

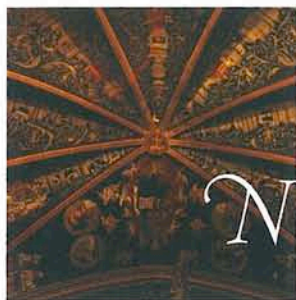


WARRIORS OF THE LORD

THE MILITARY ORDERS OF CHRISTENDOM

M I C H A E L W A L S H



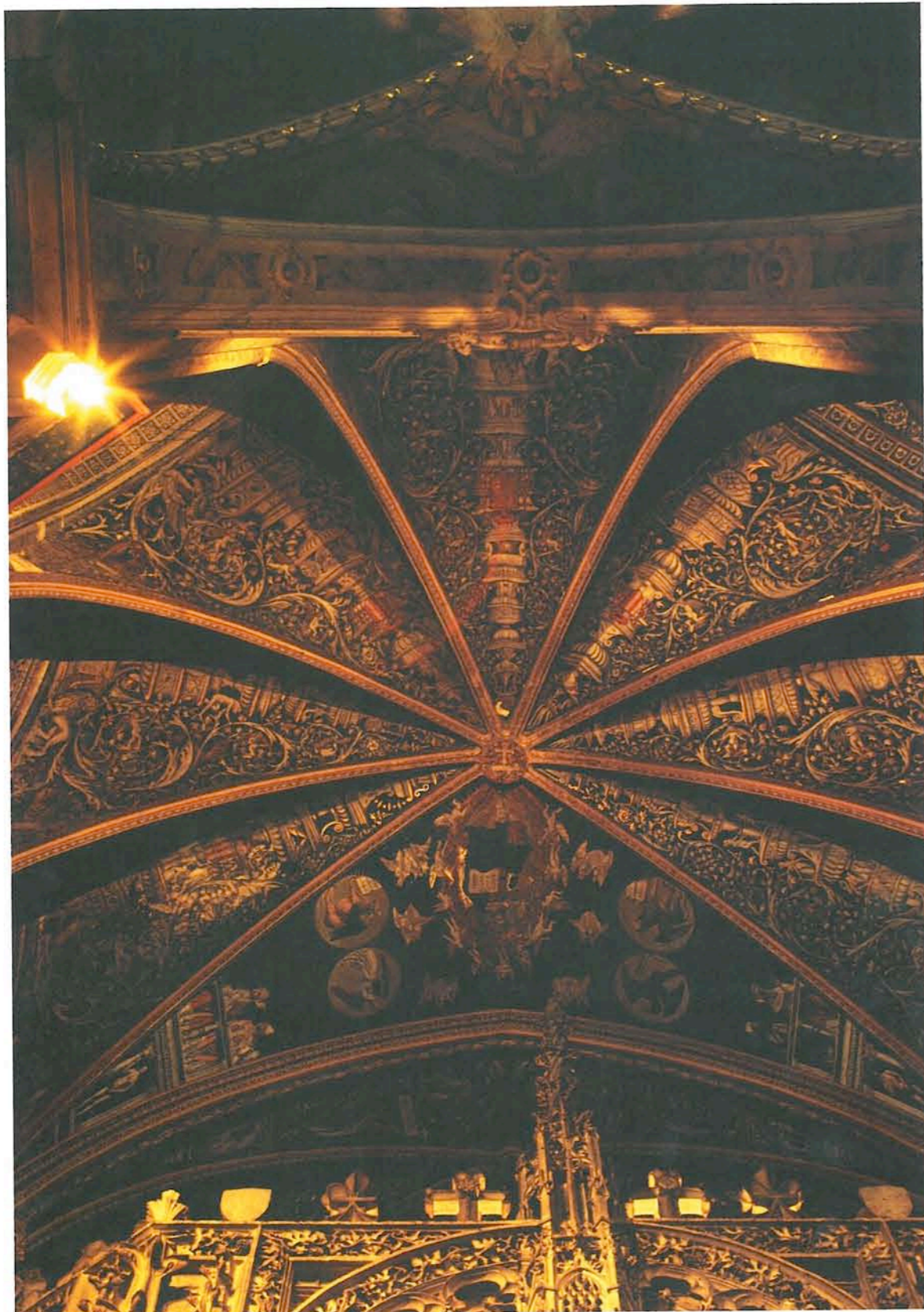


Northern Frontier

This is not a book about crusades as such, but about the role of the military Orders. There were many crusades or “holy wars” to which were attached the privileges mentioned in Pope Eugenius’s bull *Quantum praedecessores* but in which the Orders were not at all, or only marginally, involved. They were not always directed against Muslims. There were, for instance, crusades against papal opponents in Italy. But perhaps the most notorious of the crusades launched against non-Muslims was that against the Cathars, or Albigensians – so called after the city of Albi in southwest France, which was regarded, in fact somewhat mistakenly, as the center of the movement.

The Cathars were regarded by the Church authorities as Christian heretics, but there was very little that was Christian about their beliefs. Central to their faith was a conviction that there were two Gods, equal and opposite, one of good and one of evil. The evil God had created matter, inside which the spirit, created by the good God, was imprisoned. It was the task of believers, therefore, to free the spirit from the (evil) matter.

Pope Innocent III became seriously alarmed by the spread of the heresy, particularly after his legate, Peter of Castelnau, was murdered by a vassal of Raymond VI, Count of Toulouse. A crusade was proclaimed in 1209, which pitted Raymond of Toulouse and Raymond-Roger, Viscount of Béziers and Carcassonne, against Simon



de Montfort, lord of Montfort-l'Amaury and Epernon, and also heir to the earldom of Leicester – to which his son, also called Simon, eventually managed to succeed.

Simon the elder was killed at the siege of Toulouse in 1218, but the particularly brutal campaign against the Cathars dragged on until 1229. There was, however, another kind of campaign also being waged, that of preaching, and its chief protagonist was the Spaniard Dominic Guzmán.

Dominic was born about the year 1170 at Calaruega in Castile. He became a priest in the cathedral chapter at Osma, and when Alfonso IX, King of Castile, sent the Bishop of Osma to Denmark on a diplomatic mission, Dominic went too. On their way they passed through Toulouse, and encountered Catharism at first hand. Dominic and his Bishop went on to Denmark, but on their return, instead of going straight back to Osma they went to Rome, to ask permission to be allowed to become missionaries to the pagan Cumans in what is now Russia. Pope Innocent rejected their request, insisting that they should work closer to home. They went to the abbey of Citeaux, whose monks had been appointed official preachers against the Cathars, then on to Montpellier where they met the abbot of Citeaux, Peter of Castelnau, and others. The Bishop finally went back to his diocese, but Dominic stayed, founding the Order of Preachers, or Dominicans as they are more usually called, to combat the growth of the heresy alongside military efforts to do likewise: Dominic was close to Simon de Montfort.

As will be seen shortly, the Dominicans were to be active in preaching crusades, especially the crusade against the pagan tribes of northern Europe, but in the context in which they were conceived, it is no surprise that the next major development in the Christian concept of war should have come from the pen of a Dominican friar.

Friar Thomas was born about 1225 near the town of Aquino in Italy – hence his name, Thomas Aquinas. He



St Dominic

Opposite: A ceiling in Albi Cathedral, France

studied in Cologne and in the 1250s taught at the University of Paris, returning there in 1269 and staying there until the end of his life, though when he died in 1274 he was on his way to the Council summoned to meet in Lyons by Pope Gregory X. In 1266 or thereabouts he began his most famous work, a handbook of theology, the *Summa Theologiae*. Though still unfinished at his death, it is in three massive volumes, the second volume being divided into two parts, traditionally known as the “First Part of the Second Part”, and the “Second Part of the Second Part”. Thomas’s treatment of war occurs in the latter, the Second of the Second (abbreviated as IIa IIae) at Question 40.

There are four parts, or “articles”, to Question 40, each presenting a problem and answering it in the form common among medieval theologians – giving the arguments for the view opposed to that of the author, then systematically answering them. In the first article Thomas asks whether it is always a sin to wage war. He presents the arguments that it is always a sin – and then refutes these in turn. There are, he says, three conditions required, but if they are present then a war is just.

The first condition is that war must always be declared by the prince (that is, by the lawful authority). No private person, he says, has any business declaring war: he has other means to right injustices. Secondly, Thomas continues, war must be fought for a just cause: those attacked may be attacked only because of some wrong they have done. Finally, a war may only be waged to promote good and avoid evil: there must, that is to say, be a right intention.

In the second article Thomas wonders whether the clergy can fight in wars. They cannot, he says very firmly. In the third article he questions, rather oddly, whether subterfuge may be used in war. Not surprisingly he decides that it can. And finally he revisits the issue of when one may fight, asking whether it is lawful to fight on feast days. As we have seen, the Truce of God movement laid down limitations on which days battle might be joined. Thomas is unsympathetic to that point of view, arguing that no one would suggest there were days when a doctor would not come to heal a patient, so there should not be days when action may not be taken to heal the body politic.

None of this, however, suggests that the heathen can, or ought to, be converted

by military force – which is what, in Prussia, the Teutonic Knights set out to do. Indeed, in the thirteenth century the weight of scholarly opinion was against them.

By the time Thomas wrote the *Summa* his Dominican brethren were deeply involved as recruiting agents for the Teutonic Knights. Like the Hospitallers, the Teutonic Knights developed out of a hospice for the sick. In this instance it was at Acre, though the formal, Latin, title of the Order was “hospital of the Germans of Holy Mary in Jerusalem”, putting it, by its claim to Jerusalem, on an equal footing with the Hospitallers and the Templars. The hospice at Acre was founded in 1190 by crusaders from Bremen and, perhaps, from Lübeck. Like the Hospitallers, the original members were not knights – or at least not fighting men: the head of it may even have been a priest. It was in that form that, in 1191, it was taken under the protection of the Pope.

In 1198 it developed into a military Order, and as such it was confirmed by Pope Innocent III who rather oddly bestowed on it not one but two rules of life – that of the Templars for the military wing, and that of the Hospitallers for those who continued to serve the sick. In place of a priest, a knight became its head, and a succession of privileges made it equal in status to the two older Orders. In the thirteenth century it fought in the Holy Land alongside the Templars and the Hospitallers, and controlled a number of castles, mainly around Acre: the Castle of Montfort, in the hills northwest of Acre, was its headquarters.

All the military Orders in the Holy Land were lords of territories across Europe from which they could launch recruiting drives and, perhaps more importantly, gain funds to pay the vast expenses of their presence in Palestine. But the ambitions of the Teutonic Knights were rather wider. They were, for one thing, torn between loyalty to the German Emperors who had been their patrons, donating many of the lordships they held, and loyalty to the papacy. The latter, according to Church law, should have



Pope Innocent III with St Francis of Assisi

taken precedence, but that did not always happen, particularly when, as was frequently the case, Pope and Emperor were at loggerheads. A Grand Master who, in the middle of the thirteenth century, displayed too much sympathy for the papacy at the expense of the Emperor was forced to resign his office. Eight years later, in 1249, two Grand Masters were elected, one pro-papacy, the other pro-Empire, and it was the imperial candidate who emerged as the victor. The Grand Master was, after all, a prince of the Empire, elevated to that position by the Emperor Frederick II.

Given such strong links with the Empire, it is not surprising the Order looked for crusades within Europe. In 1211 the King of Hungary, Andrew II, gave it Burzenland, fronting the pagan Cumans whom Dominic and his Bishop had wished to convert. But despite having built five forts in the territory it was expelled in 1225 because, the King surmised and probably correctly, it was plotting to undermine his authority in that region, and establish itself as independent.

That such was the Order's intention can be gathered from what happened next. A Polish Duke, Conrad of Masovia, invited it to subdue the pagan Prussians who were harrying his lands. Conrad had led an attack on the Prussians in 1222–1223, but his real interest was in establishing himself as the premier noble in Poland: the Prussians were a distraction which he was only too ready to hand over to the Teutonic Knights.

Efforts to convert the tribes inhabiting the land along the Baltic had begun again in earnest in the 1190s. It was in the hands of German lords and, in particular, of the Archbishop of Bremen, Hartwig II, and his nephew Albert who was Bishop of Riga. Albert was trying to convert Livonia, an area roughly corresponding to the modern Latvia. The Livs, however, made unsatisfactory Christians, reverting to paganism rather too readily when harried by their pagan neighbors. What he needed, decided Albert, was a group of knights who would man a permanent garrison in Livonia, and provide security for his clergy. About 1202 the "Sword Brethren" came into existence, a small military Order – there were probably never more than 180 of them – which was modeled on the Teutonic Knights. The Sword Brethren, or the Brotherhood of the Knighthood of Christ in Livonia as they were more properly known, followed the rule of the Teutonic Knights, and even dressed like them in a white cape, though with a red sword and a small cross on their left shoulders.

The creation of the Sword Brethren led to the establishment of a similar, though still smaller, knighthood for Prussian territories. Again it was a prelate, Bishop Christian, who was the instigator, recruiting a group of northern German knights to defend the small inroads he had made among the Prussians. These knights were given the castle of Dobrzyn on the Vistula as their headquarters, and were generally known as the Knights of Dobrzyn, or Dobrin, in German, though the title they used from c. 1222 was The Knighthood of Christ in Livonia against the Prussians.

However much they might imitate the Teutonic Knights they were very much poorer relations, with little independence (both the Sword Brethren and the Knights of Dobrzyn remained tied to their founding bishops though not always happily), and small income. By an agreement of 1204 the Sword Brethren were allowed to retain a third of all the territory they subjugated, the remainder to be handed over to the bishop. The region in which they were active, however, was not only hostile to the knights but unprofitable as well. These knights were, therefore, engaged in a very different form of crusade than the Orders in the Holy Land. They were not trying to regain for Christendom the shrines lost to the infidel, but in the even more dubious activity of supporting by their swords a campaign of evangelization.

Not that the campaign was making much headway. In Livonia the Sword Brethren proved extremely unpopular because of the ruthless way in which they exploited the population – a course forced on them by their lack of finance from other sources. Finance was of the utmost importance, because the number of knights was too small for the task assigned it, and they had to hire, and pay, mercenary troops. "You do not fear to impede the teaching of Christ, provided that you can increase your possessions and revenues," complained Innocent III of the Sword Brethren in 1213.¹

They developed a distinctly unsavory reputation, not least after the first Master was axed to death by one of the brothers. It was not unknown for them to make war even against Christians for their own gain. They attempted, for instance, to seize lands in Estonia belonging to the King of Denmark – though the papal legate insisted on their giving them back. When a suit was taken out against them in the papal court, the Master decided that he would attempt some kind of amalgamation with the Teutonic Knights who, as will be seen, were already operating in the area, but after an

investigation the Teutonic Knights would have nothing more to do with them. In 1236, however, the Sword Brethren were defeated in battle at Saule by the pagan Lithuanians, and some 50 were killed, including the Master. The remainder were taken into the Teutonic Knights the following year.

PAPAL GUARANTEE

Conrad of Masovia had first approached the Teutonic Knights for assistance early in the 1220s, offering them Culmerland more or less as a private fiefdom: in 1226 the Emperor Frederick II made the Grand Master an Imperial Prince for Culmerland and Prussia, which undoubtedly added to the attraction of crusading in the Baltic. A small group of knights made their way to Prussia in 1228, but the Order was still deeply involved in the crusade in the Holy Land, as well as being torn between Pope and Emperor. In 1230 Pope and Emperor settled their differences, the Grand Master of the Knights acting as the Emperor's chief negotiator. Shortly afterwards the Pope guaranteed the right of the Knights to retain all the territories they conquered. Within a week Dominicans in northern Germany were being instructed by the Pope to preach a crusade, recruiting knights to fight for Christ alongside the Teutonic Knights. At first the Dominicans were allowed only to recruit in dioceses neighboring Prussia for knights to fight in Prussia. But the privilege was gradually extended geographically, and knights were allowed to commute their vow to go on crusade in the Holy Land for the crusade in Prussia. Eventually, that, too, was extended, so the Dominicans were allowed to recruit knights to fight also in Livonia.

For the first 40 or so years the preaching of this crusade was limited to the Dominicans. There was to be no deviation from the effort to send men and money via the Teutonic Knights exclusively (as they had early absorbed the Knights of Dobrzyn so they were to do, slightly later, the Sword Brethren) so as not to dissipate energies. Only in the 1260s was the preaching crusade extended to religious Orders other than the Dominicans.

The Teutonic Knights started their Prussian crusade from the Polish fort of Chelmno, or Culm, from which Culmerland took its name. In 1231 the knights at Chelmno then established a small castle at Thorn (Torún), and gradually moved out



from there to a string of modest fortifications. By the 1240s they were pressing into the Orthodox territory of Pskov and Novgorod until they were halted, and dramatically defeated, on the ice of Lake Peipus on 5 April 1242 by Alexander Nevsky, Prince of Novgorod.

By venturing into Russian lands the Knights were responding to a papal desire to spread Latin Christianity in these regions. After the Battle of Lake Peipus this initiative was abandoned – the threat of the Mongol Golden Horde presenting, it was believed, a more immediate problem. For the most part, however, the Knights were in

the regions along the Baltic for more mundane reasons: they could thus control the lucrative trade into Russia. But that was fraught with difficulties. In 1243 the Duke of Danzig decided that his own trade was being disrupted by the newcomers, and allied himself with the Prussians. Together they waged a decade of war against the Knights, which all but ended with the latter's defeat. Again in the 1260s the Knights were under pressure from their Prussian subjects. Their forts, which were still largely wooden, were overrun, their garrisons massacred, and the Knights were rescued only by a series of expeditions, in the form of crusades, led by members of the German nobility. Now the Knights rebuilt their vulnerable wooden forts in stone and, although there were further revolts by Prussian tribes, by the close of the thirteenth century they were no longer in serious danger of being dislodged from Prussia.

YEARS OF WAR

The Teutonic Knights in Prussia developed separately, and almost independently, of those in Livonia, where they took over from the Sword Brethren so disastrously defeated in 1236. Within 20 years they had recovered all the lands in Livonia that had been lost, and had even persuaded the King of Lithuania to become a Christian. It proved to be only a temporary arrangement. In 1259 the Teutonic Knights were defeated at Schoten. The Livonian Master then tried to make his way to Prussia, but he was ambushed at Durbe in 1260, and he and 150 of his knights were massacred.

The terrain he was trying to cross, between Prussia and Lithuania, was a wilderness, and one that could not support large armies. It was subject to massive snowfalls in the winter months, and massive flooding in the spring and early summer when the snow melted. Only in the depths of winter, when the snow was firm, or in the late summer when the floods had been dried up by the sun, was it really possible to wage war. Otherwise there were problems not just of supplying the troops but of the horses becoming bogged down in quagmires; it was just such a concern – that the horses might be lost in the swamps – that had contributed to the defeat of the Sword Brethren in 1236.

The battle at Durbe changed the minds of the Lithuanians. They abandoned Christianity and went to war with the Knights. The Estonians did likewise. War was

joined for the next 40 years, a war in which the Knights were frequently defeated, and in which four of the Livonian Masters were killed. A Marshal of the Order was captured and burnt alive. By the end of the thirteenth century, however, some of the tribes had been pacified, and the remainder were watched over by the Knights from a string of castles.

Then, in the last years of the century, there was an attack on Livonia led by a Lithuanian Prince who was great-grandson to the King who had become a Christian. He formed an alliance against the Knights with the city of Riga, which had serious grievances against the Knights, so serious that they had taken them to Rome, defeated the Knights, killed their Livonian Master, and even made a modest incursion into Prussia. The Archbishop of Riga sided with the Prussian citizens, arguing that although the Teutonic Knights had entered the region to bring about the conversion of the pagans, their rapacious behavior had turned people away from the Church. The English Franciscan friar, Roger Bacon, whose life spanned most of the thirteenth century, had earlier made the same criticism, echoing Innocent III's earlier complaint about the Sword Brethren. He accused them of refusing to convert the heathen because they preferred to subjugate them.

Such charges were fairly frequent, but should not be taken at face value: Bacon, like other similar critics, had very little knowledge of the area in which the Teutonic Knights were operating. The Knights made a spirited defense of themselves, pointing out that although they were accused of trading with the heathen Lithuanians, they had a papal privilege to do so, and only traded in time of peace whereas the inhabitants of Riga themselves were doing it all the time. And as for being rapacious, they were only trying to reclaim what was rightfully theirs, won by the blood of some 200 brother knights, and countless retainers. Moreover, they added, in the lands for which they were responsible there were vast numbers of (Latin) Christians, and precious few anywhere else along the Baltic.

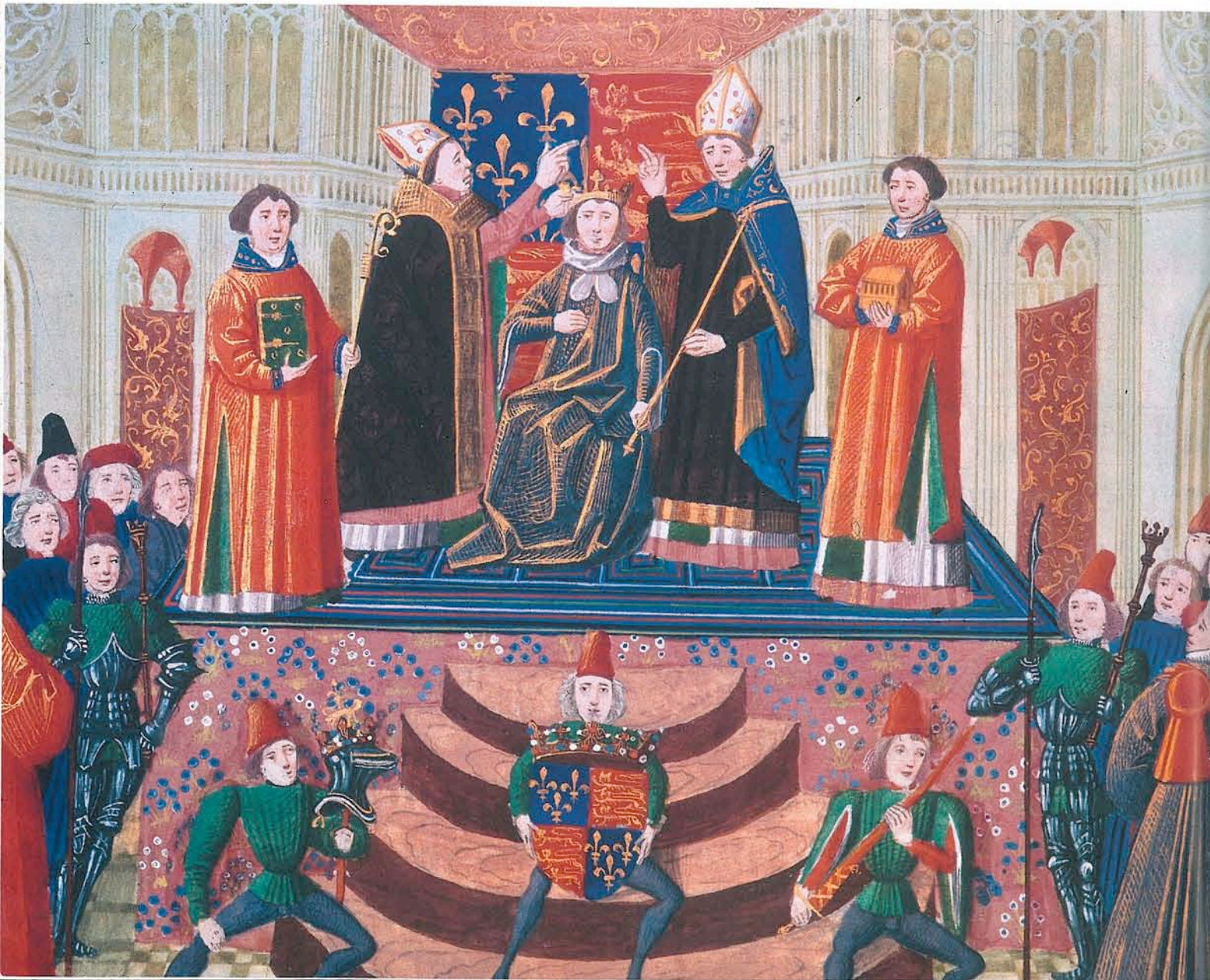
DIFFICULT TIMES

These were difficult times for the military Orders. In 1309, the year before the charges against them came to a head, the headquarters of the Knights was moved from Venice,

where it was established after the castle of Montfort near Acre was abandoned, to Marienberg in Prussia. This had happened after pressure from the brother knights themselves. But despite this geographical shift the fact remained that they had been recruited, and the Order established, to defend the Holy Land. With the withdrawal from the Holy Land, even if it meant that the Teutonic Knights could concentrate all their forces on the northern frontier, the prime reason for their existence had disappeared. And, as will be seen later, the most powerful of all the military Orders, the Templars, like the Teutonic Knights, faced similar, though rather more lurid, accusations, arising from a king but backed, albeit reluctantly, by the Pope.

The Templars were destined not to survive. The Teutonic Knights did so. The

The Coronation of King Henry IV



move of the headquarters to Marienberg, within the Knights' own state, effectively put them out of the reach of secular rulers. And as for spiritual rulers, they diplomatically elected as Grand Master a Knight who could speak excellent French, at that time the language of the papal court.

Although crusades to the East had become impossible, the enthusiasm for crusading and its concomitant benefits, spiritual and temporal, had not. The Teutonic Knights in their northern fastnesses provided the opportunity. It became a practice, from 1304 onwards, that knights from across Europe, but especially from the German lands with which the Teutonic Knights had connections, would come to fight for a season, either in the winter or the summer *Reisen*, literally "journeys" but in practice mini-crusades. Among those who came were the King of Bohemia, Henry of Lancaster, and the future King Henry IV of England. The practice lasted a century, encouraged, perhaps, by the fact that European wars had trained many in fighting skills, as well as by the still-developing concept of chivalry. Perhaps as a sign that the notion of chivalry did indeed play a significant part, these journeys would begin with all the knights sitting down together and feasting, a "banquet of honor" as it was called. They then went to war under the banner of St George, the patron saint of knights.

The chief adversary of the Teutonic Knights was the Grand Prince of Lithuania, who was as ready to take the battle to the Knights as they were to him. So successful was Grand Prince Gediminas, to some extent diplomatically as well as militarily, that the Knights had to sue for a truce, then enter an alliance against him with the city of Novgorod, to the north of Livonia, which subscribed to Orthodox, rather than to Latin, Christianity. The Lithuanians responded by an alliance with Riga, to which the Knights were therefore obliged to lay siege, giving the Grand Prince free rein elsewhere.

A peace treaty was signed in 1338, but war broke out again after Gediminas' death, a war made all the more threatening because his son was now ruler of the Orthodox territory of Pskov to the East of Livonia. The Knights therefore found themselves surrounded. Crusaders were summoned from Prussia, but they failed to stem the advance of the Pskov-Lithuanian armies. In 1348 the Teutonic Knights had

more success, aided not only by reinforcements from England and France, but by the outbreak of plague, the Black Death, which weakened both sides and diminished their ability to fight.

But rather as in the Holy Land, the Knights were too small in number, probably not amounting to more than 1,000 in total between Prussia and Livonia, to control the countryside. The Livonian Master built up a string of forts. He created a no-man's land between his territory and that of the Lithuanian Grand Prince. He re-established relations with Riga and succeeded in keeping the Poles from allying with the Lithuanians. He exploited divisions within their ruling house, and managed to ally himself with Jogailo, the grandson of Gediminas.

The alliance did not last. Jogailo did not trust the Livonian Master, and went to war again, using a new weapon against the Teutonic Knights – canon, which had been given to him as a present by the Knights only a few years before. The Knights responded similarly, but they were at a disadvantage: they had greater problems transporting their guns than had their adversary. Their situation became even more difficult when Jogailo married Queen Jadwiga of Poland. The Poles were also opponents of the Teutonic Knights, so there emerged a major force against the Order, though for the next half century or so the two countries, Poland and Lithuania, continued to be governed as separate nations. Potentially more threatening was Jogailo's decision in 1386 to become a Christian, thus undermining the claim of the Knights that in attacking him they were carrying out a crusade against the heathen. Though he promised to assist in the conversion of the Lithuanians, the Knights claimed that his baptism was only a political ploy. It was an argument that must have been widely believed, for it did not occasion a noticeable decline in the numbers coming from around Europe to take part in the summer or winter *Reise*.

ALLIANCES AND EXPANSION

The Knights continued to expand their lands, sometimes by purchase (Estonia had been bought from Denmark in 1346) as well as by war. Some of these acquisitions further hemmed in Jogailo – who, on his marriage, had changed his name to the more Polish-sounding Wladyslaw. A clash between the combined Lithuanian and Polish

state and the Knights seemed inevitable, but the Livonian Master was of a different mind. He wanted a peaceful occupation of his territory, and persuaded Wladyslaw that both Knights and Poles had a common enemy in the emerging city of Muscovy. There was for a time an alliance between the two former enemies.

The alliance was dramatically ended partly through a change of Master but more immediately through a revolt in 1409 against the Knights by the Samogitians, one of the Lithuanian tribes they believed they had subdued. The new Master, unsympathetic to the policy of detente with the Poles pursued by his predecessor (who was, as it happened, his brother) seized territory which had been ceded to the Poles by the Knights in return for the alliance. Wladyslaw promptly allied himself with the rebellious Samogitians who were backed by their Grand Prince Witwold. The Lithuanians were, said Witwold, for the most part now Christians, and the Knights had no reason to oppress them. The war was no longer going to be against the heathen – it was to be between the Teutonic Knights and others, Poles and Lithuanians, who all professed the same faith. They were, indeed, rather better Christians, claimed Wladyslaw, than the Prussians who had by this time been governed by the Knights for nearly two centuries.

When the combined Lithuanian and Polish army marched on 1 July 1410, however, it was not against the Livonian knights but against those in Prussia. Prussia was still the headquarters of the Knights, and though the two branches by now acted fairly independently of each other, there was still a Grand Master with theoretical responsibility for both. However, when battle was joined on 15 July at Tannenberg only the Knights of Prussia faced the Poles and Lithuanians, strengthened by mercenaries from Central Europe, and even by Tartars. The odds were overwhelming, the defeat of the Knights catastrophic. More than 300 of them perished in the battle, the Grand Master was killed, and so too were most of the senior members of the Order.

The fortress at Marienburg did not fall, however. Its commander held out, waiting for the arrival of Knights from Livonia. They did not come, but even Wladyslaw, who was besieging Marienburg, thought that they might and that it would be advisable to withdraw: his army had also suffered considerable losses at Tannenberg, and his mercenaries were melting away. A treaty was agreed at Thorn in February 1411.

The Knights surrendered some territory to Poland, though not a great deal. More crippling was the vast sum they agreed to pay to Poland, so great a sum that it was the equivalent of ten years income for the King of England.

But that did not settle the matter. War broke out again in 1413 and yet again the following year. The Grand Master decided upon a more radical solution to his grievances against the Poles and Lithuanians. He appealed to a General Council of the Church.

THE COUNCIL OF CONSTANCE

The Council of Constance had been summoned in 1414 by a somewhat reluctant Pope John XXIII at the instigation of the Emperor Sigismund to end the scandal of a schism in the Church. The schism had begun in 1378 by the election of a rival claimant to the papacy, and had been further complicated by the choice of a third pope in 1409 at the Council of Pisa – which had itself been summoned in an attempt to end the schism. John was the representative of the Pisan “obedience”, as it was called.

Apart from settling the schism – which it did – the Council was also required to adjudicate on a range of other issues, including the heresies of the Englishman John

Jan Huss at the Council of Constance

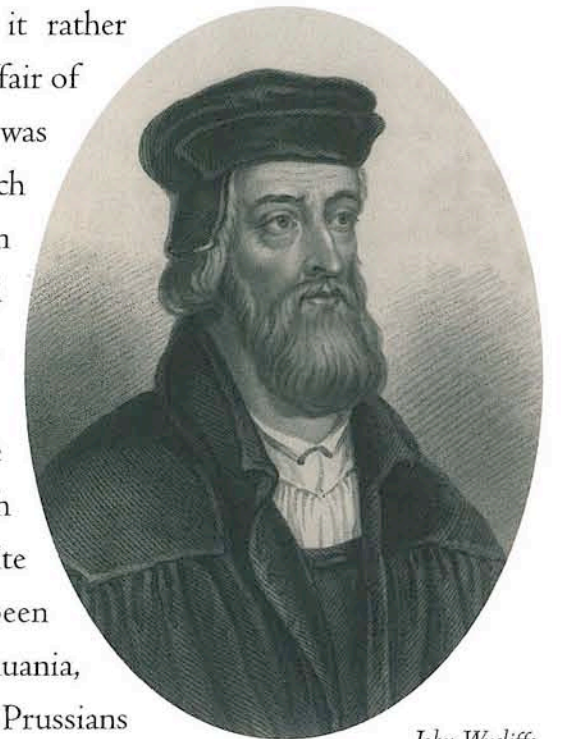


Wycliffe and the Czech Jan Huss – the latter it rather unwisely condemned to be burnt at the stake. The affair of the Teutonic Knights versus the King of Poland was pretty far down the agenda, but the debate which nonetheless took place was lively, and, in the person of Cardinal Pierre d’Ailly, Bishop of Cambrai and formerly Rector of the University of Paris, involved one of the most influential scholars of the day.

The spokesman for the Knights put their case to the Council early in 1415, before the Polish representatives had arrived. The argument was quite straightforward: the Teutonic Knights had been appointed to fight the heathen in Prussia and Lithuania, which they had done with considerable success: the Prussians were now Christians. The Polish King was envious of this success and had allied himself with the heathen in an effort to destroy the Knights. He had, moreover, failed to keep the terms of the treaty of Thorn.

Pope John XXIII, soon to be deposed by the Council, did not seem particularly impressed by the Knights’ case. Even before it had been formally presented he denied that they had any rights to Lithuania, and appointed the Knight’s enemies, Witwold and Wladyslaw, as his representatives for the Catholics in the Orthodox territories of Pskov and Novgorod.

The Polish case against the Teutonic Knights was put at the beginning of July by Peter Vladimiri, who was Rector of the University of Cracow. What he had to answer was the claim made on behalf of the Knights that they were proceeding legitimately because in their occupation of Prussia and Livonia they had been licensed to act by successive popes. Vladimiri’s response was to say that the Pope had no authority to grant such rights, with the exception of the Holy Land. The Holy Land was an exception because this was Christian territory unlawfully seized by the Muslims; otherwise even heathen nations had a natural right to their own property. This was, indeed, the traditional view of theologians as held, for example, by Thomas



John Wycliffe

Aquinas. A century and a quarter later the same argument was to be used by the Spanish theologian Francisco de Vitoria, against the right of the Spaniards to wage war against the indigenous population of the New World. Vladimiri also pressed the point, again traditional and again repeated by Vitoria, that Christians could not coerce heathens, by force of arms, to become Christians. True conversion had to be freely made. Finally, recalling the provisions of the Truce of God, Vladimiri accused the Knights of breaking the prohibition of fighting on Sundays and feast days – though that was a prohibition, which, as has been seen, Thomas rejected.

THE END OF THE CASE

A defense of the Teutonic Knights was mounted by a German Dominican, John of Falkenberg. The arguments employed by Vladimiri were ultimately a condemnation of all crusades except those in defense of the Holy Land, or the reconquest of Spain. John defended crusades in principle on the grounds that attacks on the heathen were a means of protecting Christians. The Poles, he said, had used heathen troops to attack Christians, and that was an outrage. Wladyslaw's ambitions, he added, did not end with the conquest of Prussia but stretched as far as the Rhine. And he even, if obliquely, questioned papal authority in these matters. Imperial power in temporal matters, he argued, was older than papal, and had been given by God as a means to overcome his (God's) enemies, which is what the Teutonic Knights had been doing.

Pierre d'Ailly adopted a middle-of-the-road, conciliatory approach. Falling back on the feudal system and theories of chivalry he argued that everyone must fight for his lord, so there could be no complete ban on using heathens against Christians. Furthermore a pope, or an emperor, could order Christians to attack heathens to regain lost territory (as in the Holy Land), or to repress aggressive heathens, or to punish heathens who were attracting Christians away from their faith. The Bishop of Ciudad Rodrigo added that although it was true that conversion could not be brought about by coercion, armed force might nevertheless be used to bring about such conditions as would be conducive to missionary activity leading to conversion.

The theological arguments were finely balanced. Perhaps more persuasive with the Council fathers at the time were the *ad hominem* arguments produced by Wladyslaw

and the Samogitians. The former claimed that he would have been off on crusade himself, fighting the Turks, had it not been for the need to deal with the Teutonic Knights in Prussia. And a delegation of Samogitians appeared before the Council to insist that they might already have been Christians were it not for the bad example of Christianity set by the Knights. The Knights rather went on to prove their adversary's point by arresting the Samogitians on their way home.

In the end the Council did not come down in favor of either the Polish King or the Teutonic Knights. But Witwold and Wladyslaw were left with their responsibility for the Latin Christians of Novgorod and Pskov, a sign that papal sympathies, at least, were on their side.

I. Quoted by Forey, Alan, *Military Orders and the Crusades* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994) p. 211.