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EMBRACING DEATH, CELEBRATING LIFE: REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF MARTYRDOM IN THE ORDER OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

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The 1991 Ordines Militares colloquium in Toruń (Poland) was dedicated to the topic of spirituality in the military orders,¹ but even 20 years later Kaspar Elm's statement from that colloquium's published proceedings still rings true: "The results of research conducted on the military orders in this field have been very limited thus far."² Especially one "religious feature"³ of the military orders⁴, namely the preparedness for martyrdom, has been widely neglected.⁵ This might be the case due to the fact that martyrdom appears to play a special

¹ The results of the conference were published as *Die Spiritualität der Ritterorden im Mittelalter*, ed. Z. H. Nowak (Ordines Militares. Colloquia Torunensia Historica VII), Toruń 1993.

² K. Elm, *Die Spiritualität der geistlichen Ritterorden des Mittelalters. Forschungsstand und Forschungsprobleme*, in: *Die Spiritualität* (as n. 1), p. 7: "Die Ergebnisse, die die Ritterordensforschung auf diesem Gebiet erzielt hat, nehmen sich recht bescheiden aus."

³ H.-D. Kahl, *Die Spiritualität der Ritterorden als Problem. Ein methodologischer Essay*, in: *Die Spiritualität* (as n. 1), p. 271: "religiöses Spezifikum".

⁴ The concept of martyrdom has permeated much of Christianity in one way or another. The Mendicant Orders' desire for martyrdom in the thirteenth century has recently been discussed in A. Müller, *Bettelmönche in islamischer Fremde. Institutionelle Rahmenbedingungen französischer und dominikanischer Mission in muslimischen Räumen des 13. Jahrhunderts*, Münster 2002.

⁵ Thomas Aquinas defined martyrdom as an individual's acting as a witness to the faith through the voluntary endurance of physical persecution to the point of death, cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae. Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices, and Glossaries*, Vol. XLII, London 1966, pp. 40–49.

role in an order's formation. Whenever the concept of martyrdom is part of an order's spirituality, its "normative demand"⁶ eventually transcends into a corporal result, thereby crossing the borders between spirituality and reality. This makes the concept's interpretation and implications difficult to discuss, for spirituality has always provided guidance to practice, yet rarely have its results been so drastic.

Although research on the concept of martyrdom during the era of the Crusades has gained considerable prominence, it has rarely been applied to the Knights Templar.⁷ This is surprising, as the Templars were the first military order and paved the way for a new monastic development; they were devoted to warfare only; and they, together with the other military orders, but unlike most Crusaders, established a permanent presence in the hostile environment of the Holy Land, consequently facing the threat of death both regularly and frequently. Accord-

⁶ Kahl (as n. 3), p. 271: "normative Forderung".

⁷ Aspects of martyrdom with regard to the Templars have been touched on by E.-D. Hehl, *Vom „Dulder“ zum „Kämpfer“. Erweiterungen des Märtyrergedankens durch Krieg (11. und 12. Jahrhundert)?* in: *Vom Blutzengen zum Glaubenszeugen? Formen und Vorstellungen des christlichen Martyriums im Wandel*, ed. G. Blennemann, K. Herbers J., Stuttgart 2014, pp. 195–210; J. Leclercq, *Saint Bernard's Attitude toward War*, in: *Studies in Medieval Cistercian History*, vol. 2, ed. J. R. Sommerfeldt, Kalamazoo 1976, pp. 1–40; T. Licence, *The Templars and the Hospitallers, Christ and the Saints*, *Crusades* 4 (2005), pp. 39–57; H. Nicholson, 'Martyrum collegio sociandus haberet': *Depictions of the Military Orders' martyrs in the Holy Land, 1187–1291*, in: *Crusading and Warfare in the Middle Ages: Realities and Representations. Essays in Honour of John France*, ed. S. John, N. Morton, Farnham 2014, pp. 101–118; eadem, *The Head of St. Euphemia: Templar Devotion to Female Saints*, in: *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. S. B. Edington, S. Lambert, Cardiff 2001, pp. 108–120; S. Schein, *Gateway to the Heavenly City. Crusader Jerusalem and the Catholic West (1099–1187)*, London 2005, p. 121; W. Purkis, *Crusading Spirituality in the Holy Land and Iberia. c. 1095 – c. 1187*, Woodbridge 2008, p. 98 sqq. For martyrdom during the times of the crusades, cf. H. E. J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII and Martyrdom*, in: *Dei gesta per Francos. Crusade Studies in Honour of Jean Richard*, ed. M. Balard, B. Z. Kedar, J. Riley-Smith, Aldershot 2001, pp. 3–12; idem, *Martyrdom and the First Crusade*, in: *Crusade and Settlement. Papers Read at the First Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East and Presented to R. C. Smail*, ed. P. Edbury, Cardiff 1985, pp. 46–56; J. Flori, *Mort et martyre des guerriers vers 1100. L'exemple de la première croisade*, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 34 (1991), pp. 121–139; E.-D. Hehl, *Kreuzzug – Pilgerfahrt – Imitatio Christi*, in: *Pilger und Wallfahrtsstätten in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, ed. M. Matheus, Stuttgart 1999, pp. 35–51; C. Morris, *Martyrs on the Field of Battle before and during the First Crusade*, in: *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, ed. D. Wood, Oxford 1993, pp. 93–105; J. Riley-Smith, *Death on the First Crusade*, in: *The End of Strife. Papers Selected from the Proceedings of the Colloquium of the Commission Internationale d'Histoire Ecclésiastique Comparée Held at the University of Durham 2–9 Sept. 1981*, ed. D. M. Loades, Edinburgh 1984, pp. 14–31; S. Shepkaru, *To Die for God: Martyrs' Heaven in Hebrew and Latin Crusade Narratives*, *Speculum* 77 (2002), 2, pp. 311–341; C. Smith, *Martyrdom and Crusading in the Thirteenth Century. Remembering the Dead of Louis IX's Crusades*, *Al-Masaq* 15 (2003), pp. 189–196.

ingly, the question concerning the salvific, theological, liturgical, and military relevance of the concept of martyrdom in the Order of the Knights Templar needs to be raised, its roots need to be discovered, and the extent of the concept's influence throughout the order's conception needs to be traced. This article does not intend to explain "the" meaning of martyrdom among the Knights of the Temple; rather, it strives to provide a few preliminary insights into this highly complex field of research in order to raise awareness for this topic's potential. By first discussing the theological basis, mainly provided by Bernard of Clairvaux, and subsequently focusing on selected fields of interest, this article also seeks to outline ways and opportunities to consider a neglected aspect of the order's spiritual conception and self-perception.⁸

I

The Templars' early phase of the 1120s and 1130s was closely linked to the immensely influential Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux. His ideas permeated various letters to members of the order, but above all his exhortation *De laude novae militiae*, written for the young community of brothers in the East.⁹ Composed between 1120 and 1136¹⁰, *De laude* did not originate among the Templars, but they regarded its content as crucial, and it remains the most important tract on the spiritual conception of the knightly community known to date.¹¹

⁸ The ideas presented in this article are part of my Ph.D. dissertation, currently in preparation at the Otto-Friedrich-University, Bamberg (Germany), and supervised by Professor Klaus van Eickels (Otto-Friedrich-University, Bamberg) and Professor Jochen Burgtorf (California State University, Fullerton, USA). I am grateful to both for their invaluable feedback and constant encouragement.

⁹ Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Liber ad milites Templi de laude novae militiae*, in: *Sancti Bernardi opera*, vol. 3, ed. J. Leclercq, Rome 1963, pp. 213–239.

¹⁰ D. Selwood, *Quidam autem dubitaverunt: The Saint, the Sinner, the Temple and a Possible Chronology*, in: *Autour de la Première Croisade*, ed. M. Balard, Paris 1996, pp. 222, 226.

¹¹ M. Barber, *The New Knighthood. A history of the Order of the Temple*, Cambridge 1995, p. 44, has characterized *De laude*, the *Rule*, and the letter by Hugh Peccator as "a guide to their [i. e. the Templars'] vocation". The importance of *De laude* for the Templars is further underscored by evidence from their trial. Some of the brothers commented on the importance of Saint Bernard and even claimed that their order had been *divisea et estable per monsegnur sant Bernart et des pluseus prudomes; Le procès des Templiers*, vol. 1, ed. M. Michelet, Paris 1841, p. 145; cf. M.-L. Bulst-Thiele, *Sacrae domus militiae Templi Hierosolymitani magistri. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Templerordens 1118/19–1314*, Göttingen 1974, p. 351, n. 264. Cf. also Sebastián Salvadó's excellent discussion of the altarpiece depiction of Saint Bernard in the former Templar Chapel of Palma de Mallorca, a further hint of the outstanding renown of

Bernard's assertions regarding a Templar's death are strikingly straightforward:

"So, knights, go forth untroubled, and with fearless mind drive the enemies of the cross of Christ before you, certain in the knowledge that neither death nor life can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, as you say to yourself in every dangerous situation: 'Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.'"¹²

These lines might suggest that Templars could be indifferent toward living and dying, because both would ultimately result in an encounter with the Lord. However, Bernard then goes on to specify his true intention in what appears to be a climactic sequence:

"He [i. e. the knight] takes his stance for Christ willingly and faithfully but prefers to die and be with Christ, for this is better."¹³

And:

"How blessed is the death of the martyrs in battle! Rejoice, brave champion, if you live and conquer in the Lord; but exalt and glory all the more if you die and are joined in the Lord. Life brings its rewards and victory its glory, but a holy death is rightly considered preferable to both. 'Blessed are they who die in the Lord,' but how much more blessed are they who die for the Lord?"¹⁴

Bernard's person: S. Salvadó, *Interpreting the Altarpiece of Saint Bernard: Templar Liturgy and Conquest in 13th-Century Majorca*, *Iconographica* 5 (2006), pp. 48–63. Hugh Peccator's text can be found in J. Leclercq, *Un document sur les débuts des Templiers*, *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 55 (1957), pp. 81–91; cf. S. Cerrini, *La fondateur de l'ordre du Temple à ses frères. Hugues de Payns et le sermo Christi militibus*, in: *Dei gesta per Francos* (as n. 7), pp. 99–110; Purkis (as n. 7), p. 103 sqq.; L. Dailliez, *Les Templiers. Gouvernement et institutions*, vol. I, Nice 1980, p. 24 sqq.; Barber (as above in this note), p. 42 sqq.; Selwood (as n. 10), pp. 223–224; C. Sclafert, *Une lettre inédite de Hugues de Saint-Victoire aux Chevaliers du Temple*, *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 34 (1958), p. 275 sqq.

¹² Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Liber* (as n. 9), p. 214: *Securi ergo procedite, milites, et intrepido animo inimicos crucis Christi propellite, certi quia neque mors, neque vita poterunt vos separare a caritate Dei, quae est in Christo Iesu, illud sane vobiscum in omni periculo replicantes: Sive vivimus, sive morimur, Domini sumus*. For the English translation cf. M. Barber, K. Bate, *The Templars. Selected Sources Translated and Annotated*, Manchester 2002, pp. 217–218.

¹³ Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Liber* (as n. 9), p. 214: *Stat quidem fidenter libenterque pro Christo; sed magis cupit dissolvi et esse cum Christo: hoc enim melius*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 214–215: *Quam beati moriuntur martyres in proelio! Gaude, fortis athleta, si vivis et vincis in Domino; sed magis exsulta et gloriare simoreris et iungeris Domino. Vita quidem fructuosa, et Victoria gloriosa; sed utrique mors sacra iure praeponeitur. Nam si beati qui in Domino moriuntur, non multo magis qui pro Domino moriuntur?*

It is, therefore, clear that Bernard believed death to be superior and more spiritually rewarding than a glorious life, since death unified the Templar with God. A Templar “wished to die”.¹⁵ This rationale was only possible because Bernard assessed the value of the earthly Christian life on the basis of its contribution to the life eternal. Only a meritorious life agreeable to God paved the way to salvation, which is underlined by the omnipresence of the dichotomy between virtues and vices in Bernard’s *De laude*.¹⁶ Death played the key role in Bernard’s prototype of a Templar’s life since it marked the transition from one state to the other, creating a continuity between a good life and eternal salvation.¹⁷ Martyrdom functioned as a means of conveyance, as a transmitter, elevating the soul in death from the earthly to the spiritual realm. In short, a Templar’s good life prepared him for his salvation that found its *perfectio*, its completion, in death. According to Bernard, martyrdom was, theologically speaking, the apex of a Templar’s profession, since it was the Templar’s overall aim in taking the cross to follow and serve Christ, ultimately by imitating Christ’s death. In Bernard’s words, “when such a knight is himself killed, we know that he has not simply perished but has won through to the end of this life”.¹⁸ Considering that *De laude* was intended as an *exhortatio*, it makes sense that Bernard interpreted the Templars’ profession in a letter to them from the perspective that was most important to the knights, namely that of salvation.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 214: *Nec vero mortem formidat, qui mori desiderat.*

¹⁶ Bernard contrasts the chapter on the *militia saecularis* with the following chapter on the *nova militia*, thus creating the basis for the fundamental contrast between vice and virtue. In his thoughts on intention, he condemns killing motivated by the vices of *ira* and *superbia*, cf. *ibid.*, p. 215. His chapter on the *militia saecularis* is teeming with the vocabulary of vices (*ibid.*, p. 216): *Non sane aliud inter vos bella movet litesque suscitatur, nisi aut irrationabilis iracundiae motus, aut inanis gloriae appetitus, aut terrenae qualiscumque possessionis cupiditas.* The fundamental importance of a virtuous Templar life was later also illustrated by James of Vitry in sermons 37 and 38 of his *sermones vulgares*: Jacques de Vitry, *Sermones vulgares*, in: *Analecta novissima spicilegii Solesmensis. Altera continuatio*, vol. 2, ed. J. B. Pitra, Paris 1888, p. 405 sqq.

¹⁷ Cf. M. Diers, *Bernhard von Clairvaux. Elitäre Frömmigkeit und begnadetes Wirken*, Münster 1991, p. 378 sqq.

¹⁸ Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Liber* (as n. 9), p. 217: *Cum autem occiditur ipse, non periisse, sed pervenisse cognoscitur.* I disagree with Licence (as n. 7), p. 41, that Bernard’s application of the concept of martyrdom served as handy means of forming fearless Christian fighters out of “simple Christians” (*ibid.*, refers to C. Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050–1250*, Oxford 2001, pp. 376–377). Even though the reassurance of the merits of such a death probably helped the Templars to overcome fear, the concept is by far too deeply rooted and too widespread in Templar sources to simply be seen as “psychological [...] tactics of edification”, cf. Licence (as n. 7), p. 41.

¹⁹ Licence (as n. 7), p. 42, argues that the anticipation of martyrdom was a concept that was not first applied to the Templars by Bernard, but, rather, a “spiritual path already well trodden” by the early Templars who had already fought for several years before receiving *De laude* and,

Death, however, needed to be suffered with the right intention, a notion that was key to Bernard's praise of martyrdom among the knights. Since war was only "just" when waged for the right reasons, one could only receive credit for martyrdom when it was endured with the correct intention.²⁰ As Bernard points out so skillfully, "if the combatant's cause was good, the outcome of the fight could not be bad, just as the end would not be judged good if the cause was not good, resulting from a good intention."²¹ One possible reason why Bernard included this argument might have been his concern for the knights' salvation. If martyrdom was the ultimate way to the Lord, as Bernard postulates, why not actively search for it? Because such acts of martyrdom would then be corrupted into the exact opposite, namely suicide. Thus, martyrdom needed to be a "happening" or, to use the German term employed by Eduard Christen, a "Widerfahrnis"²², exactly like Christ's passion, since Christ had neither actively sought nor prevented His crucifixion.²³ Early Christian texts, for example the *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, had

subsequently, the *Rule*. This seems plausible, especially since the early Templars are known to have suffered heavy losses, which may have prompted them to engage with the topic. However, the problem is the lack of sources for this early time period, as the mere reference to John 15:13 is insufficient to support such an argument. Moreover, the Cistercian Christo-centric influence on the concept of martyrdom in the Order of the Temple should not be underestimated, because the spiritual *imitatio Christi* of the Cistercians seems conceptually related to the military *imitatio* ideal of the Templars. By about 1130, death or, rather, martyrdom, seems to have become accepted as an integral part of the Templar profession, since Bernard, in a letter to Patriarch William of Jerusalem (A. d'Albon, *Cartulaire général de l'ordre du Temple, 1119?–1150*, Paris 1913, p. 27, no. 35), praised them for their preparedness for martyrdom: *Hoc si quidem acceptum erit Deo et gratum hominibus. si fovetis eos, qui suas animas pro fratribus posuerunt.*

With regards to the high rate of illiteracy among members of the Order, a difficult problem is that of the tract's actual knowledge and spreading among the brothers. Even if some brothers were able to understand the Latin structure and wording (no vernacular translations of the tract are known), the complex theological ideas would most likely have still remained a challenge for the common reader. Cf. A. Forey, *Literacy among the Aragonese Templars in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century*, in: *Die Rolle der Schriftlichkeit in den geistlichen Ritterorden des Mittelalters: Innere Organisation, Sozialstruktur, Politik*, ed. R. Czaja, J. Sarnowsky, Toruń 2009, p. 203. This problem applies to Order's Rule likewise. However, the concept of martyrdom was known among the brothers as this article shows. The details of the concept's spreading and promulgation among the members require further research.

²⁰ Leclercq, *Saint Bernard* (as n. 7), p. 23.

²¹ Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Liber* (as n. 9), p. 215: *Si bona fuerit causa pugnantis, pugnae exitus malus esse non poterit, sicut nec bonus iudicabitur finis, ubi causa non bona, et intentio non recta praecesserit.*

²² E. Christen, *Martyrium*, in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 22, Berlin 1992, p. 208.

²³ T. Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, Münster 1980, p. 70. Hugh Peccator's letter notes the aspects of a pure mind, inner advancement, true virtue, and above all pure intention in everything a Templar did; cf. Leclercq, *Un document* (as n. 11), p. 87: *Idcirco dixi: quia*

already made their readers aware of the thin line between salvific martyrdom and damnable suicide.²⁴

II

Considering Bernard's understanding of the meaning of martyrdom, his perception of the Templars' sacrifice in war as a testimony of their unyielding desire for peace might sound like a paradox. How could death in armed combat be justified as an event of peace?

The underlying premise here is that everything one is, one is through Christ.²⁵ To Bernard, a life that was not distinguished by its focus on Christ was a life lost and unworthy.²⁶ Twelfth-century spirituality significantly revolved around the figure of Christ, His message, and, above all, His passion.²⁷ Bernard's Cistercian theology, too, is markedly Christo-centric.²⁸ When applying the concept of peace to the Templars, one needs to keep in mind the apologetic and theological Crusading context of Bernard's world. The Cistercian, like most of his contemporaries, did not perceive his eloquent calls-to-arms against the "infidels" as a promulgation of war, because peace was not understood as the absence of war, but as an effort to maintain the God-given *ordo*.²⁹ Consequently, Bernard depicted the Templars, the new spearhead of Christianity, as instruments of peace: "The new Israelites

victus est diabolus in hac parte, non invenit quicquam suum in vobis, ubi et actio ita est, et intentio sincera. The analogies to Bernard's tract are striking. Hugh Peccator's text was an appeal to the Templars to explore their very own mental constitution; cf. *ibid.*, p. 88: *Si ergo profectus delectat, et ascendere queris in melius, noli respicere ad ea quae foris sunt, reduc oculus intus ubi Deus videt. Ibi est bonus ascensus, ubi est vera virtus.*

²⁴ The episode of the Phrygian Quintos, for example, is generally interpreted as a warning to those eagerly searching martyrdom, because "the gospel does not so teach"; cf. P. Hartog, *Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians and the Martyrdom of Polycarp. Introduction, Text, and Commentary*, Oxford 2013, p. 204.

²⁵ Diers (as n. 17), p. 380: "Denn alles was der Mensch ist, ist er durch Christus."

²⁶ Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Sermones super Cantica Cantorum*, in: *Sancti Bernardi opera*, vol. 1, ed. J. Leclercq, Rome 1957, p. 114: *Dignus plane est morte, qui tibi, Domine Jesu, recusat vivere, et mortuus est et qui tibi non sapit, desipit et qui curat esse nisi propter te, pro nihilo est et nihil est. Denique quid est homo, nisi quia tu innotuisti ei?*, cf. also Diers (as n. 17), pp. 380–381.

²⁷ Cf. G. Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*, Cambridge 1995, p. 143 sqq.; Morris (as n. 18), p. 376; Purkis (as n. 7), p. 30 sqq.

²⁸ Purkis (as n. 7), p. 89, concludes: "The sign of the cross was therefore at the heart of Bernard's crusade message." Cf. Barber (as n. 11), pp. 45–46; Diers (as n. 17), pp. 380–381.

²⁹ For this concept, cf. K. van Eickels, *Les bons et mauvais usages de la paix au Moyen Âge, ou: La mutation de l'an mil n'a-t-elle vraiment pas eu lieu?* in: *Paroles de paix en temps de guerre*, Toulouse 2006, p. 3 sqq.; J. Burgtorf, *Die Ritterorden als Instanzen zur Friedenssicherung?* in:

[i. e. the Templars] march into battle in order to bring about peace” (*Veri profecto Israelitae procederunt ad bella pacifici*³⁰). At the heart of this argument is Christ Himself who, according to Isaiah 9:5, is the *princeps pacis*³¹; thus, violence can be interpreted as an action against Christ Himself. Templars fighting for Christ, therefore, took a stand for peace, because Christ is peace.³² Bernard’s reference to the Maccabees, following just a few lines further below, magnificently serves to illustrate this. These Old Testament Jewish warriors had fought for the law of their fathers, for what they considered peaceful and lawful.³³ Most importantly, however, the Maccabees were also martyrs and, consequently, a perfect match for the Templars.³⁴

Jerusalem im Hoch- und Spätmittelalter. Konflikte und Konfliktbewältigung, Vorstellungen und Vergegenwärtigungen, ed. D. Bauer, K. Herbers, N. Jaspert, Frankfurt 2001, pp. 167–168.

³⁰ Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Liber* (as n. 9), p. 221. The term *pacifici* is part of a concept that Bernard established with regard to a person’s function for peace, elaborated in his *Sermones de diversis*. He distinguishes between *pacati*, *patientes*, and *pacifici*; cf. Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Sermones de diversis*, in: *Sancti Bernardi opera*, vol. 6, ed. J. Leclercq, Rome 1970, p. 364 sqq.; cf. Diers (as n. 17), p. 386 sqq.; Leclercq, *Saint Bernard* (as n. 7), p. 10; Burgtorf (as n. 29), pp. 170–171.

³¹ Isaiah 9:5. Cf. also, for example, Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Sermo in festivitate Omnium Sanctorum*, in: *Sancti Bernardi opera*, vol. 5, ed. J. Leclercq, Rome 1968, p. 340: 1.14: *Ipse enim est, per quem reconciliati pacem habemus ad Deum: ipse qui pacificavit in sanguine suo quae in coelis sunt, et quae super terram, mediator Dei et hominum, homo Christus Jesus.*

³² Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Sermo in festivitate Omnium Sanctorum* (as n. 31), p. 340: 1.14: *Merito filii nomine vocabuntur, qui filii opus impleverint.* Jacques de Vitry (as n. 16), p. 419, also hints at this in sermon 38 of his *sermones vulgares*: *Militia quidem institute videtur, ut violentia repellatur, injuria propulsetur et in maleficos justitia exorcesatur. Unde Augustinus: Noli existimare, neminem Deo placere posse, qui in armis bellicis ministrat [...]. Bellum autem non voluntatis debet esse, sed necessitates, ut liberet Deus a necessitate, et conservet in pace.*

³³ A similar reference to the Maccabees appears in a rousing speech allegedly delivered by the Templar Master Gerard of Ridefort before the battle of Hattin (July 4–5, 1187) and recorded in the *Libellus de expugnatione Terrae Sanctae per Saladinum*, in: *Radulphi de Coggeshall Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Stevenson. London 1875, p. 212: *Accingite ergo vos, et state in praelio Domini, et memores estote patrum vestrorum Machabaeorum, quorum vicem bellandi pro ecclesia, pro lege, pro hereditate Crucifixi, jam dudum subistis. Scitote vero patres vestros non tam multitudine, apparatu armato, quam fide et justitia, et observatione mandatorum Dei, victores ubique fuisse, quia non est difficile vel in multis vel in paucis vincere, quando victoria e coelo est.*

³⁴ The development of the Templar-Maccabee comparison is difficult to reconstruct and has, in contrast to research on the Maccabees and the Teutonic Order, not really been tackled yet. Most scholarship focuses on the (re)naissance of this image during the First Crusade: C. Auffahrt, *Irdische Wege und himmlischer Lohn. Kreuzzug, Jerusalem und Fegefeuer in religionswissenschaftlicher Perspektive*, Göttingen 2002, pp. 123–147; J. Dunbabin, *The Maccabees as Exemplars in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*, in: *The Bible in the Medieval World*, ed. K. Walsh, Oxford 1985, pp. 31–41; E. Lapina, *The Maccabees and the Battle of Antioch*, in: *Dying for the Faith, Killing for the Faith. Old-Testament Faith-Warriors (1 and 2 Maccabees) in Histori-*

If fighting was considered an act of peace among the Templars, what did this imply for martyrdom suffered in the course of establishing peace? First of all, since a Templar suffered death in the defense of Christ and peace, this occurred with the right intention, was praiseworthy beyond a doubt and crucial for the individual's salvation. Secondly, by stressing the Templars' function for peace, Bernard not only inserted the Templars' martyrdom into the tradition of Christ's death, but also into the message of peace of all classical martyrs whose renunciation of violence had been essential to their sacrifice.³⁵ Soldier-martyrs, such as Saint George, had become extremely popular by the time of the First Crusade and were serving as points of reference for contemporaries. While Bernard alluded to the early Christian forerunners to establish the legitimacy of the "new knighthood"³⁶, this reference may appear paradoxical nowadays, because there was a fundamental difference between martyrs like Saint George, whose martyrdom had been characterized by the absence of any act of resistance, and a knight, who was considered a martyr even though he was killed in the course of a battle while defending himself. Thirdly, the interdependence of martyrdom and peace enabled Bernard to underline the order's role as an eschatological tool in God's overall plan for Christianity, mainly for two reasons: because the Templars' martyrdom was a testimony to their ultimate desire for peace, since it was suffered with the aim of advancing Christ's plans³⁷, and because Bernard, like most of his contemporaries, understood the martyrs' blood in the tradition of Tertullian as Christianity's seed: *sanguis martyrurum semen christianorum*.³⁸ In *De laude's* chapter on the Temple, Bernard directly refers to Tertullian and demonstrates the importance of the martyr as an example, role model, and advocate for humanity's salvation, a *fructum* that was spread all over

cal Perspective, ed. G. Signori, Leiden 2012, pp. 147–160; N. Morton, *The Defence of the Holy Land and the Memory of the Maccabees*, *Journal of Medieval History* 36 (2010), pp. 275–293; M. Schatkin, *The Maccabean Martyrs*, *Vigiliae Christianae* 28 (1974), pp. 97–113; K. Schreiner, *Märtyrer, Schlachtenhelfer, Friedenstifter. Krieg und Frieden im Spiegel mittelalterlicher und frühneuzeitlicher Heiligenverehrung*, Opladen, 2000, p. 17 sqq.

³⁵ The peaceful enduring of suffering is based on Christ's words to Pilate (John 18:36): "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of the world."

³⁶ The connection to Old-Testament or early-Church figures was a common method of claiming legitimacy; cf., for example, J. MacGregor, *Negotiating Knightly Piety: The Cult of the Warrior-Saints in the West, ca. 1070 – ca. 1200*, *Church History* 73 (2004), pp. 329–330.

³⁷ Hugh Peccator's letter illustrates this as well, although the argumentation refers more to the inner peace (or intention) of the knight by warning him of the trickeries of the devil; cf. Leclercq, *Un document* (as n. 11), p. 89: recognizing the Lord as *Deus pacis*, for to [*v*]iris virtutum non est molestia fugienda, sed culpa; non exercitatio corporis, sed perturbatio mentis.

³⁸ Tertullian, *Apologeticum* ed. E. Dekkers, in: *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*, vol. 1, Turnhout 1953, ch. 50,14.

the world.³⁹ As martyrs were integral parts of Christianity, so were the Templars. Bernard's notions concerning the order's eschatological role converged into one conclusion: only because the Templars' intention was (usually) good, and their profession served Christianity, were their deaths not in vain but, rather, to the glory of God and Christianity. This assumption, again, finds its justification in Christ: His death was not in vain, since He was righteous (*Sed quo pacto mors hominis illius pro altero valuit? Quia et justus erat*⁴⁰). Only a righteous death "bears witness to the truth of God" (*ut Dei veritas impleatur*⁴¹) and, thus, can be considered a martyrdom in the very sense of the word, namely a testimony.

In the social context of Bernard's tract, martyrdom also seems to fulfill an apologetic, legitimizing function for this *novus genus* which had hitherto been unknown. Bernard's contemporaries were suspicious of the new belligerent monastic order, and the initial small band of knights was being subjected to heavy criticism. This, too, can be gathered from *De laude*, namely Hugh of Payns' imploring words, taken up by Bernard at the beginning of the text: "Once, twice and now a third time, unless I am quite wrong, you have asked me, dear Hugh, to write an exhortation for you and your knightly companions."⁴² Bernard's concern for the brothers' souls is impressively revealed in his explanation of the Templars' profession via the implications of martyrdom. The chance of dying for God, however, also established a criterion that was unique to the young community, since the Templars were the only community that was "offering" a continuous opportunity to gloriously die for Christ while on duty. This is plainly set out in the *Primitive Rule* which speaks of the duty of giving one's soul for the brothers:

³⁹ Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Liber* (as n. 9), p. 224: *Terra, inquam, bona et optima, quae in fecundissimo illo sinu tuo ex arca paterni cordis caeleste granum suscipiens, tantas ex superno semine martyrum segetes protulisti, et nihilominus ex omni reliquo fidelium genere fructum fertilis gleba tricesimum, et sexagesimum, et centesimum, super omnem terram multipliciter procreasti.* That Bernard was well acquainted with the collective eschatological use of the martyr's death is also evident from a passage in his sermon on the Song of Songs and its reference to John 12:24–25; cf. Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Sermones super Cantica Cantorum* (as n. 26), p. 84: *Nisi granum frumenti cadens in terram mortuum fuerit, ipsum solum manet; si autem mortuum fuerit, multum fructum affert.* Cf. also A. Lane, *Bernard of Clairvaux. Theologian of the Cross*, in: *The Atonement Debate*, ed. D. Tidball, Grand Rapids 2008, p. 261.

⁴⁰ Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Liber* (as n. 9), p. 232.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 213: *Semel, et secundo, et tertio, nisi fallor, petisti a me, Hugo carissime, ut tibi tuisque commilitonibus scriberem exhortationis sermonem;* cf. Barber (as n. 11), p. 49 sqq.

[Chapter 56]: “It is the truth that you especially are charged with the duty [*debitum*] of giving your souls for your brothers, as did Jesus Christ, and of defending the land from the unbelieving pagans who are the enemies of the son of the Virgin Mary.”⁴³

And:

[Chapter 63]: *Calicem salutaris accipiam*.⁴⁴ “That is to say ‘I will take the cup of salvation.’ Which means: ‘I will avenge the death of Jesus Christ by my death. For just as Jesus Christ gave His body for me, I am prepared in the same way to give my soul for my brothers.’ This is a suitable offering; a living sacrifice and very pleasing to God.”⁴⁵

An institution which claimed the duty of dying for Christianity and defending Christ Himself with its members’ lives was not only difficult to criticize, even by its harshest opponents, it also provided a unique salvific trait to distinguish itself from other nascent religious currents of its time. No other order would ever speak about martyrdom in the same fashion.⁴⁶ This was important for establishing a foothold in Christian society and, at the same time, muted critics who doubted the eschatological usefulness of such a new institution.

Early donations verify that the Templars’ aspirations regarding martyrdom were known, possibly even spread from the very beginning, since the aspect of martyrdom appears quite frequently, often in the formulaic manner of John 15:13 (*maiolem hac dilectionem nemo habet ut animam suam quis ponat pro amicis suis*). Ulger of Angers’ donation between 1128 and 1149, for example, was substantiated by his statement of the Templars never being afraid “to give their lives or to

⁴³ *The Rule of the Templars*, ed. J. Upton-Ward, Woodbridge 1992, p. 33; *La règle du Temple*, ed. H. Curzon, Paris 1886, p. 58. The wording in the *Rule* is a direct reference to John 15:13: *maiolem hac dilectionem nemo habet ut animam suam quis ponat pro amicis suis*; cf. Licence (as n. 7), p. 42; Purkis (as n. 7), p. 107 sqq.

⁴⁴ Psalm 115:4 of the Vulgate; cf. *La règle* (as n. 43), p. 63, n. 75.

⁴⁵ *The Rule* (as n. 43), p. 34; *La règle* (as n. 43), pp. 63–64.

⁴⁶ Neither the Hospitallers nor the Teutonic Knights seem to have taken up the topic of martyrdom in their normative texts. The only other Order offering slight reminiscences to the Templar *Rule*’s dedication to martyrdom is the Order of St. James, approbated in 1175; cf. *The Rule of the Spanish Military Order of St. James, 1170–1493. Latin and Spanish Texts*, ed. E. Gallego Blanco, Leiden 1971, p. 78, in which the prologue of the rule states: *A Conversi namque ad Dominum se de liberis nequitiae servos iustitiae facientes, non sua sed potius fratrum commoda quaerentes, Deum super omnia et proximum diligentes, corpora sua iugi martirio propter Christum exponunt, in obedientia sub alieno domino degentes, primum Deo, deinde hominibus propter Deum placere satagunt*. Ibid., p. 85: *Cum eius perfecta caritas foras omnem abiiciat timorem, et predicti fratres pro exaltatione christianae fidei et fratrum defensione, personas et res universas diversis periculis et mar[tyr]iis indifferenter exponant, Deum tota mente et totis viribus et proximum sicut se ipsos diligere comprobantur*. I am indebted to Professor Alan Forey for this reference.

shed their blood.”⁴⁷ On April 15, 1134, Bishop Raymond of Vichiers pointed to the willingness of the Templars “to lay down their lives for their brothers as well as living in poverty”,⁴⁸ and Joscelin of Soissons, around 1133/1134, stressed that Hugh of Payns and his brothers exposed their lives for the defense of Christianity and should, therefore, be supported.⁴⁹

Apart from Bernard’s works, the concept of martyrdom also permeates the order’s *Rule*, the central document of any religious community, by the omnipresence of the figure of Christ.⁵⁰ At least theoretically, these early writings established a standard for the members of the order, an ideal of guidance that made the concept of death an integral, theological, and salvific part of the order’s conception. This conclusion qualifies the concept of martyrdom as an element of the order’s spirituality, in the sense of Hans-Dietrich Kahl’s definition of a “normative demand independent of the level of its realization,”⁵¹ and answers the question whether the ideal of martyrdom should be considered as part of the order’s spirituality in the affirmative. Even more so, martyrdom as a concept was, in fact, institutionalized in the Order of the Temple, since it was both a spiritual concept and a practical instruction, rendering the Templars indeed “a collective of knights dedicated to martyrdom.”⁵²

III

The idea of institutionalized martyrdom needs to be established on the basis of concrete examples involving the community’s very members, otherwise it remains a mere theoretical construct. Hints of the concept’s existence among the members can be detected in the order’s liturgical practices. Anne-Marie Legras and Jean-

⁴⁷ Albon, *Cartulaire général* (as n. 19), p. 15, no. 21: *nec dubitant dare animas et fundere sanguinem, dum deleant et exterminent gentiles impios a sanctissimis locis, quos Dominus elegit nativitati et passioni sue et conversationi.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54, no. 71: *ordinem [ill]orum qui Iherosolimis, pro amore Dei, pro fratribus animas ponere et sine proprio vivere devoverunt, in terra nostra Deo famulari et militare voluerunt.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43, no. 59: *Quanto habundantiori caritate, frater Hugo in Xpisto carissime, tu et fratres tui, non solum sustancias (sic), verum etiam animas vestras pro Xpistianitatis defensione exposuistis, eo attentius nos et ceteri quibus ecclesiarum cura commissa est, milicie vestre usibus necessaria providere debemus.*

⁵⁰ Cf. Licence (as n. 7), pp. 43–44.

⁵¹ Kahl (as n. 3), p. 271: “normative Forderung, unabhängig vom Grad der tatsächlichen Realisierung.”

⁵² Schein (as n. 7), p. 121.

Loup Lemaître⁵³ as well Cristina Dondi⁵⁴ have produced pioneering studies in this regard, the latter arguing that the rite used by the Templars varied depending on location. With regard to liturgical references to martyrdom, one would expect that Templars staying in the West, far away from life-threatening danger, might have perceived this topic differently than their brothers serving in the East or on the frontiers of the Iberian Peninsula. This, however, does not seem to be the case. In fact, the perception of death in the imitation of Christ as a vital part of one's own *professio* connects the liturgy of western commanderies with that used among fighting brothers.⁵⁵ Templars developed "a heightened awareness of their significance as soldiers of Christ in the land of Revelation, which also infiltrated their western commanderies."⁵⁶ This caused a very personal identification with the figure of Christ, the cross on which He had hung, and the places He had visited. The abundance of *ligna domini* relics⁵⁷, the iconographic dominance of the cross⁵⁸, and the numerous references to Christ in the Templars' *Rule*⁵⁹ were explicit reminders of the passion of Christ and helped to establish visible links to the brothers in the Holy Land and the spiritual climate of the Holy City of Jerusalem.

Non-members of the order who were questioned during the trial of the Templars mention Good Friday celebrations in the order's churches all over Europe. They apparently regularly joined in this Templar celebration which, together with other feast days involving the veneration of the cross, constituted an important

⁵³ A.-M. Legras, J.-L. Lemaître, *La pratique liturgique des Templiers et des Hospitaliers de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem*, in: *L'écrit dans la société médiévale. Divers aspects de sa pratique du XI^e au XV^e siècle. Textes en hommage à Lucie Fossier*, ed. C. Bourlet, Paris 1991, p. 77–137.

⁵⁴ C. Dondi, *The Liturgy of the Holy Sepulchre in Western Europe, c.1100 – c.1500, with Special Reference to the Practice of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem*, Turnhout 2000, pp. 112–115.

⁵⁵ The trial testimonies recorded in France and Cyprus, for example, show no difference with regard to the concept of martyrdom; cf. A. Gilmour-Bryson, *The Trial of the Templars in Cyprus. A Complete English Edition*, Leiden 1998, p. 9; M. Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*, Cambridge 2006, p. 255. However, it must be noted that a trial intended to produce incriminating evidence against a community can hardly be considered a reliable source for that community's bravery and self-sacrifice.

⁵⁶ J. Schenk, *The Cult of the Cross in the Order of the Temple*, in: *As ordens militares. Freires, guerreiros, cavaleiros*, ed. I. C. Fernandes, Palmela 2012, pp. 208–209. On the importance of the Temple Mount for the Crusaders and, subsequently, the Templars, cf. S. Schein, *Between Mount Moriah and the Holy Sepulchre: The Changing Traditions of the Temple Mount in the Central Middle Ages*, *Traditio* 40 (1984), pp. 175–195; Licence (as n. 7), p. 45 sqq.

⁵⁷ S. Salvadó, *Icons, Crosses and the Liturgical Objects of Templar Chapels in the Crown of Aragon*, in: *The Debate on the Trial of the Templars (1307–1314)*, ed. J. Burgtorf, P. Crawford, H. Nicholson, Farnham 2010, pp. 192–193; Schenk (as n. 56), p. 208 sqq.

⁵⁸ J. Fuguet i Sans, *Consideracions sobre l'ús de la Creu en l'ordre del Temple*, in: *El temps sota control. Homenatge a Francesc Xavier Ricoma Vendrell*, Tarragona 1997, pp. 295–308.

⁵⁹ Licence (as n. 7), p. 43–44.

part of the Templars' liturgical calendar.⁶⁰ The highlight of these feast days was the unveiling of Christ crucified, which was celebrated by the Templars in a highly devout fashion.⁶¹ Considering the order's dedication to martyrdom, it is not surprising that the Templars celebrated the day of Christ's death even more than the day of His resurrection, the usual culmination of all Christian feast days which was not mentioned during the trial. Even Templars in the West, usually not concerned with military activities, participated liturgically in the passion of Christ and, thus, spiritually lived the ideal of martyrdom, adhering to Bernard's words that "the commemoration of His [Christ's] death prompts more piety than does the commemoration of His life".⁶² Since the Templars' Good Friday celebrations were attended by the public, contemporary society must have been well aware of the Templars' ideal to imitate Christ in death.⁶³

These observations are complemented by the fact that members of the order were clearly well informed about the specific eschatological relevance of Christ's death for their own community.⁶⁴ Numerous trial depositions confirm

⁶⁰ *Le procès* (as n. 11), vol. 2, p. 446, where the feast days are listed as *in festis Sancte Crucis mensis septembris et mensis maii, et die Veneris sancta*. These celebrations are confirmed for Templar commanderies in France, Italy, Spain, and Cyprus; cf. Schenk (as n. 56), p. 216.

⁶¹ *Le procès* (as n. 11), vol. 2, p. 446: *Et quociens adorant ipsam crucem ipsi fratres in die Veneris sancta, deponunt sotulares quos portant et gladios et cofas lineas et quicquid portant aliud extra caput*. The details of the Good Friday celebrations are also set in the *Rule*, in chapters 345 and 349; cf. *La règle* (as n. 43), pp. 197, 200: *se ne fust le jor dou vendredi saint, a la fin des hores, quant l'en dit Kyrieleison, Xristeleison, Kyrieleison, et miserere mei Deus, quar adonques doit chascun estre a genouls et sur son pis finques les oroisons sont fenies, a chascune des hores [...]. Le jor dou vendredi saint, tuit li frere doivent aorer la croiz o grant devocion; et quant il vont a la croiz, il doivent estre nus piés*.

⁶² Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Liber* (as n. 9), p. 229: *atque amplius movet ad pietatem mortis quam vitae recordatio*.

⁶³ Schenk (as n. 56), p. 217 sqq.

⁶⁴ Again Templar perception of this theme bears striking resemblance to Cistercian understanding of the relevance of Christ's sufferings and considering the close relations of both Orders it does not seem all too implausible to suggest that both concepts were interrelated. Numerous passages reveal Bernard's obsession with Christ's pain: *Quid autem est manducare ejus carnem, et bibere sanguinem, nisi communicare passionibus ejus, et eam conversationem imitari, quam gessit in carne?* In Psalmum XC, qui habitat, SBO 4, p. 394. Also: *ut quidquid nos temporaliter cruciat, respectu Dominicae passionis sapore mutato, nova nobis suavitate dulcescat*. *Liber Sententiarum*, Series Secunda, SBO 6, p. 28. Assertions like these translated into pictorial output that can be seen in Cistercian prayer images for example from the Lower Rhine area. Although stemming from the early 14th century, the image serves to illustrate the mysticism of suffering and blood devotion. It depicts Bernard and an unknown female kneeling at the cross and being showered in Christ's very blood. Cf. *Die Zisterzienser. Ordensleben zwischen Ideal und Wirklichkeit. Katalog zur Ausstellung des Landschaftsverbandes Rheinland, Rheinisches Museumsamt, Brauweiler*,

this⁶⁵, for example that of Berengar of Collo, a Templar knight, who explained that Christ had shed His blood for them (*Christus Jhesus effudit sanguinem proprium in cruce pro nobis*⁶⁶), and that they had worn the red cross on their habit to show that they would shed their own blood against the enemies of Christ in the Holy Land and everywhere else (*in illa significatione fratres dicti ordinis portant crucem panni rubei inclamide, ut effundant suum sanguinem proprium contra hostes Christi Sarracenos in terra transmarina, et alibi contra hostes fidei Christiane*⁶⁷). Thus, in the East and the West alike, the notion of martyrdom, prefigured by Christ, was at the very heart of Templar devotion and worked as a point of reference for all members of the order. To them, it was an ideal, a reminder, an exhortation, and salvation regardless of their current geographical location.

These findings correspond to Bernard's assumptions articulated in *De laude*. A distinct Christo-centrism that perceived martyrdom as the primary means of expressing a Templar's love for Christ was not just the theoretical basis of Bernard's concept for the Templars, it was, in fact, an integral part of Templar devotion. Bernard's theology of martyrdom impacted the order early on and remained vital throughout its history, which may have contributed to the belief of some Templars that Bernard had actually been the founder of their order.⁶⁸

IV

The question remains whether martyrdom and its implications had any actual relevance for the concept's primary theatre of application, namely the battlefield.⁶⁹

ed. K. Elm, Köln 1981, p. 571, F 31. Other Orders like the Hospitallers and the Teutonic Order seem less drawn to the theme of suffering.

⁶⁵ *Le procès* (as n. 11), vol. 1, pp. 141, 326, 366, 555–556, 606, 609, 612–613, 615–616, 620; vol. 2, p. 82–83, 111, 201, 222, 227–228, 230, 232, 446, 506. This list is taken from Schenk (as n. 56), p. 216, nn. 61–62, and merely represents the evidence gathered from the trial documents.

⁶⁶ *Le procès* (as n. 11), vol. 2, p. 446.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 145: *Primeremant que le religion deu Temple lu fete et fondée e nom de Deu, damada sancta Maria, et fu divisea et estable per monsegnur sant Bernart et des pluseus prudomes*. Also, *ibid.* vol 1, p. 121: *et, misericordissime Domine, tua religio (Christi adhuc voca Templum) que per generale concilio in honore beate gloriosse virginis Marie matris tue fuit facta et fundata per beatum Bernardum sanctum confessorem tuum, qui pro dicto negocio et officio per sanctam ecclesiam Romanam fuit ellectus*.

⁶⁹ This question has already been raised by S. Menache, *A Clash of Expectations. Self-image versus the Image of the Knights Templar in Medieval Narrative Sources*, in: *Selbstbild und Selbstver-*

A suitable starting point for answering this question is an event related in the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*.⁷⁰

On May 1, 1187, approximately 140 Christian knights charged against a multitude of Muslim enemies at the Springs of Cresson near Nazareth. The outcome was unsurprising: only a few Christians managed to escape alive, among them the Templar Master Gerard of Ridefort who had led the attack. Among the 90 Templars present was one Brother James of Mailly of whom the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* states that, when almost all of his comrades had already been slain, he held up bravely, one against all, killing numerous enemies, until the Muslims were so impressed by his courage that they offered to spare his life.⁷¹ However, he was unwilling to surrender because he was not afraid to lay down his soul for Christ, and thus he was killed⁷², and, by “having constructed such a great crown for himself from the crowd laid around him⁷³, ascended happily and triumphantly to heaven as a martyr.”⁷⁴ Immediately following, the stubs of the freshly-mown crops on the field of battle evaporated into dust which was scattered by some believers, first onto James’ dead body and then onto their own heads to profit from the Templar’s courage.⁷⁵ Also, some parts of his body, namely his genitals, were taken and used as relics to produce an heir who would be as brave as this Templar had been.⁷⁶

Disregarding the issue of the military irrationality of a fight against all numerical odds⁷⁷, the analysis of this account leads to two questions: Who narrated this

ständnis der geistlichen Ritterorden, ed. R. Czaja, J. Sarnowsky (Ordines Militares. Colloquia Torunensia Historica XIII), Toruń 2005, p. 47.

⁷⁰ *Das Itinerarium Peregrinorum. Eine zeitgenössische englische Chronik zum dritten Kreuzzug in ursprünglicher Gestalt*, ed. H. E. Mayer, Stuttgart 1962, p. 248. For an English translation cf. *The Chronicle of the Third Crusade. A Translation of the Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, ed. H. Nicholson, Aldershot 1997.

⁷¹ *Das Itinerarium Peregrinorum* (as n. 70), p. 248: *Virtus eius ad gratiam hostium commendanda enituit, ut ei plerique compassi ipsum ad dedicionem affectuosius hortarentur.*

⁷² *Ibid.*: *Quorum monita dissimulans mori pro Christo non timuit, sed telis, lapidibus, lanceis oppressus agis quam victus.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 249: *cum unius viri gladius tantam circumiacentis turbe struxisset coronam.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*: *ad celos feliciter cum palma martyrii triumphator migravit.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: *Erant in loco ubi pugnabatur stipule, quas messor post grana paulo ante decussa reliquerat inconvulsas. Turcorum autem multitudo tanta irruerat, et vir unus contra tot acies tam diu conflixit, ut campus, in quo strabant, totus resolveretur in pulverem nec ulla prorsus messis vestigia comparerent. Fuere, ut dicebatur, nonnulli, qui corpus viri iam exanimum pulvere superiecto conspenserunt et ipsum pulverem suis imponentes verticibus virtutem ex contactu hausisse credebant.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: *Quidam vero, ut fama ferebat, ardentius ceteris movebatur et abscis viri genitalibus ea tanquam in usum gignendi reservare disposuit, ut vel mortua membra, si fieri posset, virtutis tante suscitarent beredem.*

⁷⁷ *The Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, *ibid.*, p. 248, mentions *VII milibus Turcorum*, as does the *Chronique d’Ernoul et de Bernard le Trésorier*, ed. L. de Mas Latrie, Paris 1871, p. 146. Pope Urban III.

story of the martyrdom of Brother James of Mailly, since virtually all Christians had been slain in the engagement, and what was the intention of this story that is so reminiscent of a hagiographical *passio*? Generally speaking, interpreting narratives of martyrdom is highly problematic, especially when such narratives emanate from a military context. At Cresson, it had been either exceptionally brave or profoundly irrational to wage combat against a Muslim enemy that was completely outnumbering the Christian forces. Correspondingly, the interpretation of an event witnessed directly or heard later always depends on the narrator.

According to the *Chronique d'Ernoul*, only three knights managed to escape, and all of these were allegedly Templars.⁷⁸ Leaving aside the issue of accuracy and credibility with regard to the sources available for the events at Cresson, this statement in the *Chronique d'Ernoul* might hint at the source for the information contained in the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* and, thus, explain the character of the account. When the anonymous writer of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* picked up the story-line, probably from those Templars who were among the few survivors of the Frankish army in Outremer between 1187 and 1189, the narrative had already been told and retold.⁷⁹ When given a close reading, the episode of Cresson in the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* seems carefully constructed, since its elements, such as the offer of surrender, the defiant last stand of the almost defeated hero⁸⁰, the association of James of Mailly with Saint George⁸¹, the conscious decision for death, as

knows of 6,000 enemies; cf. *Papsturkunden für Kirchen im Heiligen Lande*, ed. R. Hiestand (Vorarbeiten zum Oriens Pontificus 3), Göttingen 1985, p. 322: *cum sex millibus Turcorum pugnaverunt*. Cf. also Bulst-Thiele (as n. 11), p. 111, for a full discussion of the events at Cresson. A possible explanation for the Christians engaging in this battle might be provided by the *Hugonis et Honorii chronicorum continuationes Weingartenses*, ed. L. Weiland (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores XXI), Hanover 1869, p. 475: *magistri Templi et magistri Hospitalis et ceterorum, insonaret, consulentes Dominum exercituum et in eo confidentes in cuius manu est victoria*. This passage in the continuations of the Weingarten chronicles supports the explanation of this event put forward by J. Burgdorf, *The Central Convent of Hospitallers and Templars. History, Organization, and Personnel (1099/1120–1310)*, Leiden 2008, pp. 455–456.

⁷⁸ *Chronique d'Ernoul* (as n. 77), p. 150: *n'en avoit que .III. escapés, le maistre del Temple et .II. de ses chevaliers*.

⁷⁹ According to Helen Nicholson, in *The Chronicle of the Third Crusade* (as n. 70), p. 10, the author of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* “put together a rough account of events of 1187–89 from what oral information and reports he could glean from those present in the crusading army, including the stories of the deaths of two Templar martyrs, as reported by the Templars”. See also: Nicholson, *Martyrum* (as n. 7), p. 108.

⁸⁰ *Das Itinerarium Peregrinorum* (as n. 70), p. 248: *Hic ostium vallatus cuneis et humano prorsus auxilio destitutus, cum tot milia hinc inde irruentia conspiceret, collegit in vires animum et unus contra omnes bellum animosus suscepit*.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 249: *qui sanctum Georgium in huiusmodi habitu militare noverant*.

well as the ensuing veneration as a martyr are all indicative of a narrative composed for the benefit of the Templars.⁸²

Depicting a Templar as the ideal Christian knight further suggests that the story originated with the Templars. Intentional promulgation by the Templars seems, therefore, very likely, especially when keeping in mind that the Templars, like the other military orders, found themselves in permanent need of money, recruits, and weapons. Displaying the prowess, altruism, and readiness to suffer martyrdom must have worked as an impressive reminder for believers in the West of how praiseworthy and indispensable the Templars really were. In turn, this might have instigated donations, support, and even local veneration.⁸³ In the case of Cresson, the Templars seem to have been particularly successful in promoting their own order's exemplary behavior, since five months after May 1, 1187, Pope Urban III praised James of Mailly and the brothers of the Temple for their self-sacrificial effort for the Christian cause in a widely circulated letter to Western magnates.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid., p. 248, n. 5, leading Hans Eberhard Mayer to suggest that the story was "legendär".

⁸³ Licence (as n. 7), p. 53, convincingly discusses the absence of any lasting Templar saint or cult. Cf. also H. Nicholson, *Hospitallers, Templars, and Teutonic Knights. Images of the Military Orders, 1128–1291*, Leicester 1993, p. 119; J. Schenk, *Some Hagiographical Evidence for Templar Spirituality, Religious Life, and Conduct*, *Revue Mabillon* 22 (2011), p. 102. Licence's statement, *ibid.*, p. 53, that there is "no proof that any Templar attracted posthumous veneration," apart from the veneration of the head reliquary of the first Master Hugh of Payns, needs to be modified because the narrative of the martyrdom of James of Mailly suggests that there were at least attempts at promulgating the veneration of Templar martyrs. Moreover, it appears that the bones of some of the Templars burned at the stake during the trial may have become objects of veneration. The *Continuationis chronici Guillelmi de Nangiaco pars prima*, in: *Chronique latine de Guillaume de Nangis de 1113 à 1300 avec les continuations de cette chronique de 1300 à 1368*, vol. 1, ed. H. Géraud, Paris 1843, pp. 403–404, states: *sic paratum incendium prompto animo et volenti sustinuisse sunt visi, ut pro suae mortis constantia et abnegatione finali cunctis videntibus admirationem multam intulerint ac stuporem; duo vero reliqui adjudicato sibi carceri sunt reclusi*; this reference is also contained in *Continuatio chronici Girardi de Fracheto*, in: *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France*, vol. XXI, ed. N. de Wailly, Paris 1855, p. 40; cf. Menache (as n. 69), p. 55, n. 51. According to Giovanni Villani, *Villani's Chronicle. Being Selections from the First Nine Books of the Croniche Fiorentine of Giovanni Villani*, ed. and trans. R. E. Selfe, London 1906, p. 381, the veneration of the bones of the last Templar Master James of Molay began shortly after his execution: "And note, that the night after the said master and his companion had been martyred, their ashes and bones were collected as sacred relics by friars and other religious persons, and carried away to holy places." Nicholson draws attention to the difference between Templar and non-Templar martyr propagation, see: Nicholson, *Martyrum* (as n. 7), p. 104 sqq. For the reference to the head of Hugh of Payns cf. *Papstum und Untergang des Templerordens*, vol. 2, ed. H. Finke, Münster 1907, p. 335: *Et audivit dici ipse testis, quod erat capud primi magistri ordinis scilicet fratris Hugonis de Paynes*.

⁸⁴ *Papsturkunden* (as n. 77), p. 322. The story's vast circulation might be due to Templar agency, since many accounts of the events of 1187 involve James of Mailly; cf. *Hugonis et Honorii chro-*

Unfortunately, the story's apparently intentional construction obscures the actual relevance of the concept of martyrdom for the Knights of the Temple in this case.⁸⁵

Accounts pertaining to an institution as political as the Order of the Temple usually come with an agenda. Even the mentioning of the word "martyrdom" is evidence of a source's particular angle, since martyrdom was considered a testimony of utmost courage. A rare case in which the premise of martyrdom seems to have transcended the propagandistic layer is a letter of Brother Andrew of Montbard who, later in life, would be elected master of his order. During the siege of Antioch by Nur ad-Din in 1149, he wrote to the Templar Master Everard of Barres and reminded his fellow Templar brothers of their promise:

"The time has come to adhere to the vow we have given to God, which is to lay down our souls for our brothers, for the defense of the Oriental church and the Holy Sepulcher. Because these are the vows we have to adhere to, in this time of opportunity, if we want to earn the merits of our vows."⁸⁶

This statement suggests that the vow taken when entering the order actually permeated the way the Templars thought of themselves and was translated into real situations of danger. This vow remained prominent throughout

nicorum continuationes Weingartenses (as n. 77), p. 475; the *Colbert-Fontainebleau* version of the Ernoul text, which contains the episode in contrast to the *Lyon-Eracles*, *La Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr (1184–1197)*, ed. M. R. Morgan, Paris 1982, p. 39; and especially the *Libellus* (as n. 33), p. 215. In fact, even the repeated mentioning of James of Mailly's name may be taken as evidence for the order's propagandistic success, since James apparently did not hold any of his Order's high offices, even though some of the sources mistakenly refer to him as "marshal"; cf. Burgtorf, *The Central Convent* (as n. 77), p. 577. Mayer, in *Das Itinerarium Peregrinorum* (as n. 70), p. 248, n. 5, may have underestimated the incident's overall relevance. For the aspect of propaganda and intentional spreading of news, cf. S. Lloyd, *English Society and the crusade, 1216–1307*, Oxford 1988, pp. 24 sqq., 39–40; R. Hiestand, *The Military Orders and Papal Crusading Propaganda*, in: *The Military Orders*, vol. 3: *History and Heritage*, ed. V. Mallia-Milanes, Aldershot 2008, pp. 162–163.

⁸⁵ If the assumption is right that the Templars were indeed responsible for the spreading of James of Mailly's example, the occurrence would be a caveat to Nicholson's statement of the Templars not publicizing "the piety and devotion of all brothers equally" and her conclusion that the Templars did not promote "own military martyrs"; Nicholson, *Martyrum* (as n. 7), pp. 105, 118. However, a solution to this problem might present itself in the differentiation of the canonical and individual theological understanding of the term 'martyr', cf. P. Dinzelsbacher, *Bernhard von Clairvaux. Leben und Werk des berühmten Zisterziensers*, Darmstadt 1998, p. 119.

⁸⁶ *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France*, vol. XV, ed. M. J. J. Brial, Paris 1878, p. 540: *Tempus enim est, vota Deo persolvamus, scilicet animas nostras pro fratribus nostris defensioneque Orientalis ecclesiae et sacri sepulcri ponamus: haec enim sunt vota quae reddere debemus in hoc tempore opportune, si votorum cupimus habere merita*; cf. Bulst-Thiele (as n. 11), p. 49.

one's career and even prompted one to join the Templars decidedly with "the aim of dying for God."⁸⁷

In discussing an abstract theological concept like martyrdom one tends to forget that, on campaign, fear was probably the biggest obstacle that any knight had to overcome, regardless of his bravery or desire for salvation.⁸⁸ Accordingly, there are examples of Templars explicitly promising to suffer martyrdom, rather than surrender, but in the end not following through on their promise, such as the siege of the Templar castles Monzon and Miravet in the Crown of Aragon in 1307 and 1308. In a letter of April 24, 1308, Raymond of Guardia, Templar commander of Miravet, warned King James II of Aragon that if the king tried to take the Templar castle, many would die, because the members of the order would rather obtain the crown of martyrdom than live in shame.⁸⁹ From a letter penned by Berengar of San Marcial, Templar commander of Ascó, we gather that Berengar and his comrades, too, claimed to prefer dying as martyrs to surrendering their castle, a conviction that Berengar would express repeatedly during the following months.⁹⁰ While these self-sacrificial statements of Templars under siege exemplify the ideal and desire

⁸⁷ *Le procès* (as n. 11), vol. 1, p. 589: *et diceret quod volebat esse serviens esclavus ordinis et mori pro Deo*. To my knowledge, this statement is the only one that connects the entrance into the Order explicitly with the aim of dying for the Lord. However, the scarcity of this statement-typus might find its explanation in the problem of suicide addressed above.

⁸⁸ The feeling of fear when facing death has its equivalent in Christ's life, namely when Jesus was praying in Gethsemane; cf. Luke 22:42–44: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." I am indebted to Professor Burgtorf for this reference. A comparison with chapter 64 of the *Rule* which, by using Psalm 115:4 establishes a direct reference to martyrdom (*Calicem salutaris accipiam*. "That is to say 'I will take the cup of salvation: Which means: 'I will avenge the death of Jesus Christ by my death. For just as Jesus Christ gave His body for me, I am prepared in the same way to give my soul for my brothers'"), suggests that there is an intentional connection between the *Rule* and Christ's hour of fear in the garden. The *calix salutaris* taken by the Knights of the Temple seems like a direct answer to Christ's fear of accepting the cup. Given the Templars' Christo-centrism, it appears plausible that their texts would be referring to this crucial part of Christ's life and subsequent passion.

⁸⁹ *Papsttum* (as n. 83), pp. 126–127, no. 80: *Et sert sia a vos, senyor, que nos volem mes morir ab corona de martiry, que no viure tostemps ab desonor de nos et de totes nostres amics*.

⁹⁰ Barcelona, Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, Cartas reales diplomáticas, Templarios, nos 462, 655, 660; cf. A. Forey, *How the Aragonese Templars Viewed Themselves in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries*, in: *Selbstbild* (as n. 69), p. 61. The letters of the Aragonese Templars provide unique insights into their state of mind and way of thinking during the ongoing sieges. Many of these letters to their fellow besieged brothers, to King James II, or to Pope Clement V, refer in one way or another to their preparedness to lay down their lives; cf. J. M. Sans i Travé, *La defensa dels templers catalans. Cartes de fra Ramon de Saguardia durant el setge de Miravet*, Lleida 2002, pp. 9–10, no. 9; p. 55, no. 80.

to live up to the premise of martyrdom, none of these brothers seems to have followed through in the end, as all of them sooner or later agreed to terms of surrender. Thus, at least in the chaotic months of 1307 and 1308, there was, as Alan Forey has put it, “in practice little enthusiasm for what was termed martyrdom.”⁹¹

Martyrdom was considered the ultimate proof of righteousness, a deed beyond any doubt or criticism. Whether narratively constructed or actually practiced (a distinction that can rarely be made with absolute certainty), the concept was used as an instrument of propaganda. The order needed to be, and obviously was, well aware, of the appeal of stories of self-sacrifice, since success depended on their public reputation as a social, religious, and military powerhouse. It appears likely that edifying stories of martyrdom circulated among members of the order.⁹² Some sources support the notion that the concept of martyrdom impacted Templar practice, though rational fear understandably posed an obstacle that was difficult to overcome. Even at the very end, some Templars still believed in the *sacrosanctitas* of martyrdom as a major argument for their order’s innocence. In a document addressed to the papal commission, John of Montréal, one of the Templars imprisoned during the trial in France, listed the great deeds of the members of the order and highlighted not only the martyrdom of Master William of Beaujeu and 300 of his knights at Acre in 1291⁹³, but also asserted that over 20,000 Templars had given their lives for God in Outremer (*que ils sont mort plus de XXm frer por la foi Die outra mer*⁹⁴).

While taking into account the Templars’ public Good Friday celebrations, as well as their propagandistic narratives of martyrdom, and inferring from these that

⁹¹ Forey (as n. 90), p. 61.

⁹² In James of Vitry’s *sermones vulgares*, some of these Templar tales have survived. To illustrate the Templars’ preparedness for giving their own lives, one of the sermons recounts the example of a Templar who, when surrounded by countless enemies, rejoiced, exhorted his horse to carry him to eternal life, and, after killing many Saracens, finally received the crown of martyrdom; cf. Jacques de Vitry (as n. 16), p. 420: *Semper igitur parati sitis sanguinem vestrum pro Christo effundere, id est animas vestras pro Deo cum desiderio et gladio ponere, exemplo cujusdam militis Christi, qui cum multitudinem videret Sarracenorum, cepit ex magna fiducia et cordis exaltatione dicere equo suo: O morelle, bone socie, multas bonas dietas feci, supra te ascendendo et equitando; sed ista dieta omnes alias superabit, nam hodie ad vitam aeternam me portabis. Ex hoc postquam multos Sarracenos interfecit, ipse tandem occubuit, in bello felici martyrio coronatus.*

⁹³ *Le procès* (as n. 11), vol. 1, p. 143: *Item, proposent que l’ordre deu Temple, en temps passé, si se es parties de la mer, et de sça mier, ens lieux que estoient en frontiera de Sarazin, bien et loiaument contre li anemi de la foy de Jeshu Crist, en temps du rois Lois, deu roy de Inglaterra en jiu [?] tepe se perdi des fôys tout le convent; et après, en temps de frere G. de Berninet nostre Maistre, que mori en Acre à mers III freres, qui morirent aveque li en Acre.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 144. The origin of this number (20,000) is unclear; at any rate, it appears too high.

most echelons of society were aware of the Templars' aspirations to lay down their lives for Christianity, one has to recognize the downside of an ideal that was as zealous as martyrdom.⁹⁵ Did the Templars fail to live up to their own expectations? Their contemporaries' criticism was, at times, relentless. As Malcolm Barber has pointed out,

“the empathy between the Templars and the interests of lay aristocratic society which can be seen in the twelfth century had its dangers, for when it began to be believed that the Templars fell short of the ideal, the reaction could be as hostile as the initial reception had been enthusiastic.”⁹⁶

William of Tyre, known for his critical stance toward the Templars, alluded to the pitfalls of their self-imposed ideal of martyrdom when he accused them of preferring surrender to armed resistance.⁹⁷ Similarly, Master Thadeus of Naples, after praising Master William of Beaujeu's glorious martyrdom at Acre in 1291, proceeded to criticize the surviving brothers for their flight, declaring that it would have been better for them to have died during the city's defense like their master.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Schenk, *The Cult of the Cross* (as n. 56), p. 219, characterizes the Templars' veneration of the Cross as “transparent”, hinting at the fact that the order “was and always had been an Order of Christ and that it was perceived and recognized as such by large parts of medieval society”.

⁹⁶ M. Barber, *The Social Context of the Templars*, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 34 (1984), p. 46.

⁹⁷ William of Tyre accused the Templars of surrendering a cave fortress situated in a place (referred to as *inexpugnabilis*) near the Jordan river to Shirkuh in the 1160s. As a result of their cowardice, so William suggests, King Amaury hung twelve of them: Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, Turnhout 1986, XIX.11: *Per idem quoque tempus, ejusdem generis praesidium, spelunca iterum inexpugnabilis, ultra Jordanem in finibus Arabiae situm, fratrum militiae Templi diligentiae deputatum, eidem Siracono traditur; ad quam eripiendam dominus rex properans cum multa militia, dum supra Jordanem castrametatus esset, recepit nuntium, quod praesidium in manus jam devenerat inimicorum; quo audito, dominus rex confusus et ira succensus, de fratribus Templi, qui hostibus castrum tradiderant, patibulo fecit suspendi circa duodecim.*

⁹⁸ Magister Thadeus civis Neapolitanus, *Ystoria de desolatione at conculatione civitatis Acconensis et tocius Terre Sancte*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, Turnhout 2004, p. 116: *o nobiles tanti magistri commilitones, ad bella doctissimi, quare, cum mortales sitis, vestro dissentientes a capite in membris vestris pati tanquam pusillanimes horruistis quod magister vester et dominus tam libenter pertulit in se ipso? Expediebat sane atque decebat, cum deputati et ascripti sitis milicie Christiane, in eo maxime infelicis casu articulo, quo in vestrum tociusque christianitatis obprobrium civitas tam populosa et nobilis Christicolarum tunc educebatur e manibus et christianus sanguis ante oculorum vestrorum obtuitus ubique in contemptum christiani nominis uberius ab impiorum manibus fundebatur, pocius pro patriis legibus et utrisque sexus tutela plebis invalide, que partim in occisionem gladii partimque in captivitatem gentium ducebatur, pro cuius salute crucis tormenta in se pati non exorruit Iesus Christus, vestri preceptoris exemplo aliorumque commilitonum vestrorum, qui ad passionis supplicium laudabilia vestigia sunt secuti, gloriosam mortem unanimiter vos omnes*

Thus, failure to follow through on the ideal of martyrdom provided critics with a target that was just as unassailable as the actual adherence to that very same ideal.

Martyrdom in the Order of the Knights Templar must be understood as an extremely multilayered and versatile concept. It sometimes reveals itself openly, for example in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux or the carefully constructed stories of Templars suffering martyrdom prior to being received into heaven. Sometimes, however, the concept's influence is more difficult to discern, for example in the area of liturgy or the members' personal experience. Thus, alternative ways of uncovering the concept need to be found. A key to this might be the "special importance [of] the motifs of the Lamb, the military sign, and the crown of victory," as has been suggested by Penny Cole.⁹⁹ In any case, a core assumption with regard to martyrdom is Christ's sacrifice for humanity. To the Templars, this was the central point of reference and the legitimization of their military and liturgical activities.

That the Templars were potential martyrs is old news. However, their particular concept of martyrdom has received insufficient attention thus far, and the concept's implications for the order's activities remain largely unexplored. The power of such a concept that puts a salvific meaning to an event feared by people throughout the ages can hardly be underestimated, especially in an environment charged with eschatological anticipation and violence like the Crusades. In the case of the Templars, the concept of martyrdom was not an empty construct devised by distant theologians; rather, it was one of the main pillars of their spiritual conception and had a considerable impact on their members' reality.

SUMMARY

Embracing Death, Celebrating Life: Reflections on the Concept of Martyrdom in the Order of the Knights Templar

The Templars were the first religious military order dedicated to warfare, and, to them, the anticipation of a meritorious death in battle was a key characteristic that was unique to their profession. Not only the order's *Rule* and early theological texts addressed to the Templar com-

eligere quam contumeliose vite ambigua spacia, quasi future vite firmam non haberetis fiduciam, in vestre dedecus sacre professionis et infamiam Ordinis, miserabiliter prorogare.

⁹⁹ P. Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades to the Holy Land, 1095–1270*, Cambridge 1991, p. 30.

munity, such as the writings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, but also a wide range of external sources, including chronicles and trial records, suggest that the Templars were particularly associated with martyrdom as the most original form of Christian sanctity, namely in imitation of Christ's own sacrificial death. This article aims at shedding light on this neglected aspect of Templar spirituality and discusses the implications of this concept's manifestation throughout the order's history.