

Foreword I

Rea, P.E., Brigadier General, OSMTH Grand Master



Portrait of GM Patrick E. Rea. Oil on canvas by Tom Curtis. Photo: Tom Curtis.

It is with pride, and more than a little awe, that I am honored to recognize the research and contributions of a number of scholars and members of the Order in preparing this history of the Knights Templar for the 900-year anniversary. One must raise a salute of appreciation to Dr. Pasi Pöllänen and the many Finnish and European scholars that have done remarkable research on the history of this Order. Scott Simon and the History and Archives Committee also deserve such gratitude for monitoring this difficult task for over three years. In many ways, this includes the parallel history of Christianity during the same period and the development of many of the nation states in Europe and the Middle East.

This book is a welcome tribute to the unique and extraordinary history of the Knights Templar. They were and remain a group of accomplished Christians that, in a very special way, fulfilled an original mission of Christian pilgrim protection. For a period time, they also provided the physical protection of the ancient and holy city of Jerusalem, the home of three Abrahamic faiths.

As we acknowledge our scholars, we also acknowledge other great historians in their discovery and explanation of a Christian group that operated throughout all of Europe and the Middle East developing financial, medical, commercial, and military institutions that remain unique for their time. Indeed, historians have praised and marveled at Templar accomplishment. Fiction writers, not bound by any part of fact, have made the Knights Templar agents of either massive good or mystical evil, which are based on nothing in this book.

It is my thought as Grand Master that this publication on the history of the Order provides our members and interested parties throughout the world

an opportunity to briefly discuss the philosophy, structure, and mission of the modern Knights Templar. A broad view of European, Middle Eastern, and Christian history over the last 800 years may prove helpful. One must recognize that such a broad brush has the understandable weakness of rich details, which I leave this book and other scholars to explain.

Since the birth of Christ over 2,000 years ago, the Christian faith, and for many years the vast majority of Christians themselves, originated in the Middle East. We were the second of the Abrahamic faiths following Judaism, which also claims the holy city of Jerusalem as their home. We preceded the third faith among the sons of Abraham, Islam, which claims Jerusalem and other holy cities in the Middle East as their home.

Following the direction of the Christian Bible, the prophets of Christendom went forward to spread the faith throughout the world. During that same period, the early denominations of Christendom developed with the heads of those denominations in Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem followed by distinguished Eastern Rite Orthodox churches that flourish to this day. Under the leadership of Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople, a series of vitally important Christian councils convened to write most of the New Testament as we know it, and in many cases they developed a common doctrine for the teaching and understanding of Christianity. Regretfully during this time, competition developed between the two or three most senior patriarchates. In this unsettled Christian environment, the great Prophet Muhammad, blessed be His name, was born and Islam developed. For the citizens of the Middle East, much of North Africa, and modern-day Anatolia, Christendom must have seemed confusing because there was so much disagreement, but to the sons and daughters of Islam, the message was very straightforward and understandable. The Hebrews' historic faith was and remains a consistent, respected, and enlightened teaching. The Old Testament is rich in history, and our Jewish friends continue to prosper under its message.

In this multi-competitive environment, North Africa, Anatolia, and what is today called the Middle East, which includes all of the Muslim countries on the Arabian Peninsula and adjacent, started to become nation states of that region and were overwhelmingly Muslim. Christians, Muslims, and Jews coexisted for hundreds of years, but regrettably the political structure of many of the new nations in the region developed a hierarchy of the faiths, which was institutionalized after the defeat of the Eastern Roman Empire by the Ottoman Empire. From that date until 1920, there was no Christian European power capable of championing the independence of our original Christian sisters and brothers in the Holy Land. The original Christian crusades, and even the founding of our Order, occurred before the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire. After that time, and after the defeat of the Christian armies in Jerusalem by the resourceful Muslim commander Saladin, Christians were very alone and very subordinated at the birthplace of Christ.

Most certainly some of the significant European powers led by Russia, Austria, and later Germany and England would bargain for Christian rights in the Holy Land, but that was done completely through diplomatic channels with the Ottoman Empire. It is worth noting that many Christian countries including Romania, Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Croatia, among others came under Ottoman control, while others actually faced the threat of their own subjugation. That is, until the combined armies of Austria, with the unique help of the Bohemian armies, were able to stop the effective Ottoman military in the East. During this period, much of Spain and Portugal came under Muslim control. With some help from other Europeans, the Iberian Peninsula was returned to the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal.

As already noted, it was during this period that many of the knightly orders were formed and thrived. The Knights Templar, unique in its structure and extraordinary in its accomplishment and wealth, found its greatest moments that defined its historic mission

that lives to this day. Notwithstanding its suppression, its mission of opening roads to Jerusalem, defending Christians at risk, building bridges among the sons of Abraham, and Christian humanitarian advocacy worldwide crystalized. The current mission has its Christian roots in some of the most interesting and turbulent times for citizens of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.

An analysis of the knightly orders, including our own, has been profoundly shaped by European political and religious history, some of which is aforementioned. As we move through the 19th century, many of those Orders became almost completely social and very often limited to specific Christian faiths. This is certainly true of the Knights Templar. In fact, various nobles and other organizations chose to borrow Templar titles, functions, and structures for their own use. We modern-day Templars recognize that, but choose to officially not associate ourselves with any of those existing organizations. During much of the latter half of the 19th century, membership in many of the Orders actually started declining and some of the smaller Orders went out of existence. It is not within the scope of my comment to provide an opinion on why this occurred, but allow me to suggest a possible reason. The decline of the Ottoman Empire and its perceived threat to Christianity and the Western world, coupled with the strong rise of the imperial powers of Austria-Hungary, Russia, Germany, and England, clearly changed the perception of the threat to Christianity. The Christians found some renewed (although more limited) freedoms and social activities during this time in Jerusalem. This was to be short-lived as the old world order, represented by the Ottoman, Russian, Austrian and German empires, crumbled at the end of World War I. The Christians in the Middle East again found themselves confused and alone, as did many other residents of that area.

There was no clear call to answer this challenge. However, many of the historic Orders, which had decreased in size and had become almost completely

social in nature, began perceiving that a vacuum of advocacy, sponsorship, and support for Christians in the Holy Land was developing. At the same time, advocates for the other two great faiths of Abraham developed among the major Arab tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, and there was a renewed call for a Jewish home state by members of the Jewish faith throughout the world. These changes were occurring during a period of political and economic chaos in many parts of Europe and the United States, which was culminated in the horror of World War II. Those forces were so negative and so great that humanitarian projects, whether considered by Christian Orders or even world bodies like the League of Nations, were simply overwhelmed in the process. Notwithstanding the cruel and uncertain nature of world events at that time, various Knights Templar groups in Europe began strengthening their organization and preparing themselves for yet unknown missions. The world was becoming so terrible, and they knew the historic Templar mission would be demanded.

Strong Templar entities existed in Switzerland, Poland, Belgium, Portugal, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. Some of those communicated with each other, and others were stand-alone entities quite often patroned by a noble house or Christian society within their host country. World War II scattered these entities to a number of safe havens in Europe, such as Switzerland and Portugal, and in the United States. At the end of the war, the Christian Orders often rededicated themselves to their Christian and humanitarian roots. The Grand Priory of the United States, as an example, was able to secure the late King Peter of Yugoslavia as their Royal Patron when His Majesty was forced to flee his home nation as communists took over his kingdom. Many of the existing Templar entities began exploring expanded Christian missions. However, the 1940s through the 1960s still exhibited a heavy social component.

By the mid-1960s, international peacekeeping missions, some led by the United Nations, began to expose US and European military officers to the plight

of Christians in the Sinai and the Holy Land. Beginning in the 1980s and continuing through today, Christian churches, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and some Orthodox, provided documented presentations to US and European audiences on the plight and flight of Christians from Jerusalem. One of the leading advocates of such information was and remains Father Peter Vasko of the Franciscan Order, who is himself an active member of the Order. Knightly Orders in the late 1980s and early 1990s were feeling an ever-growing need to help fill the lack of Christian support for their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem and the region.

Of the many Templar entities in Europe, the largest and most respected could trace its existence to the French Templars recognized by Emperor Napoleon. At the beginning of World War II, the Regent of the Order of the Temple, Mr. Emile Isaac Vandenberg of Belgium, secured the international archives. In December of 1942, after the arrival of the German troops, Mr. Isaac Vandenberg sent those archives for protection to the Grand Prior of Portugal, Mr. Antonio de Sousa Fontes¹. The intent was for temporary safekeeping, but regretfully the de Sousa Fontes family assumed an almost hereditary right. In fact, in 1995 Antonio's son, Fernando de Sousa Fontes, called himself Grand Master and placed himself outside the democratic authorities of the several Grand Priors. This development occurred against the backdrop of active negotiation initiated by the Grand Prior of the United Kingdom with de Sousa Fontes beginning in 1992. This continued until October of 1999 when the Grand Commander of the Order, Rear Admiral James J. Carey, with the other Grand Prior's unanimous approval at the Grand Magistral Council in New Orleans, separated the current members of OSMTH from any communication with the de Sousa Fontes family.

Simultaneously during the mid- and late-1990s, the new leadership of OSMTH under the direction of the

Grand Master, Major-General Sir Roy Redgrave (UK), and Rear Admiral James Carey (US), directed that the Order reach out to the Christian churches of the world to determine how the modern Templars could be most helpful. They determined that a suitable and qualified royal patron be secured with *fons honorum* power and a religious protector of international standing with canon power. Clearly the new leadership intended to establish an Order with international acceptance. The responsibility for coordinating the responses and recommendations was given to myself. From that point, and for the next four years, extensive discussions were carried out with some of the most senior sovereign houses of Europe and Africa, such as Ethiopia. A systematic campaign was also undertaken to meet with the hierarchs of the great Christian denominations.

It soon became apparent that the Knights Templar, in a more modern Order, was now in existence. After 18 months of search for a proper royal patron, Her Highness Princess Elisabeth of Ysenburg und Büdingen, Princess of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg, agreed to accept the position with a clear understanding that if a reigning sovereign house agreed to such patronage, she would be happy to stand aside. She had been active in the Order since mid-1995. The discussion on asking for her approval was completed after thorough research by leading US and European genealogists, and was thought to be most appropriate because the 21st century Templars began with a woman as royal patron. The search for a religious patron involved years of extensive meetings with archbishops, nuncios, and cardinals, including Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, of the Roman Catholic Church; bishops, archbishops and patriarchs of the Orthodox Church; scholars and bishops of the Lutheran Church; scholars, bishops and archbishops of the Anglican Church; and religious clergy from numerous other major Christian faiths. Of the many wonderful recommendations from this distinguished group of Christian leaders, the one that rang most true to OSMTH's leadership was provided the Papal

¹ Décret Magistral 23 Dec 1942; See Wagemans, this volume

Nuncio to the United States in a meeting set by myself, with Admiral Carey and General Disney in attendance. The Nuncio advised that our Order seek an internationally recognized Orthodox patriarch, because all the churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, recognize this office and could easily deal with the Knights Templar. The tasteful and quiet search for such a distinguished Christian leader began three days after that meeting and culminated in the acceptance by His Beatitude, the Most Blessed Theodosius, Primate of the Orthodox Church in the United States and Canada, as the first OSMTH religious protector. At the time of publication, Princess Elisabeth remains the royal patron and Metropolitan Theodosius has been succeeded by Patriarch Nourhan Manougian, Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, as the religious protector.

During the search for the religious protector, it became apparent that the primary mission of the Order should refocus on the Holy Land and also throughout the world to assist Christians at risk. That mission began to be debated not only at the Grand Magistral Councils in the Order, but also within the several Grand Priories. It was refined overtime by His Grace Bishop Younan after he accepted the position of Chaplain General of the Order and continues to hold the title of the Lutheran Bishop of the Holy Land and President of the Lutheran World Federation. In 2002, the Grand Priory of the United States invited European Templars to join an American delegation for the first official return to Jerusalem of a Templar group since that city had fallen to Saladin. It was my honor to lead that delegation. To my complete surprise in late Spring of 2002, His Beatitude Patriarch Torkom Manoogian, the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, called me from Jerusalem at my office in Chicago and said, "Please come to the Holy Land. Be my guest. You are welcomed, and you are needed." To my overwhelming surprise, I felt that I should remind His Beatitude that he was talking to the head of a proposed Templar delegation, and His Beatitude responded that he did understand this. His

Beatitude went on to say, "The Christians of Jerusalem need to know they are not alone. Come and be with us." And we did. And we have not stopped since.

Great Christian leaders have welcomed us, including the Greek patriarch, Latin patriarch, the head of the Lutheran Church, and the head of the Anglican Church. In addition, the Israeli government extended the hand of friendship while in Jerusalem. On that first visit, Dr. Jarjoui of the PLO High Ministerial Commission representing Yasser Arafat assured us that the return of the Templars to the Middle East in peace was a welcomed event. Since that time, Templar delegations have been visiting Jerusalem more than twice every year. Individual Grand Priories have been sponsoring scholarships, down payments for Christians to buy their homes in Jerusalem, and provided sizable stipends for the resident patriarchs and bishops of the major faiths.

It is safe to say that our relationships with the Christian faiths continue to expand. In November 2011, I was pleased to lead a delegation with the Grand Prior of Greece for a formal audience with His All Holiness, The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Constantinople (Istanbul). His All Holiness had a special medal for Templars commissioned and stated that he personally hoped to meet with any Templars on pilgrimage at his Phanar. Further, he asked that the mission of the Knights Templar be expanded to not only offer assistance to Christians at risk, but to offer assistance to needy people of goodwill throughout the world. I was able to explain to His All Holiness that the Order intended as much as possible to focus on the most martyred Christian churches, the Armenian, the Coptic, and the Assyrian Orthodox. That information was provided for his understanding.

This fine book documents the rich history of the Knights Templar. My comments in this foreword applaud that research, and also documents the establishment of the modern Knights Templar and OSMTH as an advocacy group on behalf of Christians at risk and others of goodwill throughout the world.

This advocacy is carried on through our United Nations missions in New York, Geneva, and Vienna, our membership on the Executive Committee of CoNGO², our membership in the International Peace Bureau, and other regional and national forums throughout the world. Further, our over 20 Grand Pories actively sponsor charitable and Christian programs focused on the Middle East. We have accepted the challenge of supporting the underrepresented Christian families, friends, and society in our original Christian homeland, Jerusalem

² CoNGO = Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with ECOSOC at the United Nations