and preceptories spread through most of Christian Europe and the Holy Land. Early on, the Templars became an effective force in the Iberian Peninsula,



Cross Pattée

A **cross pattée** (or *cross patty* or *cross Pate*, known also as a *cross formée*/*formy*, *croix pattée* or *Tatzenkreuz*) is a type of Christian cross with arms that are narrow at the center, and often flared in a curve or straight line shape, to be broader at the perimeter. The form appears very early in medieval art; for example in a metalwork treasure binding given to Monza Cathedral by Queen Theodelinda (d. 628), and the 8th century, lower cover of the Lindau Gospels in the Morgan Library. An early English example from the start of the age of heraldry proper (i.e. about 1200) is found in the arms of Baron Berkeley. The word *pattée* is a French adjective in the feminine form used in its full context as *la croix pattée*, meaning literally "footed cross", from the noun *patte*, meaning foot, generally that of an animal. The cross has four splayed feet, each akin to the foot, for example, of a chalice or candelabrum.

supporting Christian kings in the *Reconquista*. The Order was significant in the expansion of Aragon and Portugal. The Templars had provided a model not only for the transition of the Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights into military forces, but for the rulers in the Iberian Peninsula, who created their own military orders.

In 1146, Pope Eugenius III granted the Templars the privilege of wearing the Crusaders' Red Cross, the **Cross Pattée**, on their mantles as a symbol of their willingness to shed their blood in defense of Christianity. Noted for their bravery, determination, and discipline, Templars were described as "lions in battle". Even such enemies as Saladin expressed admiration. Thousands of Templars gave their lives in such battles as Cresson, Hattin, La Forbie and Mansurah. But they alone could not save *outremer* from Moslem reconquest. Jerusalem was lost in 1187. Following the limited success of the Third Crusade, the Templars established themselves in Acre. Upon the loss of Acre in 1291 to the Mamluks, the Templars gave up their remaining fortresses in Lebanon and Syria, retreating to Cyprus.

Who was responsible for the loss of *Outremer*? While the military orders, including the Templars, shared in the blame, there were other factors. One cause was the failure to establish an effective political order in the Holy Land. There were shifting alliances between the great lords, who intrigued against each other, even forming alliances with Moslem leaders. The arrival of new crusaders, insisting upon pursuing the Holy War at any cost, often upset the delicate balance that had been achieved between the European minority and the majority of natives. While the kings were willing to gain glory by leading crusades, they made poor leaders. Their political problems followed them to Palestine and they, too, had to return home. Many Christians grew weary of the incessant call for more Crusaders, having to sacrifice their resources and their sons. As the Crusader States vanished after Moslem victories, many came to believe that retaining *Outremer* had become an impossible dream. This first attempt to colonize outside of Europe came to a disastrous end in 1291.

Ending

By the late 13th century, questions were being raised about the effectiveness of the military orders and whether they should be reformed or abolished. Proposals were made to unify the Hospitallers and the Knights Templar into one order. The loss of Acre became the moment of truth. Could the military orders continue to justify their existence? Unlike the Templars, the Hospitallers chose to escape the political in-fighting on Cyprus by conquering the island of Rhodes and transforming it into a base for naval action against the Turks. The Templars, remaining on Cyprus, planned to use the island for a return to the Holy Land. That was not to be. As economic support dwindled, and recruitment lagged, the Order became an aging order. Still the Templars had the appearance of great wealth. Rumors circulated as to moral and fiscal corruption. This opened the Order to attack.



Figure 3 Philip IV the Fair (1268-1314), King of France. Leemage/Corbis/Getty Images

The King of France, Philip IV, decided to take advantage of the Templars' loss of credibility and weakness. On Friday, October 13, 1307, all Templars within France were arrested and imprisoned. Harsh treatment and torture resulted in the desired confessions of immorality and acts bordering on heresy. Important leaders, including the Master of the Temple, James of Molay, confessed.



Figure 4 Pope Clement V by Henri Auguste César Serrur

The Pope, Clement V, was caught off guard. He tried without much success to regain control of the issue; after all, the Templars were directly under papal authority. Pressure from the King and the confessions convinced the Pope to widen the investigation by ordering all Templars in Christian Europe to be arrested and interrogated. Facing a deadlock with Philip IV, the Pope decided to resolve the issue by calling a General Council to meet in Vienna in 1312. The lack of credible incriminating evidence led the majority of the council fathers to conclude that the charges lacked merit, in particular since the charges could not be substantiated outside of France. The Pope, yielding to royal pressure and the vague promise of another Crusade, by his own authority on March 18, 1313 issued the bull, *Vox in excelso*, dissolving the Order. The Templars were to be pensioned off and their property turned over to the Hospitallers. Still there was unfinished business. Leaders of the Order who had confessed, retracted their confessions and then confessed again. They languished in prison, awaiting sentence. James of Molay and the Preceptor of Normandy, Geoffrey of Charney, refused to accept life sentences, proclaiming their innocence. As relapsed heretics,

Philip IV ordered their execution by fire. Finding courage at the end in the midst of flames these two vigorously continued to deny the charges against the Knights Templar. In the Iberian Peninsula some Templars survived by being absorbed into military orders created by the kings, such as the Order of Montesa in Aragon and the Order of Christ in Portugal. Many ex-Templars accepted the pensions, entered other religious orders, or returned to secular pursuits. Perhaps the last Templars were two men who had survived the fall of Acre. About 1340, they were discovered, married with families and serving a sultan in Palestine. They were repatriated, provided with pensions, and given great honor by the papal court in Rome.

The Knights Templar vanished into the mists of history, only to re-appear in the 18th century, under a different guise, that of Freemasonry. Freemasonry had spread to the Continent from Scotland and England. In 1736 Andrew Michael Ramsay, a Scottish Freemason and Catholic, insisted in a speech to the Masonic Lodge in Paris that Masonry had begun in Palestine among the Crusaders, particularly the military orders. Shortly after that, a German noble, Baron Karl Von Hund, announced a new kind of Masonry, Strict Observance, directly descended from the Templars. To support his alleged discovery, he claimed that Templars had survived in Scotland, where a secret line of Grand Masters had preserved the Order's existence. Masonic lodges began to adopt rituals and symbols associated with the medieval Templars. Myths about the Scottish survival and Templar association with Solomon's Temple became common.

Reemergence

In 1804 another form of Templarism appeared in Paris in the same year that Napoleon Bonaparte had proclaimed himself Emperor of his Grand Empire. Members of a Masonic lodge, the **Knights of the Cross** (*Chevaliers de la Croix*) led by a medical doctor, Ledru, and a noble, Claud-Mathew, Radix de Chevillon founded the **Order of the Temple** (*Ordre du Temple*). Fabre-Palapart, a former Catholic priest, who had supported the French Revolution and become a chiropodist, joined the Order. When the founders were unable to find a “notable person” to become Grand Master, Palapart, known as “a leading Masonic figure”, agreed to become the temporary Grand Master.



Figure 5 Bernard-Raymond Fabre-Palapart

To justify this Templar “restoration”, two documents appeared. One was a **Charter of Transmission** that revealed the secret survival of the Knights Templar through a hidden line of Grand Masters, beginning with Larmenius, an alleged successor to James of Molay. Written in ciphers, the document contained the “signatures”, also in cipher, of these Grand Masters. Conflicting Latin translations appeared after 1804. This charter appeared in part as a reaction to von Hund’s claims. The second document was the **Statutes of the Knights of the Order of the Temple** (*Statuts des chevaliers de l’ordre du Temple*). The founders said this document originated in 1705 and was attributed to the notorious Duke of Orleans, Philip, under whom it was claimed the Templars re-appeared for a brief moment, before vanishing into obscurity once more. There is no historical evidence that these documents existed before 1804. It appears they were created as instruments of convenience.

The first years of this Order of the Temple were years of successful recruitment that resulted in the establishment of priories within the Grand Empire, including Italy and Switzerland. For reasons of his own, Napoleon Bonaparte approved of the restoration, allowing a solemn ceremony in Paris honoring Templar martyrs, including James of Molay. In 1811 when the Grand Orient of France tried to re-assert control over the *Ordre du Temple*, the Order declared its autonomy and broke with its Masonic past by adhering to “the Catholic Apostolic and Roman religion”. Only Roman Catholics could be members. This promising beginning was suddenly threatened by Fabre-Palapart. A schism broke out in 1813 when he refused to give up the office of Grand Master, and revised the Statutes to justify assuming absolute authority. The result was a fragmented Order with two Grand Masters, indulging in a “little war of protests and anathemas”.



Sir William Sidney Smith

Admiral Sir William Sidney Smith (June 21, 1764 – May 26, 1840) was a British naval officer who served in the American and French revolutionary wars. He was the only person known to have been at both the Battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo and he was the man about whom Napoleon said, “That man made me miss my destiny.”

With the collapse of the Grand Empire and the re-ordering of Europe by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, a Templar priory was formed in England, led by Sir William Sidney-Smith. He joined with the Duke of Choiseur in an effort to heal the schism. In 1827 unity was restored with Fabre-Palapart continuing as Grand Master. The Order again prospered, expanding into Spain and Portugal.

For a second time Fabre-Palapart disrupted the Order. He had founded the **Johannite Church of the Primitive Christians**, based on a spurious version of the Gospel of St. John and the *Levitikon*, documents “discovered” by the Grand Master.

The *Levitikon* claimed that from the first bishop of Jerusalem, James, an uninterrupted

JOHANNITE It is "Johannite" because it claims a continuity with the primitive Johannine Christianity of the saints John the Baptist and John the Apostle, and the Christian scriptures attributed to John.

line of Grand Pontiffs, including Hugh de Payens, had led a secret version of the Christian faith. When Fabre-Palapart, having proclaimed himself Sovereign Pontiff and Patriarch, began to impose his religion on the Templars, another schism erupted. Once more Sidney-Smith came to the rescue. In 1834 he issued a manifesto against the Grand Master and called for an Executive Commission. Fabre-Palapart, now in poor health, retired to the south of France. Taking advantage of his absence, a Convent-General was called, it formed an Executive Commission and reformed the Order, restoring the Catholic tradition. On receiving word that Fabre-Palapart had died, Sidney Smith was chosen as regent. In 1838 a new **Declaration** was issued stating the nature of the Order, including a corrected version of the Statutes of 1705. When Sir William Sidney-Smith became Grand Master, one faction known as the *palaprien* Templars refused to accept his election.



Figure 6 Franz Xaver Winterhalter Portrait Of Napoleon III Louis Napoleon Bonaparte

The Order of the Temple remained split between the “legitimate” Templars and the *palaprien* Templars. In 1845 an attempt was made to acquire recognition from Pope Gregory XVI. In the 1850s the French Emperor, Louis Napoleon, recognized one of the factions. The *palaprien* Templars, reverting to the Masonic past, continued to be centered in Paris and led by regents. Both groups seemed to have disappeared between 1848 and 1870.

While the Knights Templar of today can claim roots extending back to 1804, the actual founding took place in Belgium in the 1930s. A Belgian priory was founded in 1815 by the Marquis Albert-Francois du Chasteller. After 1840, this Priory split into “Legitimate” and Masonic priories. The Masonic Trinity of the Tower priory lasted until 1930, when it was abolished. In 1932 several former members established a new Grand Priory of Belgium, restored the Catholic tradition, and took the name of **The Sovereign and Military Order of the Temple** (*Chevaliers de l'Ordre Souverain et Militaire du Temple*).

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Shortly after, a move was made to restore the International Order with a Magisterial Council led by a regent. The second regent, Emile-Isaac Vanderberg, dedicated himself to re-establishing unity, in particular with priories in Italy, Portugal and Switzerland. The International Order became a confederation of Autonomous Grand Priors, known as the **Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem** (*Ordo Supremus Militaris Templi Hierosolymitani – OSMTH*). Then came the German invasion of Belgium in 1941. To ensure Templar survival, Vanderberg made a temporary transfer of the archives to the care of the Portuguese Prior, Antonio Pinto de Sousa Fontes. Once the war ended in 1945, de Sousa Fontes refused to return the archives. After the sudden death of Vanderberg, de Sousa Fontes assumed the title of Regent. Division within the International Order (OSMTH) erupted, as some Priors rejected his leadership. Two years later the Regent issued updated **Statutes**, in which the Order was described as “traditionally Catholic, chivalric, cosmopolitan, independent and conservative.” In 1948 he designated his son, Fernando de Sousa Fontes as his successor.



Figure 7 Emile-Isaac Vanderberg



Figure 8 Antonio Pinto de Sousa Fontes



Figure 9 Fernando de Sousa Fontes



Figure 10 Fernando de Sousa Fontes

In February 1960 de Sousa Fontes died. His son, Fernando de Sousa Fontes, succeeded, taking the title of Prince Regent. Meanwhile the Grand Prior of Switzerland, Anton Leuprecht, had been receiving Americans into the Swiss Grand Priory. As more Americans joined the Order, action began to form an American Grand Priory. The Corporate Charter was signed on June 4, 1962 by Crolian W. Edelen, William Y. Pryor, Herschel S. Murphy, Warren S. Hall, Jr., John D. Leet, Lawrence Stratton and George J. Deyo. The Grand Priory was incorporated in the State of New Jersey on June 29. Crolian W. Edelen was chosen the first Grand Prior. The Prince Regent recognized the Autonomous Grand Priory of the United States (**SMOTJ-GPUSA**). In April of 1964 the former king of Yugoslavia, Peter II, became the Royal Patron of the American Grand Priory. He remained in this office until his death in November of 1970.

The International Order continued to have problems. In 1970 the Prince Regent called together a Convent General of the Order to meet in three sessions: Paris; Chicago and Tomar, Portugal. While resolutions were passed that recognized the Order as “universal and not limited to any one nationality or Language”, and that the Order “shall be a Christian Order”, nothing was accomplished to bring unity back to the OSMTH. With increasing opposition from European Grand Priorities, the Regent turned to the American Grand Priory, appointing members to the Grand Magistracy.

Matters remained calm until 1993 when de Fontes revised the Statutes so that he could become the “Grand Master”. Once more the Prince Regent called a Convent General to meet in three sessions. At the first session in Santiago, Spain, the revised Statutes were presented, but no action was taken. The final session was to meet in London, England. In 1995, a proposed agenda, calling for basic reforms, was sent to de Sousa Fontes, now calling himself Grand Master. He abruptly cancelled the session. In reaction, the British Grand Prior, Sir Roy Redgrave, called for an International Conclave. At its meeting in June a list of reforms was drawn up to be presented to de Sousa Fontes. The Grand Priors agreed to meet in Salzburg, Austria on November 3 to receive the response. When the Convent was informed that de Sousa Fontes had rejected all the demands, the London resolutions were enacted. A Grand Council of Grand Priors was formed to govern the Order, since the office of Grand Master was considered vacant. COL Joseph Esposito, Grand Prior General of NATO, was elected President of the Grand Council of Grand Priors.

The moment of truth arrived - would OSMTH separate itself from de Fontes as Prince Regent? The Grand Council met in Paris in March 1996. To avoid division within the Order, one final offer was made to the “Grand Master”, allowing him to retain an honorary position with the title of **Prince Regent Emeritus**. The offer was rejected. The process of separation would drag on for another three years. At an August meeting in Lillehammer, Norway, the Grand Secretary, COL Ronald Scott Mangum of the GPUSA, was authorized to draw up a **Statement of Separation** from the Prince Regent. Finally, in 1999 the issue of separation from de Sousa Fontes was settled in New Orleans, where the Grand Magistracy Council approved the **Statement of Separation**.



Figure 11 Peter II



Figure 12 Sir Roy Redgrave



H.R.H. Princess Elisabeth

Elisabeth, Princess of Schleswig-Holstein (née Princess Elisabeth of Lippe-Weissenfeld; born July 28, 1957, Munich, Germany) is the princess consort to the current Head of the Ducal House of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg, Christoph, Prince of Schleswig-Holstein. Elisabeth is the daughter of Alfred, Prince of Lippe-Weissenfeld and his wife Baroness Irmgard Julinka Wagner von Wehrborn. The House of Glücksburg (also spelled *Glücksborg*), shortened from House of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg, is a Dano-German branch of the House of Oldenburg, members of which have reigned at various times in Denmark, Norway, Greece and several northern German states.

Besides the fate of the “Grand Master”, the Salzburg meetings dealt with the future structure of the Order and its administration. On November 2, 1996, the Constitution, known as the “**Coordinated Statutes of the Ordo Supremus Militaris Templi Hierosolymitani**” (OSMTH) was adopted, stating the goals and structure of the Order as an international confederation of Autonomous Grand Priors. The Grand Magistral Council, made up of Grand © 2020 SMOTJ, Inc. IV-28 Version 4.3

Priors, would possess the legislative power. The International Grand Commander became the Executive Officer, while the office of Grand Master would be more ceremonial.

In 1997, Her Royal Highness Princess Elisabeth of Ysenburg and Budingén, Princess of Schleswig, Holstein, Sonderburg und Glücksburg agreed to serve as Royal Patron for the Autonomous Grand Priory of the United States of America. She continues to serve the Order in that position.

In 1999, at Glasgow, Scotland, Sir Roy Redgrave was elected Grand Master. RADM James J. Carey was elected International Grand Commander.

On October 15, 2004 at Monchengladbach, Germany, RADM James J. Carey was chosen Grand Master and BG Patrick E. Rea International Grand Commander. Both Carey and Rea had served as Grand Priors of the GPUSA.



Figure 13 RADM James Carey



Figure 14 BG Patrick Rea



Archbishop Vicken Aykazian

is the Ecumenical Director and Diocesan Legate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern), in which capacity he has served since January of 2000. Archbishop Aykazian was born in Siirt, Turkey, in 1951. He studied theology at the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem and was ordained a deacon in 1968 and a celibate priest in 1971. In 1992, His Holiness Vasken I, the late Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians, ordained him a bishop. In addition to his seminary education in Jerusalem and at the Holy Cross Armenian Seminary in Istanbul, he received a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Kings College in London; studied pastoral theology at St. Augustine's College in Canterbury, England; received his Ph.D. from the Armenian Academy of Sciences' Department of History; and completed the Ph.D. course requirements at Fribourg Catholic University in Switzerland. As Diocesan Legate and Ecumenical Director, Archbishop Aykazian is a prominent representative of the Armenian Church and a spokesman for Armenian causes in the United States.

The Autonomous Grand Priory of the United States of America established the position of Religious Patron in 2001. The Religious Patron is a senior Christian religious leader who consents to provide religious protection and guidance to the Order. His Eminence, Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Ph.D., Legate of the Eastern Diocese Armenian Orthodox Church is the current Religious Patron.

As early as 1997 the GPUSA and OSMTH expressed concern over the plight of Christians around the world who had become victims of intolerance and even persecution. A plan was developed to support **Christians at Risk**, with aid going to Christian communities in Ethiopia, Iraq, Kosovo and Palestine. To bring about better understanding between Western Christianity and Russian Orthodoxy, the GPUSA supported the reconstruction of the Church of Christ in Moscow that had been destroyed under Stalin. This Russian opening led Bishop Tikhon of Archangel to request aid for his vast diocese. The result was the creation of a "Rolling Church," a train that would provide both medical and spiritual aid. Such developments led to a declaration calling for cooperation and understanding between Jews, Christian and Moslems, **The First Alexandria Declaration of the Religious Leaders of the Holy Land**. This was made possible through a partnership between OSMTH and the **International Center for Religion and Diplomacy**, founded by a Templar Knight, Dr. Douglas M. Johnston, Jr.

The Templar dream of a return to the Holy Land started to become reality when GPUSA began making donations to the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land to help preserve sacred sites associated with Christianity. This became an international endeavor and expanded to other Christian groups, both Orthodox and Protestant. In 2003, the Patriarch of the Armenian Church invited Templars to visit the Holy Land. The American Grand Prior, BG Patrick Rea led the delegation. Firm relations were established with the Armenian, Greek, and Latin Patriarchs along with bishops of the Anglican and Lutheran churches. Growing concern about the survival of the Christian communities in Palestine, resulted in an increase of humanitarian aid, particularly in support of schools.

Another important development after 1999 has been the expansion of both the national and international Order. The growth of the American Grand Priory, with many new Pories and Commanderies required structural modernization. Grand Prior XIII, BG Patrick E. Rea, formed a Council of [former] Grand Priors and divided the Grand Priory into regional districts, each headed by an appointed Regional Deputy Grand Prior. Membership of the Grand Council and its voting procedures were reformed to provide a more efficient operation. At the same time, OSMTH undertook expansion into Asia, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and both North and South America. The growing international activity of OSMTH in charitable, ecumenical, and humanitarian activity was formally recognized by the United Nations. In July 2002, OSMTH was granted special consultative status to the Economic and Social Council as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO).



Two significant developments occurred in 2007. On October 13 in Belgium where the modern Order had its beginning, the **Brussels Declaration** was issued, stating the Order's Vision, Commitments, and Program for Action. This was the first statement of principle since the Convent General in Paris in 1838. Finally, as an organization the Knights Templar returned to Jerusalem after an absence of 820 years. On November 12, the Provisional Commandery of the Holy Land was created with the American Priory of St. King Charles the Martyr as its mentor. Six postulants became its first members. The circle had been closed.

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