



THE COMMANDERY OF KNIGHTS TEMPLAR **Chivalric Masonry**

A Commandery of Knights Templar in the United States confers three Orders: The Illustrious Order of the Red Cross, The Order of Malta, and The Order of the Temple. The Masonic Orders of the Temple and Malta are founded upon the traditions of the Chivalric Orders of Knighthood of the middle ages, and the Rite has therefore acquired the title of Chivalric Masonry.

When the rival Grand Lodges of England signed the Act of Union in 1813, ' they stipulated that, "this article is not intended to prevent any lodge or chapter from holding a meeting in any or the degrees of the Orders of Chivalry, according to the constitution of said orders." While this historic pronouncement removed the Orders of Chivalry from Ancient Craft Masonry, it gives proof of the relationship which had existed between the Christian Orders and the more universal Ancient Craft degrees prior to the Act of Union.

The Commandery of Knights Templar is founded upon the Christian Religion and the practice of the Christian virtues. The Orders of Malta and The Temple are entirely based upon the ethical, moral, and spiritual concepts for a well governed life.

In the early history of the Rite, these Orders were classed as "degrees." While they are conferred as "Orders" today, they are degrees, or steps in Chivalric Masonry. Therefore, for clarity in this work, they will, at times, be referred to as degrees.

THE ILLUSTRIOUS ORDER OF THE RED CROSS

The first Order conferred by the Commandery is the Illustrious Order of the Red Cross. The theme upon which this Order is based has quasi-biblical roots, for it is based upon an account found in the book of II Esdras in the Apocrapha and in the writings of Josephus. It teaches reliance upon the inherent values of reverence for Deity, Truth, Justice, and Liberty, with emphasis upon the importance of Truth.

In Hebrew history, the story upon which this degree is, based would chronologically follow that of The Super Excellent Master's Degree and properly follows that sequence in the York Rite system. While there is nothing of a Christian nature in the degree, it forms an appropriate link between the teachings of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament.

A number of Red Cross degrees are found-in various Masonic systems. Many of these have no relation one with the other, with respect to historical eras, degree content, or moral precepts contained therein. However, the ingredients of our Red Cross degree are today found in degrees conferred by Irish Templar's, Scottish Royal Arch Masons, and The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, by other names. While the ingredients are the same, the Templar Red Cross degree has been radically changed in many respects and is therefore unique. This degree does not exist in the British Templar system but is known to many of their members as The Red Cross of Babylon.

This Order was first conferred in the American Colonies in a "Council of Red Cross Knights," which was formed for that purpose. The term "knight" as used in this connotation has no reference to chivalric knighthood "miles," but rather the old Latin usage of "eques" meaning of equestrian rank.

Thomas Smith Webb has been credited with placing this degree within the American Templar system and providing for its conferral by Encampments of Knights Templar during the formative period, at the end of the 18th century. During the 19th century several unsuccessful attempts were made to drop the Red Cross from the American system to provide compatibility with British Templar which only recognized the Order of Knight Templar, with Knight of Malta attached as an optional addendum.

The Commandery of Knights Templar will open a "Council of the Illustrious Order of the Red Cross," and create the candidates "Companions" of that Order.

The Order of Malta

The ritual of the Order of Malta is purely Christian and when conferred in full form, is one of the most striking and impressive of the degrees in the York Rite system.

The "Masonic" degree is supposed to have originated in Scotland in the 18th century. There was originally very little substance to the ritualistic work and the degree consisted primarily of a series of questions and answers and a means of recognition among the members. The degree entered the American Colonies informally toward the end of the 18th century and was usually communicated only to Knights Templar.

As late as 1850, there was no standard ritual for the Order of Malta. American Grand Encampments (Grand Commanderies) conferred the work as they knew it. The degree was revised and expanded and an accepted form of conferral was exemplified at the Triennial Conclave of the Grand Encampments at Boston in 1850, however, no rituals were authorized or printed. At that time the Order of Malta was conferred after the Order of the Temple, not as a higher degree, but rather as an appendant order.

Attempts to standardize the various Templar degrees proceeded with the Grand Encampment but it was not until 1883 that the ritual for the Order of Malta was finalized and printed by the Grand Body. The approved ritual was practically the same as had been conferred in Massachusetts for many years and is almost identical to the Order as conferred in England today.

The Commandery of Knights Templar opens a "Priory of Knights of Malta" for the conferral of this Order. The work includes a pass degree termed "Knights of St. Paul, or the Mediterranean Pass." In accordance with the history of the original Knights of Malta, the degree creates the candidate a Knight Hospitaler of St. John of Jerusalem, Palestine, Rhodes and Malta.

WHAT ARE THE CHIVALRIC ORDERS

We have referred to the Orders conferred By a **Commandery**. These are:

The Order of the Red Cross
The Order of Malta
The Order of the Temple

The Order of the Red Cross is not, strictly speaking, a Christian Order. Its' value in the Templar system is its' bridging of the gap between the Royal arch degree and the Order of the Temple. It is a story founded upon an important period in Hebrew history and stresses **Faith in GOD**, the importance of **Truth**, and the value of **Liberty and Justice**.

The Order of Malta brings to the novitiate the story of another of the great Chivalric Orders, whose deeds of heroism fill the pages of history, and whose Christian character forms a bright page in religious history.

The most sticking degree, or order, is **the Order of the Temple**, described as the "**ne plus ultra**" of the Masonic system --- especially to Christian Freemasons. We cannot describe its' beauty and the impressions which it creates on the mind of the candidate. It must be seen and experienced to be appreciated. We cannot add more.