

# The Virgin And The Priest The Making Of The Messiah

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## 8 Legacy of Messianic Conflict

For most Christians, the notion that John the Baptist had disciples who did not believe in Jesus could hardly be less meaningful. And the fact that John's disciples continued to exist as a separate sect long after his death has significance only for a few specialized scholars. Nonetheless, the schism between the two opposing messianic sects was without doubt *the* determinative factor in the establishment of the Christian Church. And compelling evidence exists that the tension between them developed into an ideological rivalry that influenced key events in world history. Today, this friction is manifested in the world's principal religio-political conflict.

The history of the Christian Church is well documented, though there are still gaps in our knowledge of the early centuries. But what about the Church of John? Most people are unaware that such a thing ever existed. Scholars, who know of the 'Johannite' heresy, regard it as a curiosity. The Johannite Church had many faces, and like Christianity, split into competing sects each with a different emphasis. But it has always existed.

### DISCIPLES OF JOHN

According to Luke, the early Baptist movement was not restricted to Judea or even Palestine. Baptist missionaries evangelized Diaspora Jews, and had already established a presence in Ephesus (modern Turkey) before Paul and the first Christians arrived there. The Book of Acts told the story of Apollos of Alexandria who was...

an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately.

Acts 18: 24-27

Needless to say, the narrative does not elaborate on the details of Apollos' 'inaccurate' Baptist teaching, and his apparent conversion was described as a formality. Later in Ephesus, Paul came face to face with a group of John's followers who were also converted with remarkable ease.

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus....they were about twelve of them in all.

Acts 19:1-7

The Church of John had the same goal as the Christians -- to gain new converts. But both groups shared the same dilemma. Their founders had been executed by the authorities, so had presumably failed in their life's work. For orthodox Jews, who expected a triumphant Messiah, this was all they needed to know in order to reject any Baptist or Christian claims.

After the Resurrection event, the idea of Jesus' second coming took root, though Jewish Christians were unlikely to have understood it in the same way as Gentiles. Jesus' disciples persevered confident they would soon be vindicated. Similarly, the early Baptists expected John's return. It was the cyclical nature of Providence. This explains the speculation that Jesus was John the Baptist revisited,

Some said, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; that is why these powers are at work in him."

Mark 6:14

Neither sect could proselytize effectively to Gentiles without a coherent philosophy. Paul devised a theology/Christology specifically intended to appeal to "God fearers" -- Gentiles, attracted to monotheism, who respected the ethical teachings of the Torah, but did not subject themselves to circumcision and had no interest in priestly and Levite rituals. Pauline Christianity was incredibly successful, but modern critics of Paul claim that his strategy of being "all things to all men," forced him to incorporate into his message Gnostic elements from Egyptian, Greek, or Babylonian mystery religions, which he fused together with some of his own esoteric Jewish ideas. Gnosticism is notoriously difficult to pin down; it has many characteristics, and not all of them are found in any given system of Gnosticism. Suffice it to say that Paul's essentially "Gnostic" doctrine was that salvation came from the heavenly Christ and not from Jesus the man. This was achieved through the practice of an ascetic lifestyle, which led to spiritual revelation, and not through the power of intellectual reason or ritual observances.

If Pauline Christians borrowed ideas from others, then no doubt the afore-mentioned, multi-talented Apollos was a prime source of material. The impossibly spontaneous acceptance of Paul's teaching by John's disciples suggests that the opposite scenario was closer to the truth. Baptist ideology was embraced by the Christians. Its most useful or attractive concepts were amalgamated into a religious mix to gain converts from the Church of John. Baptists, and not Christians, were the first to adopt Gnostic principles.

By honoring John and integrating certain Baptist traditions, the Christians hoped to eventually unite the two movements. But in the long term, eulogizing John the Baptist was counterproductive. It fostered a misplaced reverence toward him that enabled the Johannite Church to exist as a parasite and wreak havoc within the body of the Christian Church. A large number of churches, cathedrals, public buildings and even cities dedicated to John the Baptist, were instituted not by the Church of Jesus, but by its sworn enemy.

Despite Jesus' scathing condemnation of John and the indisputable evidence of a conflict between them, a negative portrayal of John the Baptist would still be offensive to most Christians. Psychologists could explain this as denial caused by the subconscious mind, afraid of where the actual truth might lead -- to the gradual deconstruction of everything else it *believes* is true.

The Fourth Gospel, composed in Ephesus, a region with an acknowledged Baptist

presence, contains blatant Gnostic references. The text's repeated use of "light" and "life" led scholars to suggest that the writer was himself a convert from a Gnostic Baptist group.<sup>1</sup> The gospel has a singular emphasis on the doctrine of a pre-existent savior, temporarily in the world to suffer as atonement for the sins of mankind, which is an idea most scholars believe is missing from the synoptic gospels. The famous prologue must have been written with Baptists in mind because it insisted that John was "not the light." Presumably he was a "false light," as the "true light" was Jesus.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.

John 1:5-9

The Baptist cult was a lasting presence in the region. At least 250 years after the gospel of John was written, the Christians still considered them a major threat. Ephraem the Syrian (c. 306-373 C.E.), born in S.E. Turkey, had a reputation as a sacred poet. In one of his hymns, Mary sings to the infant Jesus,

The conception of John took place in October in which darkness dwells. Your conception took place in April when the light rules over darkness and subdues it.<sup>2</sup>

John the Baptist was more than just "not the light" -- he was the darkness.

## **SIMON MAGUS**

In pursuit of uniformity, the naming and refutation of heresies was the early Church's foremost obsession. Once Gnosticism was recognized as the number one menace, it was ruthlessly persecuted. Irenaeus (c. 130-202 C.E.), a giant in Christian history, compiled a listing of all known unorthodoxies, which stated that All those who in any way corrupt the truth, and harm the teaching of the church, are the disciples and successors of Simon Magus of Samaria.<sup>3</sup>

In Church tradition, Simon Magus was considered the founder of Gnosticism, but his story remains one of the great mysteries connected to the origins of Christianity. He is known mostly from a passage in the Book of Acts; the early disciples were being harassed in and around Jerusalem, so Philip went into Samaria to preach the word. His success there eventually drew the attention of Simon Magus,

who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the nation of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is that power of God which is called Great". And they gave heed to him, because for a long time he had amazed them all with his magic.

Acts 8:9-11

Simon converted and, "after being baptized," joined forces with Philip. When the leadership in Jerusalem heard, Peter and John went to Samaria and laid their "hands on the people" to receive the Holy Spirit. This impressed Simon, who offered Peter money in exchange for receiving the same power. Thus the word 'simony' evolved to describe the offense of buying and selling ecclesiastical office. Simon Magus was not mentioned again in the New Testament, but his life would become the subject of much myth and

speculation. Luke's source for this episode was almost certainly the Clementine literature. The texts claim that the source of animosity between Jesus' disciples and the disciples of John the Baptist revolved around the identity of the Christ,

And, behold, one of the disciples of John asserted that John was the Christ, and not Jesus, inasmuch as Jesus Himself declared that John was greater than all men and all prophets. "If, then," said he, "he be greater than all, he must be held to be greater than Moses, and than Jesus himself. But if he be the greatest of all, then must he be the Christ."<sup>4</sup>

Then the astonishing claim is made that Simon Magus was John's favorite disciple.

Being an adherent of John...through whom he came to deal with religious doctrines...Of all John's disciples, Simon was the favorite, but on the death of his master, he was absent in Alexandria, and so Dositheus, a codisciple, was chosen head of the school.<sup>5</sup>

Simon had gone to Egypt, "to perfect his studies of magic," at the time John was in prison. On his return, he usurped control of the Baptist sect from Dositheus, the original leader after John's death. Peter and Simon had a lengthy and convoluted theological debate which ended with a duel of their magical powers. Simon lost after he attempted to fly from a high building and broke his legs in the fall.

Whether real or imagined, the connection between Simon Magus and John the Baptist was intended to show that John's disciples were the most committed anti-Christians. Repeatedly identified as the greatest threat, the original Gnostics were Baptists. As John the Baptist was the biggest thorn in Jesus' side, so his followers were the biggest thorn in the side of the Church.

## **DOSITHEUS**

There is scant information on Dositheus. He is generally understood as the Samaritan founder of the Dositheans, a Gnostic religion that sprang up in the first-century C.E. Epiphanius wrote that the Dositheans were a Baptist sect with a peculiar set of traditions and practices. Origen (c.185-254 C.E.) mentioned that the Dositheans kept written records, and that Dositheus made messianic claims, even a resurrection myth was attached to him:

Dositheus the Samaritan, after the time of Jesus, wished to persuade the Samaritans that he himself was the Messiah prophesied by Moses; from that day until now there are Dositheans, who both produce writings of Dositheus and also relate some tales about him, as that he did not taste of death but is still alive.<sup>6</sup>

A listing of thirty-two heresies, compiled by Hippolytus (c.260-235 C.E.), began with a mention of Dositheus, which demonstrates how seriously he was taken. Rabbinical sources and Arabic writers stated that as late as the tenth-century C.E., Samaritans were divided into two sects, orthodox Samaritans and Dositheans. Books of the Dositheans were found among Christian Gnostic texts at Nag Hammadi, which proves that the early Church was susceptible to influence by Gnostic Baptists. In fact, a significant percentage of the Gnostic treatises found at Nag Hammadi contain no references to Jesus (though some have obvious Christian interpolations), and even though the themes are based around figures from the Old Testament, the texts are clearly not of Christian origin. As no

evidence exists for the existence of Jewish Gnostic groups, the texts most probably have Samaritan sources.

Many texts belong to what scholars call 'Sethian' Gnosticism. Sethian Gnostics hold Seth, third son of Adam and Eve, in special veneration and claim to be his true descendants. Significantly, this is also a tenet of Mandaean theology. In the late-eighteenth-century C.E., a Syriac Christian theologian named Theodore Bar Konai composed a short paper on current heresies. He made no serious attempt to explain their ideas, but included a brief history of the Mandaeans, whom he said were known as the Dositheans.

Among New Testament scholars, the Mandaean religion and its possible connection with the roots of Christianity, was one of the most controversial subjects of the first half of the twentieth century. Outside academe, nobody had heard of Mandaeans. Today, they are an endangered species.

## MANDAEANS

Since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, many people belonging to minority religious groups have fled Iraq because his regime had previously given them a certain degree of protection. The Mandaeans, located mostly in and around Baghdad and Basra, are one such group. Their future in Iraq is uncertain, and at the moment they are estimated to number only about thirty thousand worldwide.

Western scholars have assumed that the name 'Mandaean' derives from the Aramaic word *manda*, meaning knowledge. But this is unlikely. Based on the principle that religious sects are known by derogatory titles given them by others, 'Mandaean' probably comes from *Mandi*, the name of their ritual baptismal house that contains a special pool connected by pipe to a nearby stream, known as a 'Jordan.' Wearing long white robes, Mandaeans perform regular ablutions with running water inside the *Mandi*. In addition, *mandi* is a word used in parts of the Moslem world, meaning to bathe or wash.<sup>7</sup> Mandaeans, therefore, were known by outsiders as 'bathers' or 'baptizers' rather than 'knowledgeable ones'.

Similarities between Mandaean and Qumranian baptism rituals have been documented.<sup>8</sup> In particular, the water must be 'living;' moving water connected to natural sources and not static. The literature of both sects includes the concept that angelic warriors fight on the side of "light" against "darkness." They also reveal an especially high regard for Noah, found nowhere else in ancient literature. This makes sense, as the water of the flood judgment, like John's baptism, was a purifying agent.

Visiting missionaries who first encountered the Mandaeans described them as a Christian sect who had a special veneration for John the Baptist. Following the publication of Mandaean sacred books in the early twentieth century, that opinion was no longer tenable. The texts describe a complex mix of classic Gnostic precepts. The most important works are the *Ginza*, a collection of prayers, theology, and history; the *Haran Gawaita*, a history of the Mandaeans; and the *Book of John*, a history of John the Baptist traditions and a selection of his prayers. Written in an eastern Aramaic dialect, the manuscripts include a record of the names of the mostly women scribes who had copied them previously. An uninterrupted chain of copyists has been identified going back as early as the late second, to early-third-century C.E.<sup>9</sup>



Mandaeen Baptism

Mandaeans claim that they were persecuted in Judea, and left there shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., which they believe was divine retribution for their oppression. Strangely enough, although they consider themselves to be direct descendants of the original followers of John the Baptist, Mandaeans insist that their ancestry is not Jewish. They neither use circumcision nor keep Saturday as their Sabbath Day. Mandaean writings are implacably anti-Jewish, which means that if they emigrated from Palestine shortly before the Roman invasion, they must have been part of the Samaritan or Gentile community that was attacked by the Jews in the uprising of 66 C.E.

Often described with abstract myths and symbols, the Mandaean view of John the Baptist is complex. The *Book of John* explains that shortly after John's birth, the Jews tried to kill him, so he was taken away by Anosh,<sup>10</sup> a celestial savior spirit identical with Enoch, much loved at Qumran. John is depicted as a Gnostic pre-existent savior figure, who descends from the light world to rescue souls trapped below in the world of darkness. After death, he guides the soul of the Mandaean initiate upward through different levels of the light world.

There is no confusion about the Mandaean concept of Jesus. He was the devil incarnate. He betrayed John, stole his secret teachings, and perverted their meaning to deceive the Jews and spread evil throughout the world. The following verses are typical:

While John lives in Jerusalem, gaining sway over Jordan and baptizing, Jesus Christ shall come to him, shall humble himself, shall receive John's baptism and shall become wise with John's wisdom. But then shall he corrupt John's sayings, pervert the Baptism of Jordan, distort the words of truth and preach fraud and malice throughout the world.<sup>11</sup>

For nine months devil-Christ enters the womb of his mother, the virgin, and conceals himself there...when he grows up he enters the house of prayer of the Jewish people and takes possession of all their wisdom. He perverts the Torah and alters its doctrines and all its works.<sup>12</sup>

O deceived ones, you who have been deceived!... Do you not know, O you deceived, that you have been deceived? I (Jesus) am a good for nothing messiah, flayed for my torment, wise for evil...leads men astray and throws them down into the powerful clouds of darkness.<sup>13</sup>

The hereditary Mandaean priesthood is known as the “Nasoreans.” Mandaeans insist that Jesus was originally a Nasorean of high standing, forced out of the group because he violated a sacred trust. The gospel notion that Jesus was a “Nazarene” -- after an obscure village named Nazareth -- is best understood as a Christian attempt to explain away the title by which he was known -- ‘Nasorean.’ The phonetic root of ‘Nazarene’ and ‘Nasorean’ is the Hebrew word *nazar*, meaning to separate from others for self purification. The word ‘Nazarite’ is used in the Old Testament to describe those who make religious vows of abstinence. Samson was the most famous Nazarite in the Old Testament. Paul also took religious vows, as did Jesus.

“Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

Mk 14:25, Mt 26:29, Lk 22:18

Jews who made these oaths did not shave or cut their hair during the time period of the vow, which explains why Jesus was always depicted with long hair and a beard. It would be impossible for the title ‘Nazarene’ to originate from a village named Nazareth for two reasons. First, there is no evidence from census records, historical maps, or archeological excavations that Nazareth existed at the time of Jesus. Second, a small Galilean town was a meaningless point of reference for people who lived in Jerusalem or Judea, and would only be recognized by those who lived in its immediate vicinity. Opponents of Jesus who wished to disparage his native land called him a ‘Galilean;’ those who wished to belittle his message called him a ‘Nazarene.’ ‘Nazareth’ was a suitable word to denote a community of committed religious Jews, separated from mainstream society; it was not necessarily a specific point on the map. The village of Nazareth was established by Christians long after Jesus’ death.



Plate 27. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *John the Baptist Preaching*, 1486, Florence, Italy

Jesus, top left, watches and listens to John the Baptist. The crowd is oblivious to Jesus, and only John has a halo. A dove, symbol of spiritual authority, descends toward John, and not Jesus, as in the gospel accounts.

Long and involved poetic tractates dedicated to John the Baptist as the 'Good Shepherd' or the 'Good Fisher' are a feature of Mandaean literature. These themes are much more developed than in the New Testament, where they refer to Jesus. As John was the first to have a dedicated following, these titles would have originally belonged to him.

In the Good Shepherd poetry, John is called by God to "be a loving shepherd for me and watch me a thousand out of ten thousand." John accepted, but asked how he would retrieve those who were lost and left behind. God replied,

If one falls into the mud and stays there stuck, then let him go his way and fall a prey to the mud. Let him go his way and fall a prey to the mud, in that he bows himself down to Messiah.<sup>14</sup>

John should leave them alone. As victims of 'Messiah' (Jesus), they were a lost cause. However, John takes care of his own followers,

A Shepherd am I who loves his sheep; sheep and lambs I watch over. Round my neck I carry the sheep; and the sheep from the hamlet stray not...I bring them unto the good fold; and they feed by my side.<sup>15</sup>

Although Renaissance artists commonly depicted John holding a shepherd's staff, only Jesus was described as a 'shepherd' in the New Testament.

I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me... And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.

John 10:4-16

In the Good Fisher discourses, John rejects the approaches of the evil fishers and finally overwhelms them. The 'evil fishers' are the Christians, and John wants nothing to do with them. They belong to Jesus, "the head of all of you."

The Fisher clad him with vestures of glory, and an axe hung from his shoulder...when the fishers caught sight of the Fisher, they came and gathered around him... "be our great partner and take a share as we do... Grant us a share and we will give thee a share in what we possess..." When the Fisher heard this, he stamped on the bows of the ship..."Off from me, ye foul smelling fishers, ye fishers who mix poison. Begone, begone, catch fish who eat your own filth. The perfect ones' partner cannot be your partner. The good cannot belong to the wicked, nor the bad to the good. Your ship cannot be tied up with mine, nor your ring be laid on my ring. There, is the head of all of you; count yourselves unto *his* realm."<sup>16</sup>

John issues a warning to be wary of false baptizers on the river Jordan,

'Tis the voice of the Pure Fisher who calls and instructs the fish of the sea in the shallows. He speaks to them, "Raise yourselves up, on the surface of the water

stand straight; then your force be double as great. Guard yourselves from the fishers who catch the fish and beat on the Jordan.”<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, when John is asked about rival Christian baptizers in the fourth Gospel, he replied with a suspiciously longwinded theological harangue in praise of Jesus that ends with the dubious famous phrase “he must increase and I must decrease.” The Mandaean writings make curious references to ‘sandals.’

I will bring thee then sandals of glory with them canst thou tread down the thorns and the thistles. Earth and heaven decay, but the sandals of glory do not. Sun and moon decay, but the sandals of glory decay not. The stars and heaven’s zodiacal circle decay, but the sandals of glory decay not. The four winds of the world decay, but the sandals of glory decay not. Fruit and grapes and trees decay, but the sandals of glory do not. All that is made and engendered decays, but the sandals of glory do not.<sup>18</sup>

The “sandals of glory” belong to John as the true savior. Christian writers stole the sandal metaphor, and all the gospels emphasize John’s unworthiness to even “tie the thong of Jesus’ sandals.”<sup>19</sup> The original context was switched so that Jesus, and not John, was the rightful wearer of the ‘sandals of glory.’

Mandaean literature contains a description of the afterworld. Once there, Christian souls find themselves in a low realm and realize they were deceived by Jesus. When they notice Jesus bowing four times to ‘Manda d-Hiia,’ (Aramaic for ‘Gnosis of Life’), a title for John the Baptist, they ask him,

Did you not say ‘I am the God of Gods, the Lord of Lords, I am king of all the worlds, I am the chief of all works’. And now who is this man, who passed before you, and you have bowed down to him four times with the deepest respect. Who is this man?<sup>20</sup>

Dissatisfied with Jesus’ answer, the Christians wish to receive John’s baptism.

We wish to sell all our goods, go up to the Jordan, and have ourselves baptized in the name of the man who passed beyond you.<sup>21</sup>

## **GNOSTIC RELIGIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST**

What separates the Mandaeans from other minority religions in the region is that its ruling priesthood has allowed outsiders access to the sacred texts, parts of which have been published in the West. Other Gnostic-minded groups in the Middle East, more powerful and influential than the Mandaeans, refuse to divulge their innermost teachings. In certain cases, this prohibition has been enforced with the death penalty.

The Druze faith is one such mysterious religion. Non Druze are forbidden to read Druze texts, and the teachings remain unpublished. Only a basic outline of Druze theology is in the public domain. Today there exist an estimated 800,000 Druze, located principally in Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. Historians date the origin of their religion to approximately 1,000 years ago, but the Druze, like the Mandaeans, claim they existed before Moses.

The Druze community is split between the ‘initiated,’ cognizant of the esoteric teachings, and the ‘uninitiated,’ who are ignorant of them, a common feature of all Gnostic sects.

From the little that is known of their philosophy, Druze share the same concept of the spirit world as the Mandaeans. They are also known to venerate El Khidr, known mostly as a figure worshipped by Sufis (quasi-Gnostic Moslems), but who is widely honored in Turkey, North Africa, and throughout the Middle East. In many Islamic and Arabic traditions, El Khidr is another name for the prophet Elijah. As in Jewish tradition, Elijah/El Khidr is an eternal being who watches over mankind, bringing help and comfort to the righteous in times of need. Belief in reincarnation and the transmigration of the soul is a Druze tenet, and Druze believe that El Khidr and John the Baptist are one and the same.

Tourists in Israel can take guided tours around traditional Druze villages, but although there are no temples or churches, visitors will be able to see Druze holy sites as well as historical artifacts dating from the time of the Crusades. Near a large Druze town, mentioned in Crusader documents as the fortress of "Busnen," is the tomb of Nabi Zakarya. Christian and Jewish tour guides, knowing almost nothing about the Druze religion, mistakenly explain that this tomb was built for the minor Jewish prophet Zechariah, and no tourist is in a position to correct them. Druze themselves do not make this claim. In all likelihood, the hallowed tomb belongs to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist/El Khidr. But if the Druze understand that Zacharias was the father of Jesus, they are not saying. Their view of Jesus is murky. Historically, their existence was always threatened by Moslems and Christians, and they could not risk offending them. Past experience has taught them that the art of survival means keeping their secrets.

Druze are not the only Gnostic faith in the Middle East with Baptist connections. The powerful Alawi sect of Syria, the controlling faction in both the government and military, and the Alevi minority of Turkey are both secretive societies with hereditary priesthoods dedicated to preserving their undisclosed teachings. The Alawi originate from the mountainous region of Syria, recognized by Pliny the Elder as home of the 'Nazarenes.' Even today, they are known to outsiders as "Nosaryii," after the name of their priesthood. El Khidr is highly regarded in the customs of Alawi and Alevi, and many public festivals and ceremonies are held in his honor.

The Kurdish Yazidi religion is centered on angels, spirits, and the different levels of heaven. Throughout Kurdistan, special shrines dedicated to El Khidr, are built near water springs. 'El Khidr' translates from the Arabic as 'the Green man,' which symbolizes his life-giving properties, and hence the association with water. Baptism by El Khidr/John the Baptist has the power to give initiates eternal life in the high realms of the spirit world.

The 'Green Man' is found in many different cultures. In medieval European art, he was usually depicted as a stone or wood-carved head made from leaves and vines. A mysterious figure, no scholarly consensus exists on its meaning. Although seemingly pagan, the Green Man frequently appears in churches, chapels, abbeys, and cathedrals. The author of *A Little Book of The Green Man* even found carvings of the Green Man in Knights Templar churches in Jerusalem built in the twelfth century.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps Europe's most fascinating medieval chapel is at Rosslyn, Scotland. Built in the middle of the fifteenth century, half way between the dissolution of the Knights Templar and the official institution of the Freemasons, Rosslyn chapel's architecture and enigmatic carvings are cited by numerous conspiracy theorists as evidence for an alternative explanation of history. In many different guises and changing facial expressions, there are over one hundred carvings of the Green Man at Rosslyn chapel.

## ISLAM

Islam has towered over the Middle East for almost fourteen hundred years and is the biggest single influence in the region. For various reasons, Islamic scholars have not yet developed a critical approach to the Koran, and there is no serious investigative quest to discover the 'historical Mohammed.' It is simply accepted that the Koran was dictated to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel and it is therefore the word of God. Yet Islam is far from monolithic. Its two main Sunni and Shiite branches are themselves divided by various splinter groups. So defining Islam is not a simple matter.

A common observation in the West is that since Judaism, Christianity, and Islam originate from the same Hebrew source, they should not be inimical to each other. However, the roots of division are buried so deep within the fraternal archetypes that attitudes and behavioral patterns are almost genetically pre-conditioned.

In contrast to the favored second-son principle within Judeo-Christianity, Islam champions the cause of the first-born. Ishmael, Abraham's first son, is revered as the common ancestor of the Arabs and, in direct contradiction to the Genesis story, Moslems believe that Ishmael, not Isaac, was taken up the mountain by Abraham and offered as a sacrifice.

By claiming that Mohammed received his angelic vision in "a cave," the Koran repeated the story of Elijah, the prototype of John the Baptist. While Elijah fasted inside a cave, he received instructions from an "angel of the Lord." Compilers of the Koran used the angel Gabriel because he had famously announced the birth of John the Baptist, and Islam was to restore the lost birthright of the older brother. Islam's early history was an attempt to reclaim this legacy by force of arms. The strong faith of Moslems came from the absolute conviction that they were taking back -- on behalf of God and their ancestors -- what was rightfully theirs.

Islam began in the seventh century but its roots can be traced back to the Qumran sect. Much of Islamic law and ritual is centered on practices advocated by John the Baptist, and rejected by Jesus. Qumranian traditions were adopted by various baptizing groups that continued to exist in and around the Dead Sea area during the early centuries of the Christian era. In general, these groups maintained strict obedience to laws on fasting, animal sacrifice, circumcision, dietary restriction, daily ablutions, and the wearing of white robes. Epiphanius, Eusebius (c. 320 C.E.), Hegesippus (c. 150 C.E.), and Hippolytus gave them a series of different names: Elchaisites, Sampsaeans, Naasenes, and so on. They were not regarded as Christian sects, Jews, or even pagans, but as something altogether separate.

In the view of modern non-Islamic scholarship much of the Middle East was occupied by unorthodox Christian groups who practiced a primitive form of Christianity centered on non-canonical texts. In a transparent attempt to claim Islam as a corruption of Christianity, the Encyclopedia Britannica states that "it can hardly be wrong to conclude that these nameless witnesses of the Gospel, unmentioned in church history, scattered the seed from which sprung the germ of Islam."<sup>23</sup> This opinion wildly exaggerates the influence of Christian heretics, and woefully neglects the Baptists, who *are* mentioned in church history.

Initially, when Arab armies invaded Palestine and the surrounding areas, they did not

destroy Christian churches. Churches built to honor John the Baptist were co-opted. In Damascus, a large Byzantine church dedicated to John the Baptist was initially shared with the Christians. But under the Umayyad caliph Al-Walid I, the church was demolished in 720 C.E., and a mosque built in its place. The location was considered appropriate for Moslems only, and by way of compensation, Christians were given land in the city to build four churches. The Grand Mosque of Damascus, built on the site of the old church, was constructed based on the House of the Prophet Mohammed in Medina, and was the largest and most impressive mosque in the world at the time. During excavations, a rumor started that the head of John the Baptist had been found so a special shrine was constructed to hold it. The shrine still exists and attracts pilgrims from all over the world. In 2001, Pope John Paul visited to pay his respects.

The Baptists were mentioned in the Koran as “Sabians,” an Arabized word meaning “Baptist” that also has a connotation to light. According to Islamic historians, Mohammed himself was originally a Sabian, not a Christian, and many of Islam’s externals were derived from Sabian practices. The key to understanding Islam lies with these mysterious “Sabians.”

## **SABIANS**

Moslems often assume that the Sabians of the Koran were inhabitants of ‘Saba,’ an ancient kingdom of southern Arabia mentioned in the Old Testament, from whence came the Queen of Sheba. However, the kingdom of Saba had ceased to exist several centuries before the time of Mohammed. The Koran identifies Sabians as “people of the book,” which means they had religious scriptures centered on the holy prophets of Israel. They are mentioned three times:

Those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the **Sabians**, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve

Those who believe and the Jews and the **Sabians** and the Christians -- whoever believes in God and the last day and does good they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.

Those who believe and those who are the Jews and the **Sabians** and the Christians and the Magians and those who set up gods (with God) -- God will decide between them on the day of resurrection for God is a Witness over all things.

Modern Islamic scholars explain that “sabi” was a word meaning “one who has changed his religion.” Therefore, once Mohammed renounced his former faith, he was known as a ‘sabi.’ But Muslim writers who lived during the early Islamic period used ‘Sabian’ and ‘sabi’ to specifically link Mohammed and his teaching with the beliefs and practices of the Sabian religion:

The polytheists used to say of the prophet and his companions ‘these are the Sabians’ comparing them to them, because the Sabians who live Jaziartal Mawsil (Iraq) would say ‘there is no God but God’.  
*Abd al-Rahman ‘ibn ‘Zayd (d. 798 C.E.)*

I saw the prophet when I was a pagan. He was saying to the people, ‘if you want to save yourselves, accept that there is no God but Allah.’ At this moment I

noticed a man behind him saying ‘he is a sabi.’  
*Rabi’ah ‘ibn ‘Ubbad* (who lived at the same time as Mohammed)

He (Mohammed) is a Sabian.  
*Ibn Jurayi* (who lived in the 8th century)

Islamic writers provided only meager descriptions of Sabian teaching:

The Sabians believed in prophets and prayed five times daily.  
*Ziyad ‘ibn ‘Abihi* (d. 672 C.E.)

The Sabian religion is between Judaism and Magianism.  
*Ibn Abi Nujayh* (d. 749 C.E.)

The Sabian religion resembled the Magians and worshipped angels.  
*Hasan al-Basri* (d. 728 C.E.)

The Sabians believe they belong to the prophet Noah, they read zabur, and their religion looks like Christianity.  
*Khalil ‘ibn Ahmad* (d. 786-787 C.E.)

In some cases the Sabians were said to inhabit the area of modern Iraq, and the general description fits with that of the Mandaeans, who are known today as ‘Subi’ by their Moslem neighbors. Modern Mandaeans claim that they are the Sabians mentioned in the Koran to avoid persecution. But many Moslems remain unconvinced, largely because Mandaeans reject Abraham, Moses, and the prophets after him, and their writings include attacks on Mohammed. They also disallow circumcision which is absolute to Islam. Islamic scholars noted that there were two distinct groups of ‘Sabians,’ who were at odds with each other:

The Sabians of Harran and the Kimariyyun. They are different Sabians and the latter opposes the religion of the Harrians.  
*Abu Bakr Mohammed ‘ibn Zakariyya al-Radi* (d. 923 C.E.)

The ‘Kimariyyun’ was another name for Iraqi-based Sabians, or Mandaeans, who were a breakaway faction of the Harranians, named after the ancient city of Haran, located in the area of southern Turkey near the border with Syria. During the time of Mohammed, Haran was a strategic center on the ancient caravan routes whose population had resisted Christianization, but was no longer a great civilization. Skeptical historians believe that the Sabians of Harran only adopted the name “Sabian” to claim the same rights that Moslems had given Jews and Christians.

A written tradition, considered factual by modern Mandaeans, states that they came via Haran to their present location in Iraq. The abrupt opening lines of the Haran Gauaita, a Mandaean sacred text, refer to their exile:

And Haran Gauaita welcomed him and that city in which there were Nasurii, since there was no road for the king of the Jews... And 60,000 Nasurii abandoned the sign of the Seven and entered into Tura-d-Midai, the place where no tribe had power over us.

Haran was a Christian-free zone, “since there was no road for the king of the Jews.” The

ancient city of Haran was a center of the old Mesopotamian religion of the seven planetary deities. Haran had seven famous temples built on seven different levels, which explains the reference “they abandoned the sign of the Seven.” The Mandaeans left Haran before the Islamic conquest. Harranians, who remained behind, made peace with the Moslem invaders, and were considered as traitors by the Mandaeans.

According to Islamic tradition, Mohammed was illiterate, so he was probably unschooled in the complexities of Mandaean or Harranian theology and familiar only with their rituals, which included praying five times daily and a thirty-day fast reminiscent of the Moslem Ramadan fast. He may also have been influenced by the negative portrayal of Jesus.

The Koran does not give an account of Jesus’ life, but suggests, and many Moslems believe, that the crucifixion was a staged event. Jesus was replaced on the cross with an imposter, and viewed events from a secret hiding place, “they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them.” This same opinion was espoused earlier by Mandaeans<sup>24</sup>, and can also be found in *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, one of the Dosithean scrolls found at Nag Hammadi:

I did not succumb to them as they had planned. But I was not afflicted at all...I did not die in reality, but in appearance, lest I be put to shame by them...It was another, their father, who drank the gall and vinegar; it was not I. They struck me with the reed it was another, Simon, who bore the cross on his shoulder...It was another upon whom they placed the crown of thorns...And I was laughing at their ignorance.<sup>25</sup>

Arab historians described the Sabians of Harran as monotheists who practiced baptism as inspired by John the Baptist and followed a strict moral code. They held daily prayers and ablutions, and had the ‘call to prayer’ tradition that Islam adopted. Unlike the Mandaeans, circumcision was compulsory. Harranians believed they were descendants of Abraham, himself a Sabian, and had a systemized belief in angels and heavenly bodies that followed Gnostic traditions.

Many non-Islamic historians think that the Moslem fasting ritual of Ramadan came originally from the Harranian/Sabian tradition. The ancient religion of Haran, which spread around the region and into Arabia, centered on the worship of Sin, the moon god. Adherents held a special thirty-day fast in honor of Sin. They concluded this fasting period by offering animal sacrifices and by giving alms to the poor, as is the custom in Islam.

The Islamic Calendar is based on lunar reckoning. The months begin with the appearance of the new moon, and the position of the moon determines the dating of festivals. During Ramadan, Muslims observe the daily fast from the first appearance of light on the eastern horizon to sunset. The original reason for the fast was to mourn the disappearance of the moon. Eating and celebration began again with the moon’s daily re-appearance. Ramadan ends at sunset when the moon’s crescent becomes visible. The crescent moon was the symbol of Sin, the moon god, and the crescent moon features on ancient coins and in archeological sites throughout the region. Islam assumed the same symbolism as its own motif.

A strong connection between the Sabians of Harran and the sect at Qumran has been noted recently.<sup>26</sup> Twelve hundred or so graves discovered at the Qumran site, are all

aligned on a North-South axis. Jewish graves, however, always faced Jerusalem. Similar graves have also been found at other locations around the Dead Sea and in Jordan, and these cannot be Moslem graves as they would be facing Mecca. The Arab historian al-Buruni, writing around the mid-ninth-century, wrote that the Sabian/Harranians prayed toward the North, which they considered was the location of “the middle of the dome of Heaven and its highest place.” This not only explains the arrangement of the graves, but suggests that a northern migration of John the Baptist’s followers was an historical fact.

Mohammed’s new religion was borne out of his Sabian convictions. The goal of Islam was to unite the different monotheistic creeds, so he rejected complex Gnostic elements attached to Sabian theology, and the Koran did not condemn other Abrahamic faiths. Nevertheless, Islam represents a monumental effort to impose onto the world the philosophy and religion of John the Baptist. In the Arabic language, John the Baptist is known as ‘as-Sabi,’ which means the ‘Baptizer’ or ‘Immerser.’ John the Baptist was indirectly the founder of the Sabians, and the spiritual father of Mohammed.

Fallout from the division between Jesus and John the Baptist developed into the history of conflict between Christians and Moslems. The initial victories of Islam, which included the capture of territories in Italy, France, and Spain, elicited a military response from European powers. The medieval crusades were supposedly instigated to take back possession of the Holy Land and liberate the Christians from Islamic repression. One group of crusaders, officially known as The Poor Knights of Christ of the Temple of Solomon -- the Knights Templar -- was at the center of events during this period. But it is not certain why they were there, what they were doing, or whose side they were on.

## **THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR**

Genuine facts on the origins of the Knights Templar are scarce. They rose almost without trace. Officially, the order was founded by French noblemen sometime after the first crusade early in the twelfth century, ostensibly with the honorable purpose of safeguarding passage to travelers en route to the Holy Land. This was clearly a ruse, because within a generation the Knights were established as *the* elite crusader fighting force, and had earned a reputation in battle as almost unbeatable opponents. The Templars were granted special privileges by the Pope, and were allowed such an unprecedented degree of independence that within a relatively short space of time they controlled the destiny of nations. Yet their fall from grace was even more sudden and mysterious than their rise had been.

In 1291, the last European stronghold in the Holy Land collapsed, and the demoralized Templar fleet escaped to Cyprus. The major power brokers had already lost their enthusiasm for the Holy Land, and many held the Templars responsible for the failure of past crusades. It was only a matter of time before their enemies struck. Philip IV, the bankrupt king of France, conspired together with the Pope, by then a virtual vassal of the French king, to destroy the Knights Templar and confiscate their wealth and property. Denounced as heretics and blasphemers, they were thrown in jail, tortured by the Inquisition, and their leadership burnt at the stake.

Abolition of the Templars applied throughout Christendom, but some researchers claim that a substantial number escaped persecution and continued to thrive in Scotland and elsewhere as an underground political and religious movement. Later, Templar ideals and aspirations resurfaced in Freemasonry and in mystical sects such as the alchemists and Rosicrucians. Many suspect that influential and powerful secret societies with Templar

origins have manipulated global geo-politics from behind the scenes for centuries. These ideas irk traditional historians who regard the Knights Templar as nothing more than a group of sophisticated warrior-monks.

During the heresy trials, bizarre and conflicting information was presented by prosecution witnesses and defendants. But increasingly, as new research comes to light, it appears that a strange and heretical ideology underpinned both the Templar's involvement in the crusades and their immensely wealthy and influential international power base. The Knights Templar organization was structured not to bolster the establishment, but to undermine it. They sought not to promote Roman Catholicism, but to overthrow it. Lynchpin of the Templar revolution was messianic faith, not in Jesus Christ, but John Christ.

At the height of their power, the Templar network consisted of some 870 castles, churches, and convents, and vast tracts of land spread throughout Europe, Syria, and Palestine. They were outside the jurisdiction of all kings, and were answerable only to the Pope. They were not subject to any local ecclesiastical authority, and were given the right to construct their own churches and maintain their own priesthood. Exempted from all tithes, they could still collect tithes for themselves, and keep any booty or spoils of war. In 1144, even indulgences were granted to benefactors of the Templars. Not only were they an autonomous church within a church, the Knights Templar were the most powerful multi-national corporation the world had ever seen.

Historians grossly underestimate the extent of Templar influence on the affairs of medieval Europe. The Plantagenet Kings of England (1154-1399), adopted John the Baptist as their patron saint [Plate 29], and maintained close links with the Knights Templar. The ensign of St. George, a red cross on a white background that was selected by Plantagenets as the national flag and symbol of England, was a Knights Templar standard. The Plantagenet dynasty was descended from French nobility who ruled the county of Anjou. The first Plantagenet or Angevin king, Henry II, ruled as King of England (1154-1189), Count of Anjou, Duke of Normandy, Duke of Aquitaine, Duke of Gascony, Count of Nantes, Lord of Ireland and, at various times, controlled parts of Wales, Scotland and western France. Significantly, Plantagenets also ruled as Kings of a Templar-controlled Jerusalem from 1131-1205.

As part of Henry II's attempt to increase independence from Rome, he tried to force the Church to accept the jurisdiction of the crown courts. Inevitably, this led to conflict with the Vatican and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas a Becket. The Church refused to concede, and as an uneasy standoff prevailed, the king took counsel from the Knights Templar. The subsequent murder of Becket in 1170 -- an event apparently Henry later regretted -- shocked the medieval world. It was inconceivable that Christian knights would murder the Archbishop of Canterbury (second in rank only to the Pope), inside a Cathedral and in front of witnesses. But the architects were unlikely to have been Christians, in the normally accepted sense of the word. Most probably they were Templar Knights, and they had no reason to fear the consequences of their actions in civil society. They were the untouchables.



Plate 29. The Wilton Diptych, Anonymous, c 1395, National Gallery, London.

John the Baptist puts his arm on the shoulder of the Plantagenet King Richard II of England. Ancestral kings stand behind. The origin and of “Plantagenet” has long baffled historians. But the root is undeniably an amalgam of “plant” and “gene.”

This association derives from the ancient tradition of using agricultural references to denote human bloodline and genealogy.

To whose ancestral lineage, then, did the “Plantagenets” claim to belong? John the Baptist?

The Templars were the most powerful faction behind the forcing of King John to sign the Magna Carta in 1215. John was staying at Templar headquarters when the Barons first made their demands, and Templars actually positioned themselves as supporters of the king, although many Barons were also Templars. The first section of the Charter was designed to advance the Templar agenda to free the English Church from Papal control. Naturally, the Pope denounced the Magna Carta shortly after it had been signed, feigning concern that it took away the authority of the king.

The twelfth and thirteenth century heyday of the Knights Templar coincided with the construction of numerous churches, abbeys and hospitals dedicated to John the Baptist, many of which still stand today. Popular mystical cults emerged that emphasized salvation through baptism and venerated saints of dubious historicity such as St Catherine and St Margaret. Midway through the thirteenth century, the Archbishop of Canterbury

declared that all baptismal fonts were to be kept under lock and key when not in use by the priesthood. This was to protect them from “interference by sorcery.”

As an officially established Order of the Church, receiving an annual papal tribute, the Knights Templar had a special obligation to convert non-believers wherever and whenever possible. Yet from what is known of their time in the Holy Land, the Templars had no interest whatsoever in evangelizing or recruiting on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church. The Knights Templar was a Trojan-horse movement.

Several incidents raised suspicion of their motives, and with the passing of time, contemporaries began to wonder exactly where Templar sympathies lay. In 1154, there was a failed coup in Cairo which resulted in the murder of the caliph, the implacable enemy of the Europeans. The perpetrator, who was the vizier to the caliph, and his son escaped with a large quantity of treasure. Soon afterward they were captured by Templars, who confiscated the wealth and killed the father. The son confessed his desire to convert to Christianity, but the Templars sent him back to Egypt, where he was put to death.

Another notorious episode was even more damning. When the legendary Muslim leader Saladin emerged with his dream of a unified Islamic world, the heretical Islamic sect known as the Assassins was seriously threatened. By 1173, the Assassins had been paying a tribute of two thousand gold pieces to the Templars for two decades by way of protection money, and they sent an ambassador to Jerusalem to seek an alliance against Saladin. Almaric I, the crusader King of Jerusalem, agreed and promised the Templars that he would recompense them financially for the loss of revenues. But during his return home, the Assassin ambassador was killed by Templars.

William of Tyre, a contemporary historian, wrote that the Assassins had expressed their readiness to convert to Christianity in order to seal the alliance with the crusaders. Evidently, this was not an attractive proposition for the Templars, and the ambassador’s murder prevented it from happening.

The Inquisitors accused the Templars of having Moslem sympathies. There may be some validity to this charge, in so far as certain Templars used Islamic symbols on their seals, which is difficult to imagine in a Christian Order, particularly during the time of the crusades. Seals were an extremely important aspect of medieval life, because only a tiny minority of the population was literate. Seals were precursors of the signature, and as such were indispensable in establishing authenticity and credibility in medieval society. Official stamps today used on government documents follow this tradition. Educated outsiders, who expected to see overtly Christian symbolism on a Templar seal, were no doubt surprised to see the crescent moon. Perhaps some seals were intended only for ‘in house’ communication, but Templar symbols revealed a kinship with an esoteric heritage that predated Islam.



Templar Seals

Popular opinion that the Knights Templar were the sworn enemies of Islam is incorrect. They chose their battles carefully and only fought against certain branches of Islam. Throughout most of the period when the Templars were an active fighting force, the Middle East was in a state of virtual civil war between the rulers of Cairo and Damascus, and the smaller sultanates or tribes variously allied with either side. Moslem powers often proposed military alliances with the Europeans, which time and again caused friction because the Templars invariably supported the Damascenes whatever the circumstances merited.

In 1148, the crusaders decided to attack Damascus and a force of 50,000 men laid siege to the city. Yet within five days, the army had disintegrated and the siege collapsed. In the inquest that followed, the Templars were accused of accepting bribes from the Damascenes to arrange the mission's failure.

In 1239, after Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor, had returned to Europe following the sixth crusade, he publicly blamed the Templars for many crusader defeats because they would not enter into alliances with Egyptians. He further accused them of having a treasonable relationship with Damascus Moslems, and of allowing Moslems to perform religious rites in Templar churches.

A similar conflict developed between the Templars and King Louis IX of France. In 1252, the two warring Moslem factions had sent delegations to the king to canvas his support. The Templars showed Louis a signed treaty that they had already negotiated

with the Damascenes, which required his signature. But the king had intended to ally with Cairo and he reacted furiously to this news. The Templars were forced to assemble barefoot and the Grand Master made to publicly confess his error and beg for forgiveness.

Evidently, the Templars shared an ideological affinity with the Damascenes. And if Damascus Moslems were allowed to perform rituals in Templar churches, then *quid pro quo*, Templars were permitted similar access to Moslem holy sites. At this time, Damascus was a melting pot of cultures, and the Sunni branch of Islam was only one of many competing faiths. The Alawi or Nosyrai, and the Druze were also strong there, and as mentioned previously, the focal point for the worldwide veneration of John the Baptist was located in Damascus.

The Assassins, with whom the Templars initially had an adversarial relationship, are suspected of having had a strong influence on Templar mysticism during the later years of their involvement in the Holy Land. Inhabiting the mountainous region of Syria known for its 'Nazarene' origins, they rejected orthodox Islam. Derivation of the "Assassin" name is more likely from the Arabic "assas," meaning 'guardian,' and not from 'hashish' as has often been suggested. The Assassins were keepers of secrets.

During the heresy trials, some Knights made reference to a sacred red cord worn around the neck that was received after a certain initiation ceremony. A similar tradition belonged to the Order of the Peacock Angel, a Kurdish Yazidi secret society, whose members wore a red and black intertwined thread. This practice was probably linked to ancient beliefs regarding the messianic bloodline.<sup>27</sup> It was understood that a spiritual umbilical cord connected to the head was severed at the moment of death. The red cord was symbolic of this umbilical cord and linked initiates to the holy blood.

During torture and interrogation, many Knights revealed that they worshipped a figure known as 'Baphomet,' which individual Templars described as a bearded human head, two heads, or a horned head of some kind. Much speculation has centered on the identity of Baphomet, but rather than list all the possibilities, the most obvious explanation is likely to be nearest to the truth. *Baphe* is Greek for to baptize in water, and *metis* is the Greek for wisdom. Accordingly, Baphomet was either the literal head of John the Baptist or something representative thereof. Among the iconography inside Templar churches, there were usually depictions of John the Baptist's severed head on a platter. And in an era obsessed with the power of relics, the Templars were reputed to have had a saying that "he who controls the head of John the Baptist rules the world."

Once in the Holy Land, crusaders set about repairing old churches and rebuilding holy sites, as well as looking for treasure and valuables. In the town of Sebaste, ancient capital of Samaria, two ruined churches would have had particular significance to the Knights Templar: The Church of the Tomb of John the Baptist, and the Church of the Discovery of the Baptist's Head.

The tomb of John the Baptist in Samaria was first mentioned by Rufinus of Aquileia, who described a pagan assault on Christians that took place in 361-362 CE under Julian the Apostate. Rufinus claimed that pagans broke open the tomb, burnt the bones, and scattered the ashes. Later, a group of monks from Jerusalem succeeded in rescuing some relics.<sup>28</sup>

Matthew recorded that Herod allowed John's disciples to take his body, so conceivably it

was taken to Samaria at some stage. Samaria was a stronghold of the Baptists during the first century, and few Jewish tombs were located there. Later, a church was built over the location of the tomb. The Monophysite John of Beth Rufina, described the tomb's position within the church: "The place was a particular chapel of the temple, protected by a grating because it had two reliquaries covered with gold and silver, before which two lamps burn constantly, one of St. John and the other of St. Elisha; there is also a rug-covered throne on which no one sits." Elisha was the apprentice of Elijah the prophet, thus he was similarly apprenticed to John the Baptist. The throne at the tomb of John was not a Christian creation, but represented John's role and status amongst his followers.

Of the many rumors that circulated about the location of the severed head, one emerged in Sebaste that claimed John the Baptist was imprisoned there and his head was found at the prison site. A church was built over the site of the discovery. Both these churches in Sebaste were shells by the time of the crusades, and were rebuilt by visiting crusaders. After the Europeans left the Holy Land, Moslems took over the Church of the Tomb and transformed the area into a mosque, which was standard Islamic practice with religious sites attached to John the Baptist.

In 1145, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, William I, announced that the relics of John the Baptist had been recovered, and he granted an indulgence of forty days to whoever would contribute to the rebuilding of the church of the Discovery of the Head of the Baptist.<sup>29</sup> A strong possibility exists that Templars restored these two churches, after first removing certain valued items, including perhaps what was believed to be the head of John the Baptist. A Russian abbot, who visited Sebaste in the middle of the twelfth century, remarked that he saw "a beautiful church erected on the site (of the tomb of the Baptist), dedicated to the Precursor, with a most wealthy Frankish friary." The founders of the Templar Order were all French or Frankish noblemen. Who else could have been this "wealthy Frankish friary"? The Moslem writer Usamah, who died in 1188, also visited Sebaste and witnessed a certain ceremony.

I visited the tomb of John, son of Zacharias -- peace be onto them both! -- in the village of Sebastia in the district of Nablus. The prayer over, I walked out into an enclosed courtyard in front of the place of the tomb. There was a door ajar; I opened it and entered a church where I saw about ten elderly men with uncovered heads and hair as white as carded cotton. They stood looking to the east, and had on their chests sticks ending with transverse bars, twisted like the front part of a saddle. On these sticks they swear...Such a view as I saw would soften any heart, but at the same time it displeased and saddened me, not having ever seen among Moslems anyone with such devout zeal.<sup>30</sup>

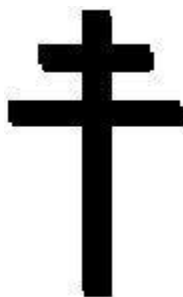
The description reads as though the writer had witnessed a Templar ritual on what would have been hallowed ground for them. It may even have been the Knights of St. John, or Hospitallers. This was an order with close connections to the Templars, and there are grounds to believe they shared some of the same heretical views.<sup>31</sup> The Hospitallers' cross was white on a black mantle, and that of the Templars was the same shape but red on a white background. The design is known as a cross pattée; meaning the arms of the cross broaden outward toward the ends. Initially, both Orders joined forces together on military campaigns, but later developed a rivalry and tended to keep to themselves.

The Templars were given the emblem of the red cross pattée by the Pope, but their original insignia, given by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, consisted of a cross made from one vertical and two evenly spaced horizontal bars, commonly known as the Cross of

Lorraine, because it was incorporated into the heraldic arms of the House of Lorraine during the fifteenth century by Rene d'Anjou. Celebrated as a royal patron of the Renaissance, Rene d'Anjou, among whose many titles was the King of Jerusalem, was a close friend of Leonardo Da Vinci.

In ancient Mesopotamia, this type of cross symbolized the staff of Dumuzi, the Assyrian shepherd king/god, and became an emblem of leadership throughout the region. As John the Baptist was known as the original Good Shepherd, the cross of Lorraine was used to show allegiance to him. During incarceration while awaiting trial, Templar Knights drew the cross of Lorraine on their cell walls.

Although no conclusive proof exists that she ever used it, Joan of Arc has always been associated with the cross of Lorraine. The transcript of her court trial does not specify details of the heresy she was charged with. The Church continues to keep that a closely guarded secret. Nevertheless, considering Rene d'Anjou was Joan's backer, and that his mother, Yolande de Bar, was the mother-in-law of the Dauphin and a strong advocate of Joan's cause, one might speculate with good reason that Joan of Arc had Johannite affiliations, unwittingly or otherwise. This would account for the fact that it took five hundred years for the Catholic Church to grant her sainthood.



Cross of Lorraine

Was the Vatican aware that important Orders participating in the crusades, not only had hidden agendas, but adopted teachings that opposed those of the Church? In certain Church circles, the Templars' true loyalties were probably well known. They simply could not be exposed until the time was right. Hence, the dénouement was postponed until the early fourteenth century, when the advantages of doing so outweighed the disadvantages. In the nineteenth century, the Vatican issued a statement claiming that it knew all along about the Templar's involvement with the Johannite heresy.

The Johannites ascribed to Saint John [the Baptist] the foundation of their Secret Church, and the Grand Pontiffs of the Sect assumed the title of *Christos, Anointed, or Consecrated*, and claimed to have succeeded one another from Saint John by an uninterrupted succession of pontifical powers. He who, at the period of the foundation of the Order of the Temple, claimed these imaginary prerogatives, was named Theoclet; he knew Hughes De Payens, he installed him into the Mysteries and hopes of his pretended church, he seduced him by the notions of Sovereign Priesthood and Supreme royalty, and finally designated him as his successor.<sup>32</sup>

The Templars are now recognized for their advances in architecture, which enabled the construction of the amazing Gothic cathedrals such as Chartres in France, which they sponsored. They possessed a deep appreciation of geometrical principles far in advance of their time. Some writers have convincingly argued that the Templars had a sophisticated and accurate knowledge of the earth's measurements centuries before

conventional science.<sup>33</sup> Templar economic practices involved banks, checks, credit and interest-bearing accounts, and are widely acknowledged as precursors of the modern capitalist banking system. But, in their own time, the Knights Templar were not loved.

The wealth, and the political clout that came with it, made the Templars unpopular with ruling elites, but they were similarly disliked by the masses. When the purge against them began, there were no riots in the streets of Paris; there was no public outrage. The general population considered them to be arrogant, secretive, ostentatious, and aloof. Medieval artists represented them as paying homage to Reynaud the fox, a character that stood for pious fraud and hypocrisy. But above all, the Templars were suspected of having a mysteriously sinister purpose. This was the case, even from the earliest days, as the following quotes from twelfth century documents testify,

“We have heard that certain of you have been troubled by persons of limited wisdom, as if your profession, to which you have dedicated your life, to carry arms for the defense of Christians against the enemies of the faith and of peace, as if, that profession is either illicit or pernicious, that is either a sin or an impediment to a greater achievement.”<sup>34</sup>

For the Knights of the Temple with the pope's approval claim for themselves the administration of churches, they occupy them through surrogates, and they whose normal occupation it is to shed human blood in a certain way presume to administer the blood of Christ...Above all it would be a sign of true religion if they refrained from the administration of those things which by God's prohibition it is not permitted for them to touch. Still it is entirely wicked that, enticed by the love of money, they open churches which were closed by bishops. Those suspended from office celebrate the sacraments, they bury the dead whom the Church refuses, and they act once a year so that during the rest of the year the erring people are deaf to the voice of the Church; and he who cannot be coerced seems to be corrected. Therefore, they travel around to churches, they praise the merits of their own Orders, they bring absolution for crimes and sometimes they preach a new gospel, falsifying the word of God because they preach living not by grace but by a price, by pleasure and not by truth. And in the end, when they convene in their lairs late at night, 'after speaking of virtue by day they shake their hips in nocturnal folly and exertion'. If one moves in this fashion towards Christ, then the doctrine of the Fathers which teaches that the narrow and steep path heads towards the true life of man is false and vain.<sup>35</sup>

The Templar leadership held the same contempt for Jesus and the Christians as the original followers of John the Baptist. Under oath, most Templars confessed to denying Jesus and the Virgin Mary, and to desecrating the cross by various means. Some revealed that at the time of initiation into the Order they were told “Jesus is nothing. He is a false prophet.” The Knights Templar became a place of solace for antichurch heretics, and eventually the word spread. Church leaders in Europe demanded the withdrawal of Templar privileges, and as early as 1175, Pope Alexander III publicly condemned the Order for allowing the burial of people in Templar cemeteries who had been excommunicated by the Church.

Long before the collapse of the European presence in Palestine, many Europeans had begun to look at the Templars with serious misgivings. But perhaps the truth was that the Knights Templars had become too powerful, too independent within the Johannite Church. They no longer served the interests of those on whose behalf the order was

created, and the secular Johannite leadership was resentful of them. Several years before he moved to destroy the order, the young Philip IV had applied to join the Templars. His membership request was summarily rejected for reasons unknown.

## THE HOLY GRAIL

The appearance of Grail literature during the halcyon days of the Knights Templar was not accidental. In its original format, the legend of the Holy Grail was an epic of Templar mythology and rites of passage. Although the Grail is commonly assumed to be a sacred object or spiritual ideal connected to the blood of Jesus, this is only because Christian writers hijacked and expanded on the original Baptist version of the Grail story.

The concept behind the Holy Grail was around a long time before the end of the twelfth century, when Chrétien de Troyes produced the first known Grail romance, *Perceval, the Story of the Grail*. The Grail legend was patterned along similar lines to the “cauldron of rebirth” of Celtic folklore, the “horn of plenty” from Greek mythology, and the “tree of life” of Jewish mysticism. In other words, it represented the ideal.

Nowhere in Chrétien’s poem is Jesus either mentioned or alluded to. Neither is the reader told what the Grail is, apart from that it is golden and carried by a maiden. It is considered to be a type of dish, as Chretien at one point mentioned “a hundred boar’s heads on grails” -- which must realistically have been carried on platters or dishes of some kind. The central scene occurred when Perceval, on his quest to win his knighthood, encountered the “Fisher King” at the Grail castle but neglected to ask him the enigmatic question, “whom does the Grail serve?” Later, Perceval learns, much to his distress, that his oversight had caused a terrible affliction on the land, and that the Fisher King was his uncle, making Perceval a member of the Grail family.

Chrétien died around 1188, before he was able to finish the work, so he did not live to witness the explosion of interest in the Holy Grail throughout Western Europe in the decades that followed. Several Grail stories have survived from this period, each claiming to tell the ‘real story.’ The most celebrated and successful was undoubtedly *Parzival*, composed between 1195 and 1216, by Wolfram von Eschenbach of Bavaria. Wolfram began his version by claiming that Chrétien’s account was flawed, and that his was more accurate as he had been taught the true story of the Grail by a gentleman who had read the original text, written in a “heathen” language by a “scholar of nature descended from Solomon and born of a family which had long been Israelite until baptism became our shield against the fires of hell.” The source of Wolfram’s Grail legend was not a Christian, but a Baptist of high ranking Jewish ancestry.

Wolfram adhered to the hermetic principle that all of man’s affairs, past, present, and future are written in the constellations, and that at one time angels had left the Grail on the earth. “Since then, baptized men have had the task of guarding it, and with such chaste discipline that those who are called to the service of the Grail are always noblemen.” Described as a special stone of immense significance, the Grail is mysteriously connected to God, royalty, and to a specific bloodline. Considering that there is also a “Grail family,” this ‘stone’ is not to be confused with a pebble or boulder, but rather it is the seed inside the fruit -- an ancient idea found in most religions that symbolized the regeneration of life and lineage.

A constant theme of *Parzival* is that those responsible for the Grail are “baptized men,” and they alone are worthy to be associated with it. As they were subordinate to no

ecclesiastical hierarchy, and not subject to the Pope or the Church of Rome, this “baptism” is unlikely to have been the traditional Christian sacrament. Wolfram stated on several occasions that Grail knights are Templars:

Always when they ride out, as they often do, it is to seek adventure. They do so for their sins, these Templars, whether their reward be defeat or victory.<sup>36</sup>

These independent Baptist knights are tasked by God to protect and preserve the “Grail Family.” But absolute secrecy is required of them.

Upon the Grail it was now found written that any Templar whom God’s hand appointed master over foreign people should forbid the asking of his name or race, and that he should help them to their rights. If the question is asked of them they shall have his help no longer.<sup>37</sup>

This type of saintliness is very different from the Christian ideal. The Grail knights resemble more of a secret society than a charitable order. They wished to protect their identity because even though the Templars preached a heresy, they did not wish to be publicly identified as heretics.

Chrétien’s original work was written in response to the loss of Jerusalem in 1188, when the faith of the Templars needed renewal. He came from Champagne, the area where most of the founders of the Knights Templar were born. Chrétien’s Holy Grail could easily be understood as the platter which carried the head of John the Baptist, or as an allusion to Baphomet. The first Christianized version of the Grail story was written as a riposte by Robert de Boron, a decade or so after Chrétien. Robert claimed he was drawing on an earlier source than Chrétien, and one of his main goals was to eliminate confusion about what the Holy Grail was. According to Robert, it was the chalice used by Jesus at the Last Supper. It came into the possession of Joseph of Arimathea, who used it to collect Jesus’ blood during the crucifixion. Members of the “Grail family” were relatives and descendants of Joseph of Arimathea. The Fisher king was Joseph’s brother-in-law, and Perceval was a grandson of the Fisher King. Robert was trapped, however, by official church doctrine that stipulated Jesus had no other family save Mary, his mother -- so the Grail family was linked instead to Joseph of Arimathea. The Grail family in Templar-inspired versions was connected to the lineage of John the Baptist.



The head of John the Baptist on a golden charger or platter was a popular subject for certain medieval artists. Did it represent the Holy Grail of the Johannite Church?

Anfortas, the Fisher King in Wolfram's *Parzival*, is initially described as "wearing clothes of such quality that had he been lord of the whole earth they could not have been finer. His hat was of peacock's feathers and lined inside."<sup>38</sup> Peacock feathers signaled that Anfortas belonged to the messianic royal lineage. The hero Parzival became Grail King, and thus achieved messianic status, once he returned with the Holy Grail, found with help from his family and various Templar Knights.

Modern authors, who suggest that the Knights Templar were guardians of the secret lineage of Jesus, need to reconsider. Linking Jesus with the esoteric meaning behind the Holy Grail is perfectly legitimate, but the original medieval presentation of the Grail story was from the Baptist perspective. If Jesus and John were brothers, the bloodline issue is further complicated, but it is hard to imagine that the Knights Templars, or any successors to the Templar legacy, had interest in protecting descendants of Jesus.

The Knights Templar's demise coincided with the end of the Grail literature. Revived two hundred years later in Sir Thomas Mallory's *La Morte D'Arthur*, the Holy Grail was

established as Robert de Boron's cup of the Last Supper. Mallory moved King Arthur to center stage, so he was no longer the peripheral figure of early Grail romances. Later, Victorian artists introduced King Arthur and the Holy Grail to the modern era and ever since it has been one of the most popular myths in Western culture. But meaning of the Grail remains inscrutable.

## AGNUS DEI

*Agnus Dei* -- Latin Vulgate for the 'Lamb of God' -- was an essential Templar emblem. Templar seals featured the *Agnus Dei*, usually with its right leg folded over a shepherd's staff, and with a cross pattée in the background. Some seals even have the legend, "TESTIS SUM AGNI," meaning "I am a witness to the Lamb." This particular lamb motif predated the Templars, and was a common feature in early medieval illustrations of Beatus' *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. Beatus was an eighth century monk living in Spain during the Islamic occupation, who mostly wrote compilations of texts from early Church Fathers. For reasons unknown, his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* was popular in certain monastic circles. Twenty six lavishly decorated copies, infused with esoteric symbolism, have survived dated between the tenth and sixteenth centuries. [Plate 30].

Although the significance of the leg position is unknown, it held a strange importance for the Templars. Every knight was buried with his legs arranged in the same manner. Tombstones of wealthier knights were often intricately carved with an image of the deceased laid to rest in the same configuration.<sup>39</sup>

Stone carvings of the *Agnus Dei* are a common feature above the entry door to Templar churches, particularly in England. And to most observers, this insignia would belong to a Christian order. *Agnus Dei* derives from a well known verse in the fourth Gospel by which John the Baptist identified Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"<sup>40</sup> As John had no reason to subscribe to the Christian theological view of Jesus that emerged decades later, this saying was clearly inauthentic and, like other verses in the fourth Gospel, was put in John's mouth to hide the truth from new recruits to the Church.



Plate 30. Illustration from Beatus Manuscript, c 10<sup>th</sup> century The Lamb is victorious over the serpent and the dragons.

The 'lamb' reference was derived from the paschal lamb of the original Passover event. In Moses' time, God sent a plague over Egypt to kill all first-born sons. The Jews were instructed to protect themselves from the angel of death by marking their doorways with lamb's blood as a substitute for the first-born Israelites. The sacrifice of the paschal lamb came to represent the messianic covenant between God and the chosen people. In Templar theology, the true Lamb of God was John the Baptist, the first-born son. The Christians stole John's title and applied it to Jesus.

The end of the early period of Grail literature was a signal for the Baptist heterodoxy to be expressed in works of art. Numerous masterpieces promulgated Johannite themes using the 'Lamb of God' motif. John was depicted with a shepherd's staff, sometimes holding a lamb, or with a lamb at his feet.

The Flemish painter Jan Van Eyck, acknowledged as one of the greatest artists of all time, is credited with introducing oil painting techniques to Florentine artists such as Botticelli and Leonardo Da Vinci. His influence was extraordinary, and in several ways Van Eyck was a facilitator of the Renaissance. His most famous work, *The Adoration of the Lamb*, a twenty-four-paneled polyptych completed in 1432, was at least a decade in the making. Known as the “Ghent Altarpiece,” it is located in the city’s San Bavo cathedral [Plate 31]. The concept behind the painting is the apocalyptic vision of the end of history as described in the Book of Revelation, in which the “Lamb” is the principal character.

In the center panel, the Lamb stands on Mount Zion in the New Jerusalem. Blood flows from a wound on the Lamb’s side into a grail or chalice. Behind, in the left background, is a crucifix. Directly in front of the Lamb, an octagonal fountain aligned to its center, almost touches the Lamb’s pedestal. A Latin inscription on the fountain, “this is the source of the water of life, originating from the seat of God and the Lamb,” alludes to the eternal life-giving properties of baptism.

Octagonal fonts and pillars were common architectural constructs in Templar churches. One of the most famous octagonal structures in the world is the ‘Dome of the Rock’ built on the site of Solomon’s Temple [Plate 32], where the Templars established their headquarters. According to Islam, the rock placed in the center of the dome is the spot from where Mohammed was taken into the heavens by Gabriel. In Florence, the spiritual home of Renaissance Johannism, the city’s celebrated Baptistery is also an octagonal building.

Van Eyck insinuated Templar crosses throughout the panels. On the reverse side of one panel, John the Baptist touches a Templar cross with his famous right-hand forefinger. Two panels are filled with Templar Knights on horseback, come to worship the Lamb. In the lower center panel, a group of cardinals turn to face away from the Lamb. And in the left foreground, a group of bearded figures, presumably rabbis, also look away.

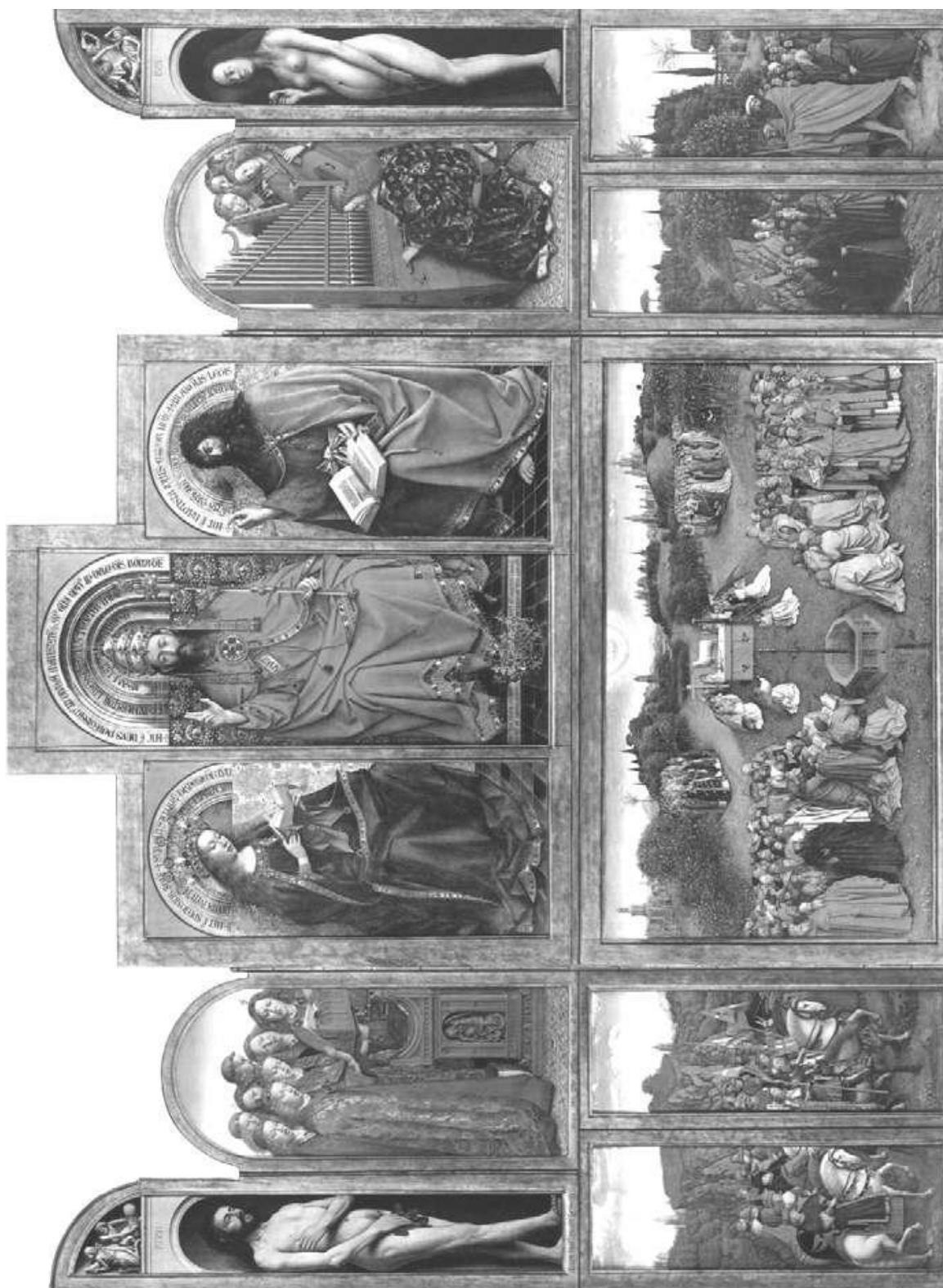


Plate 31. Jan Van Eyck, *Ghent Altarpiece*, c 1432, Cathedral at St Bavo, Ghent

In Revelation, the crowd around the Lamb are described as “these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes.”<sup>41</sup> Van Eyck’s message is that the Catholic hierarchy, along with the Jewish rabbis, did not recognize the Lamb, so would not be saved on the last day.

Most art historians take for granted that Van Eyck painted the Lamb as a representation of Jesus. They also assume that the prominent regal figure who sits in the top center

panel, directly above the Lamb is Jesus. The words, “King of Kings” are painted on his gown, and together with the crowns upon his head, indicate that this is the character from Revelation 19, “and on his head are many crowns... On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, “King of Kings and Lord of Hosts.” He will “rule the nations with a rod of iron.” Traditionally, Christians have interpreted these verses as a reference to Jesus. However, Revelation 19 continues with the crucial, and usually neglected line; ‘he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself.’ If this royal personage was the returning Jesus, then the prophecy was meaningless because *everyone* knows his name. The prophecy only makes sense if it refers to someone unknown, or as yet unborn. .



Plate 32. The Octagonal *Dome of the Rock*, Jerusalem

Revelation stated that “the armies of heaven, wearing white linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.”<sup>42</sup> In the Johannite movement, from Qumran Essenes to the Knights Templar, all white was standardized wear. Messianic prophecy belonged to them. With Templar crosses embroidered into his garments, the coming savior of Van Eyck’s masterpiece was part of the Baptist Grail family.

Despite widespread speculation on Templar involvement in the occult, their scientific and practical leanings are well known. It is unlikely, therefore, that they believed in the literal return from the dead of any historical figure. Such ideas were probably mocked as fantasies concocted by the Roman Church. And there is no evidence to suggest the Templars believed in reincarnation.

The painting was known to be a particular favorite of Adolf Hitler, and was confiscated by the Nazis during the Second World War. Doubtless, part of its appeal was the theme that Jews and Catholics were persona non grata in the millennial kingdom -- the Third Reich. Hitler was reputed to have been an avid reader of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival*, and his favorite piece of music was known to have been Wagner’s *Parzival*.

The well-documented obsession of the Nazi leadership with Grail-related artifacts strongly suggests a belief that their mission was to consummate the quest of the original Grail Knights .

Presumably, the Nazis had in mind the “Teutonic Knights of St. Mary’s Hospital of Jerusalem,” a Germanic version of the Knights Templar, rather than the Frankish original. Formed in Jerusalem in 1190, the Teutonic Knights were an order exclusively for German born nobility. Based on the same model as the Knights Templars, they were answerable only to Popes, had a separate and distinct priesthood, and were exempt from the jurisdiction of any secular or ecclesiastical powers. Their heartland was the Baltic region, but they were intermittently involved, politically and militarily, throughout central and eastern Europe. Influenced by the Teutonic Knights, many German intellectuals and aristocrats developed anti-Catholic sentiments, which was later of great help to Martin Luther in his fight with Rome.

Following the annexation of Austria in 1938, Hitler confiscated the “Spear of Longinus,” alleged to be the Roman spear that wounded Jesus on the cross, from a Vienna Museum. He did not collect memorabilia for its monetary value; it was the spear’s ‘anti-Christ’ properties that appealed. One myth connected to it was that its owner had the power to rule the world. It had once belonged to Charlemagne, and was seized by Napoleon from the Holy Roman Emperor a thousand years later. The Spear of Longinus was adopted as a totem of the Teutonic Knights, and was purportedly an inspiration behind the Order’s creation.<sup>43</sup>

The Grail family, given a strictly genetic interpretation by the Nazis, became the Aryan master race. The destiny of the German people, therefore, was to bring “salvation” to rest of the world. Hitler was regarded as the end time redeemer figure in Revelation who will “smite the nations.” As a prayer composed for children in Nazi orphanages testifies,

Leader, my Leader, given to me by God, protect me  
And sustain my life for a long time

You have rescued Germany out of deepest misery,  
To you I owe my daily bread

Leader, my Leader, my belief, my light

Leader my Leader, do not abandon me

The occult side of Nazi ideology is still shadowy. The victorious allied powers were determined not to publicize it, and defendants at Nuremberg were forbidden from making any references to Nazi esoteric beliefs. It was essential that the public believed Nazi atrocities were motivated only by brute primitive instincts.

Matthias Grunewald was one of most highly regarded painters of the German Renaissance. Born in the 1470s, he served as court painter and hydraulic engineer to two successive archbishops of Mainz, from about 1510 to 1525. It is thought that he left this post because of his Lutheran sympathies, but Grunewald was far more extreme than Luther. His greatest work, the *Issenheim Altarpiece*, was completed in 1515, two years before the world ever heard of Martin Luther [Plate 33].

The center panel is a crucifixion scene that has a reputation for inspiring awe and wonder among those who see it, though not only because of the artist’s technique. Grunewald

placed a character in the crucifixion scene not mentioned in any gospel as being present. It was a bold move, not because the person he depicted was dead by the time of Jesus' crucifixion, but because Grunewald had resurrected John the Baptist to return as a prosecutor to accuse Jesus.

John stands to the right, holding a book with his left hand, while pointing sharply at Jesus with his right-hand forefinger [Plate 80c]. The gesture is not made to identify Jesus, but to indict him. This is overlooked simply because it is so far outside the accepted myth.

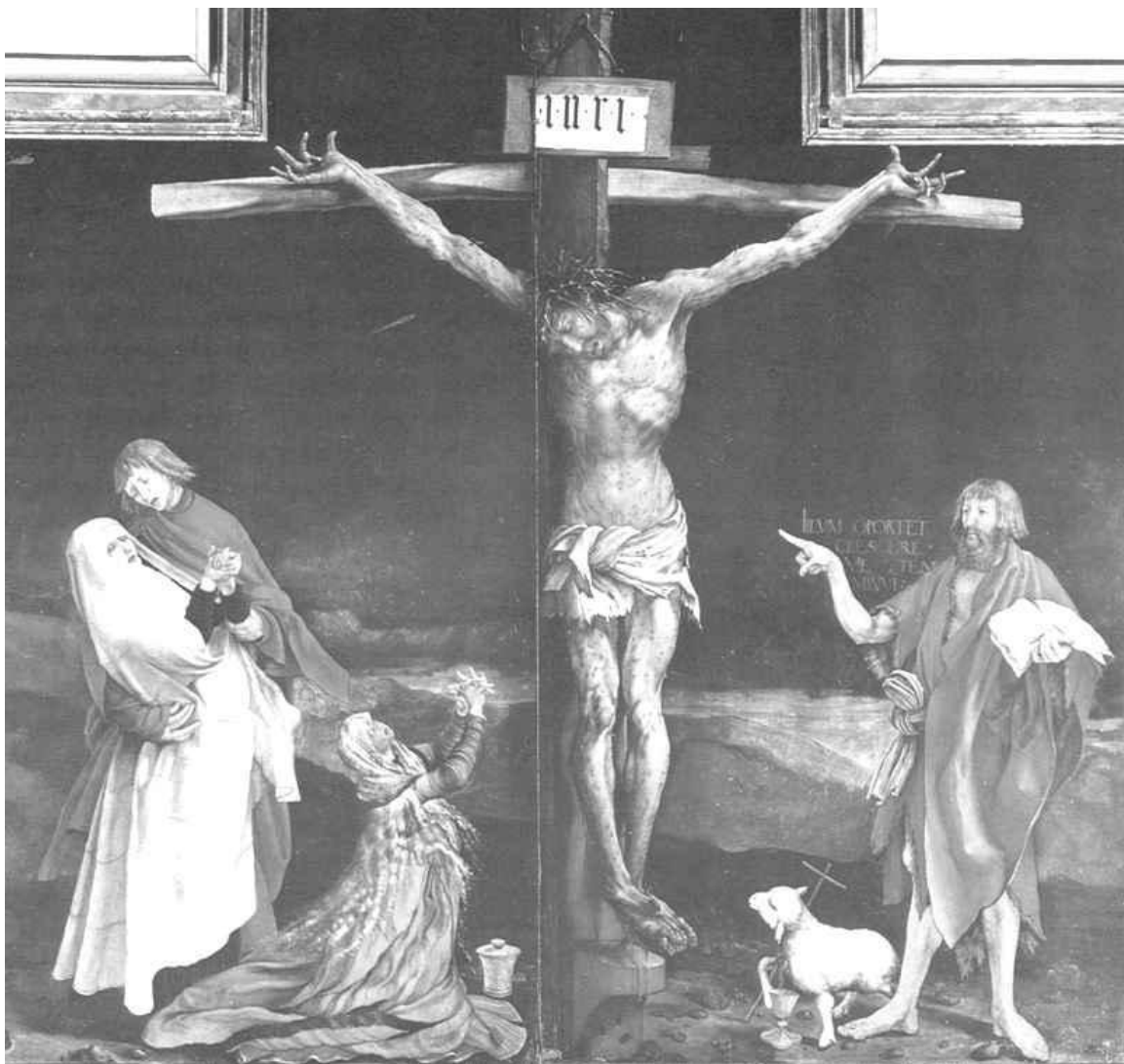


Plate 33. Matthias Grunewald, *Issenheim Altarpiece*, 1515, Musee d'Unterlinden, France

The Lamb of God stands loyally at John the Baptist's feet, depicted exactly as it appears in Templar seals and insignia -- right leg folded, holding a shepherd's staff. As in the Ghent Altarpiece, blood runs from the Lamb's side into a golden chalice, or grail. The Latin Vulgate, "He must increase, and I must decrease," is painted as though spoken by John. But if Grunewald wanted to emphasize that John was lesser than Jesus, it would have been simpler to have omitted him from the painting. John's posture indicates that this Bible verse was a slander, falsely attributed to him. Grunewald brought John back from the dead to condemn Jesus, not to laud him. Crucifixion was justice served.

One of the best encapsulations of the medieval Grail/Baptist heresy is the Coat of Arms of the Tallow Chandlers of London [Plate 34]. The Tallow Chandlers were originally a

guild of candle makers, formed to promote educational and charitable purposes in London around the year 1300. John the Baptist is their patron saint.

Both crests at the top of the Coat of Arms feature the head of John the Baptist. On the left side, a female angel holds a golden charger or serving plate on which John's severed head rests. On the right, John's head lays on a platter centered on an alchemical sun. The motto at the base of the Arms is the Latin Vulgate, "Ecce Agnus Dei qui tollit peccata mundi -- "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." There is no representation of Jesus anywhere. John the Baptist is the Lamb of God. It is he who takes away the sins of the world.

The angels wear golden crowns of five five-pointed stars, not to signify that 'light' is the business of candle makers, but because the pentangle star was a well known symbol of esoteric spirituality, and a central component of Templar/Baptist iconography. Similarly, the scallop shell, resting on top of the three dove shield, was a familiar motif in the mystical imagery of the period, best known from Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, but also associated with Mary, the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. The scallop shell was also linked with John the Baptist [Plate 35]. Turtle doves were also commonly used Templar symbols. For diplomatic reasons, the "Agnus Dei" verse replaced the earlier motto of the Tallow Chandlers, "Quae arguuntur a lumine manifestantur" -- "Things not in dispute are made clear by the light."<sup>44</sup> In the era of the Inquisition that followed the persecution of the Templars, the potential identification of John the Baptist as 'the light' of the Tallow Chandlers would have been much too dangerous.

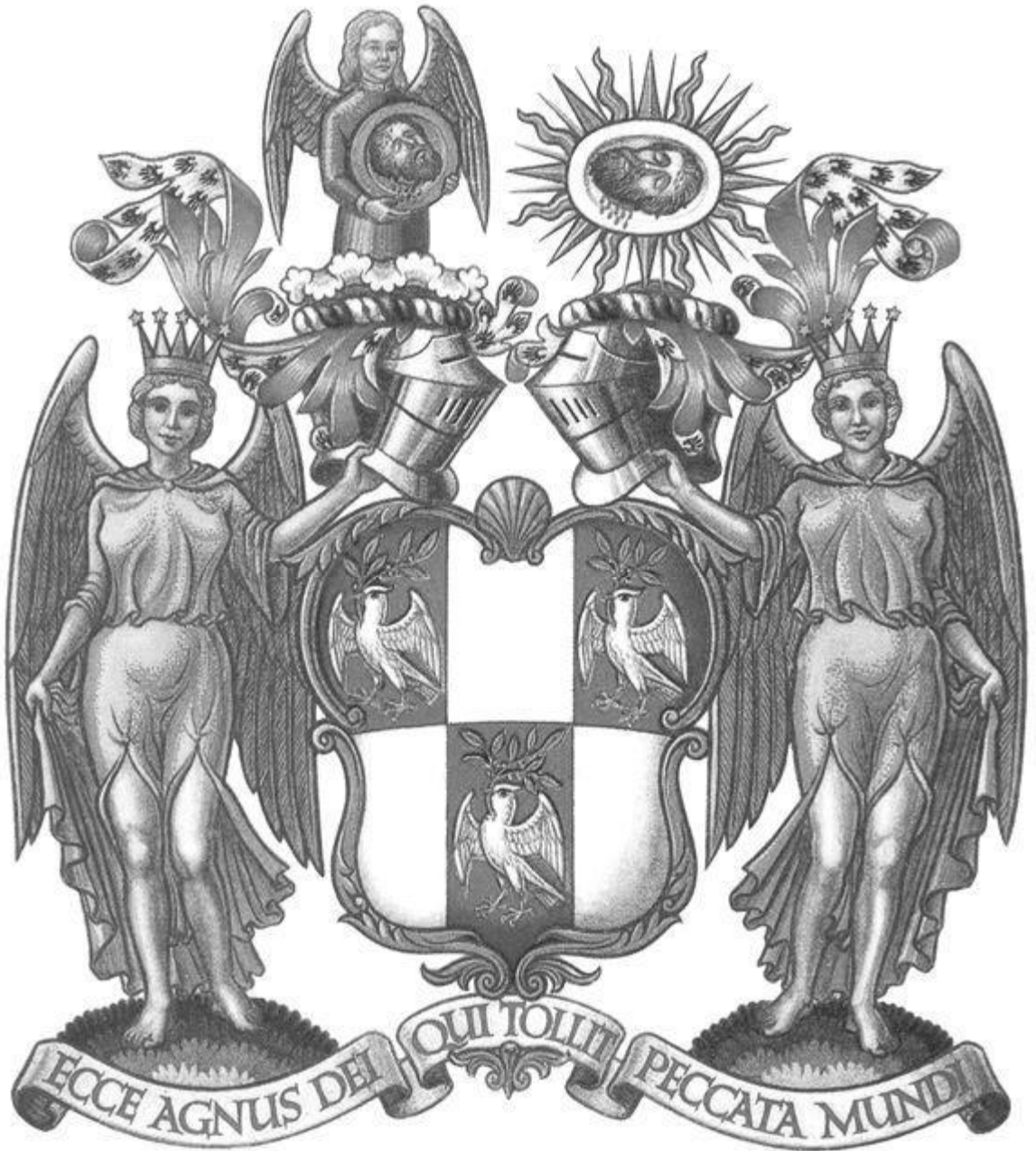


Plate 34. Coat of Arms, Tallow Chandlers, London, UK

### **BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX**

The remarkable achievements of Bernard of Clairvaux make him *the* outstanding figure in twelfth century Church history. More than any king or Pope, Bernard shaped the course of important events. A deeply religious man, politics was also his field of expertise. He preached to kings, instructed Popes and cardinals, hired and fired bishops, built abbeys and cathedrals, instituted a military order, and mobilized a crusade to the Holy Land. He was born in 1090, during the height of the monastic reform movement. Forty years later, Bernard had almost the whole of Christendom dancing to his tune.



A statue of John the Baptist at Orleans Cathedral, France, shows him reflecting on a scallop shell he holds in his right hand. Plate 35.

In the face of widespread corruption in the Church and the moral decline of the priesthood, the monastic lifestyle had come to be regarded as the ideal Christian vocation. Several Popes were former monks, and by the beginning of the twelfth century the papacy had established a degree of independence from the Holy Roman Emperors. The new power of the Papacy was proven by the overwhelming response to Urban V's call for the first crusade that led to the 'liberation' of Jerusalem in 1099. Popes and Holy wars, however, needed sponsors. And whoever paid the piper called the tune. So with this in mind, and with Jerusalem safely under its control, the Johannite Church infiltrated the monastic movement.

Not for Bernard the customary agony of the saint who struggles to overcome his demons; he had no great crisis in coming to terms with God or salvation. He was only twenty two

years old, but his focus was already set when he joined the recently formed and ailing Cistercian order of Benedictine monks in 1112. His impact was immediate; his rise meteoric.

According to legend, Bernard's family was horrified when he announced his intention to join a monastery. But the legend does not explain why thirty two of his noble friends and family members joined the Cistercians at the same time. Clearly, a great deal of forethought was involved. The grand strategy was not to escape from the world, but to change it. Effective control of the abbey at Citeaux was usurped by the newcomers, and on account of his charisma, intellect, and energy, Bernard emerged as the leader and spokesman.

In 1115, the Count of Champagne, a cousin of Bernard's and one of the wealthiest men in Europe, donated land to build Clairvaux (Valley of Holy Light) abbey, in Champagne, a few miles from Troyes. This signaled the start of a period of explosive growth for the Cistercian order. During Bernard's lifetime over three hundred abbeys were founded. Never before or since has Europe witnessed such phenomenal development in a monastic order.

Similar to the Essenes at Qumran, Cistercians wore white robes, practiced daily ablutions, followed a strict dietary regimen, and all personal wealth belonged to the community. But more significant was the shared conviction that they were establishing the kingdom of God on earth. Bernard of Clairvaux was a new Teacher of Righteousness, leading the new "sons of light." A special military corps, the Knights Templar, was being prepared for heavenly war against the "Kittim," not Imperial Rome, but the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1118, three years after the founding of Clairvaux, Hughes de Payen, another relative of the Count of Champagne, arrived in Jerusalem as leader of the original Templar faction in the Holy Land. His second-in-command, Andre de Montbard, a co-founder and a future Grand Master of the Knights Templar, was Bernard's uncle. The Count of Champagne made at least two trips to the Holy Land and officially joined the Templars in 1124. The patriarch of Jerusalem, who formally recognized the Knights Templar in 1120, was also a family member.

Bernard quickly built a vast network of agents, recruiters, and spies. Financed, not with monastic farming revenues, but by the Knights Templar and their wealthy supporters among the nobility. He interceded with Pope Honorius II to obtain papal recognition for the order, and subsequently a Church council was convened at Troyes in January 1128 to officially legalize the Knights Templar. During the council, the Templars received their new rule written by Bernard, based on the rule that Cistercians lived by, and not dissimilar to the rule at Qumran.

Bernard composed a special tract, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, in which he described the new order as, "unknown by the ages. They fight two wars, one against the adversaries of flesh and blood, and another against a spiritual army of wickedness in the heavens." It extolled the virtues of the Templars, promising heavenly rewards for those who contributed to their cause. It was, in effect, a Baptist indulgence, a substitute for the traditional Vatican practice of selling places in heaven along with the forgiveness of sins. Land and money poured in. The wealth and prestige of the Cistercian order grew hand in hand with the Knights Templar. In a relatively short space of time, Bernard had earned the reputation and the resources to be a popemaker. And, in order to move to the next

level, that was precisely what he needed to be.

The abbey of Clairvaux alone produced eight Cardinals during the twelfth century. But Bernard especially groomed one of his former pupils, Gregorio Paparesci, for the papacy. When Honorius II died in 1130, Gregorio was already the papal legate to France. On the night of the Pope's death, a minority of Cardinals hastily elected Gregorio as Pope Innocent II. He was forced to flee Rome, however, when Anacletus II was elected shortly afterward by the majority. Bernard called a special synod in France which declared Anacletus' election invalid, and he traveled extensively to rally support for Innocent. Following audiences with several crowned heads of Europe, King Lothair of Germany was persuaded to send an army to invade Rome and oust Anacletus from the Vatican.

Inconclusive fighting dragged on for many years. Innocent only took his seat in Rome in 1138, following Anacletus' death in January that year, and after his duly elected successor, Victor IV, conveniently resigned two months later. Once Bernard's surrogate was the undisputed head of the Church, a Papal Bull was issued, *Omne datum optimum*, which made the Knights Templar invulnerable. Technically, from this moment onward they were responsible only to the Pope. No bishop or ecclesiastical authority, no king or prince of Christendom, had authority to interfere in Templar affairs.

Innocent II did not enamor the papacy to the population of Rome. On his death in 1143, the citizenry, weary of incessant papal corruption, established a Commune and declared Rome an independent state. His successor, Lucius II died in battle against the forces of the Commune, and the next three popes were each forced out of the city at one point. Eugenius III (1145-1154), a former star pupil of Bernard's, and Eugenius' protégé, Hadrian VI (1154-59), were not conventional died-in-the-wool Catholics. To the consternation of believers, and surely to the delight of anti-Catholic heretics everywhere, Hadrian used the pretext of his dispute with the Commune in Rome to ban all Church sacraments in the city.

After the loss of the county of Edessa, retaken by Moslem forces in 1144, Eugenius called for a second crusade in 1145. The reaction to his appeal was lukewarm, so Bernard intervened and took personal responsibility for the success of the campaign. In 1148, the kings of France and Germany agreed to send armies to the Holy Land. For various reasons, however, the second crusade ended as a humiliating fiasco. To deflect responsibility for the debacle, Bernard declared that it was God's punishment for the "immorality" of the Christian soldiers.

Official Church history regards Bernard of Clairvaux as a devout and unfailingly orthodox Roman Catholic. Surviving texts of sermons attributed to Bernard are cited to prove his piety. Yet scores of them are dedicated to the Song of Songs -- a paean to sexual love and the physical attraction between the king and queen. This theme holds no relevance for a celibate priesthood and does not validate any Church doctrine. Bernard seldom mentioned incidents in the New Testament, nor did he quote extensively from it, save to wax lyrical on the "bride and the bridegroom." Though he is widely credited with encouraging veneration of Mary, there is no evidence that he understood her as the mother of Jesus. For example, the oath of allegiance that Bernard wrote for the Knights Templar required them to have the "Obedience of Bethany -- the castle of Mary and Martha." In other words, their loyalty was to Mary of Bethany, synonymous with Mary Magdalene.

Place names in the New Testament held a much greater significance than mere

geographical locations. Bethany's relevance was as the place "beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing."<sup>45</sup> The heart of Bethany in modern day Jordan is a small natural hill called Elijah's Hill, or *Tell Mar Elias* in Arabic. Local tradition, for thousands of years, has identified it as the place from where Elijah ascended to heaven. As Jesus identified John the Baptist with Elijah, so Bethany was similarly linked with John. The title "Mary of Bethany" signified that Mary was part of John's inner circle. For Bernard of Clairvaux and the Knights Templar, "Obedience to Bethany" meant submission to the Baptist cause, or in practical terms, the House of Champagne. When Bernard appealed for the second crusade to the king and queen of France in front of an assembled multitude of thousands, he did so at the Basilica of Mary Magdalene at Vezelay, where local legend claimed she was buried and her relics were kept. In the treasured myths and iconography of the Knights Templar, there was no place for Mary, the mother of Jesus.

In Catholic mythology, Bernard was praying to a statue of the Madonna and Child when he asked, "show me that you are a mother." Looking up, he saw drops of milk fall miraculously from Mary's breast. Myths, however, are subject to interpretation. Popular folklore in parts of France claimed that Mary Magdalene had sailed to France to avoid persecution in the Holy Land. She gave birth to a "holy child" on French soil. A cult of Magdalene was fervently maintained by those who held an unorthodox view of the sacred feminine. Statues of the Madonna and child were everywhere, and churches dedicated to Our Lady -- "Notre Dame" -- dotted the landscape. But to which "Lady" did they belong? As the Cathars discovered, dedication to the wrong Mary could prove fatal. In the Church of John, public devotion to Mary was kept deliberately ambiguous.

Fasting himself to emaciation and ill health, Bernard might be described today as a religious fanatic. Yet he had a brilliant mind. In the medieval world, Bernard of Clairvaux was a Gulliver among Lilliputians. He ran rings around contemporary Catholics, dazzled by his intelligence and overawed by his demeanor. Not everyone, however, was blinded by his light.

Arnold of Brescia was born in the same year as Bernard, 1090, but that was one of few things they had in common. An Augustinian monk with an impeccable reputation, Arnold's life's work was to campaign against corruption, simony, and worldliness in the Church. His chief target was Bernard of Clairvaux, "puffed up with vainglory, and jealous of all those who have won fame in letters or religion, if they are not of his school."

Arnold was a serious threat, and had to be silenced. Exiled from Italy and France, and denounced by Innocent II at the Lateran Council in 1139, he was forced to take refuge in Switzerland. With Bernard in hot pursuit, Arnold eventually found a protector in Bohemia who would not be intimidated. Finding his way to Rome, he began to speak out against hypocrisy in the higher clergy. Though subsequently excommunicated, he was welcomed by the Roman population in general, and became the leader of the experimental egalitarian society known as the Commune of Rome.

While Bernard campaigned across Europe rallying support for the second crusade, Arnold accused the Cardinals of acting like "Jews and Pharisees" against true Christian interests. Pope Eugenius III was charged with "filling his own purse" rather than "imitating the zeal of the Apostles whose place he filled." In due course, Arnold's supporters forced the Pope out of Rome. Naturally, the Commune was regarded as a dangerous challenge to the accepted order of medieval society, and the Papacy successfully conspired with the Holy Roman Emperor to overthrow the fledgling

democracy. In 1155, Arnold was captured, hanged, and burnt at the stake by Papal guards.

When given the opportunity to debate with Peter Abelard, France's leading reformist theologian and logician, and a known sympathizer of Arnold of Brescia, Bernard declined. He did not need to justify himself. You were either with him or against him. His passion was a radical millennial ideology. And it was this ardent belief, and not a righteous desire to rescue Christians from Islamic repression, that enabled him to legitimize the bloodshed of crusader wars. For Johannites, the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 had crystallized messianic expectation. In his tract, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, Bernard wrote

Hail land of promise, which, formerly flowing only with milk and honey for they possessors, now stretchest forth the food of life and the means of salvation for the entire world.<sup>46</sup>

The "means of salvation," was not through belief in the sacraments of the Holy Catholic Church and the redemptive death of Jesus. According to Bernard, "salvation" came to mankind through the Knights Templar by dint of their mission in the Holy Land. Wolfram von Eschenbach advanced the same opinion in *Parzival*.

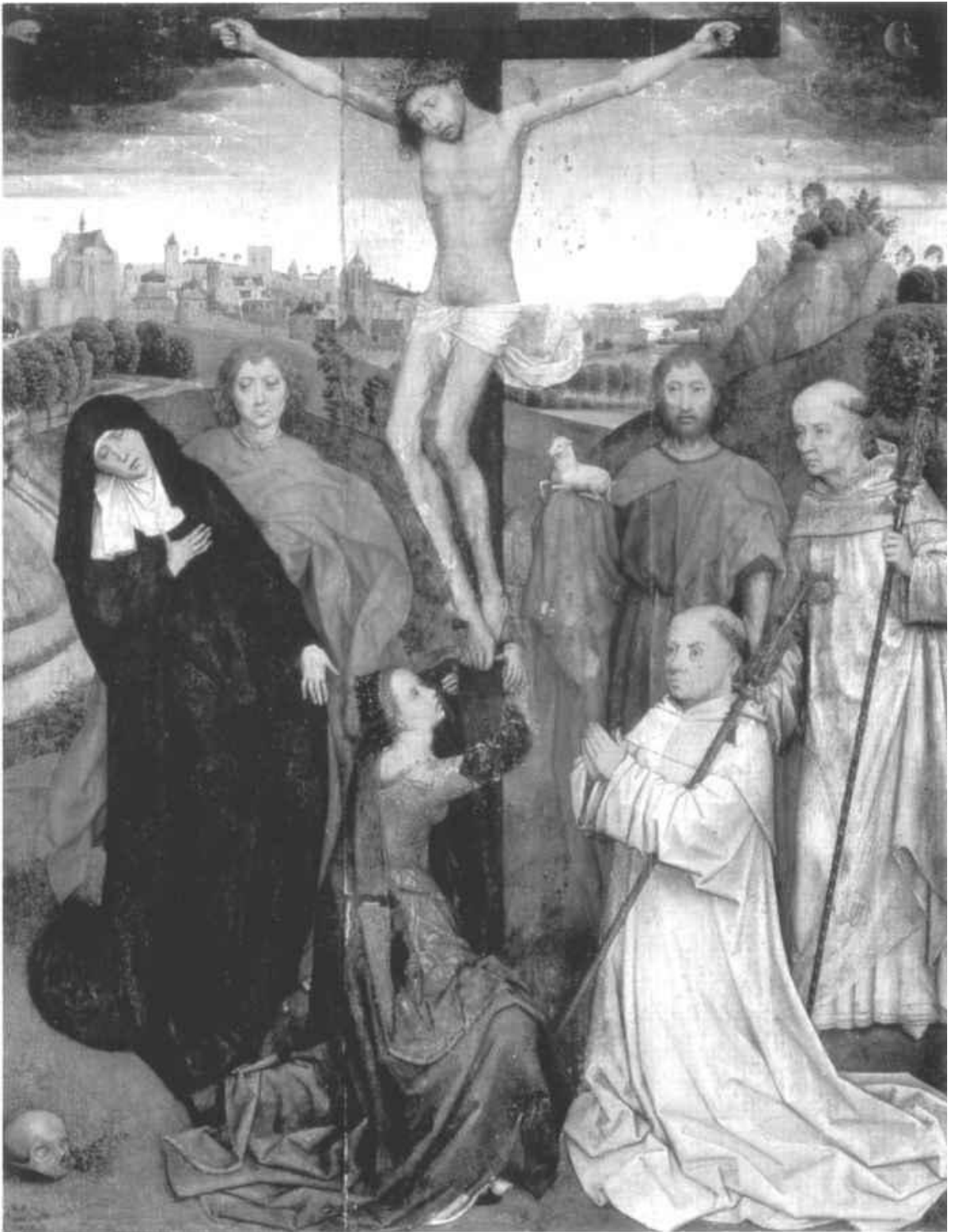


Plate 36. Hans Memmling, *Triptych of Jan Crabbe*, fifteenth century.

John the Baptist puts his arm on the shoulder of the kneeling St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Both look away from Jesus, and Bernard is not praying in the direction of the crucifix.

The Grail castle, protected by Templars, was located at “Munsalvaesche,” which means Mount of Salvation, or Mount Zion, which Revelation describes as the home of the Lamb of God in the heavenly Jerusalem.

“It is well known to me”, said his host, “that many formidable fighting men dwell at Munsalvaesche with the Grail....I will tell you how they are nourished. They

live from a Stone whose essence is most pure.”<sup>47</sup>

Bernard died in 1153, so he did not live to witness the downfall of Arnold of Brescia and the forces of accountability and transparency that he represented. His dream, however, lived on. The Knights Templar were secure, the infrastructure was in place, Jerusalem was held, and the Papacy was in the bag. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux was officially canonized in 1172. Arnold of Brescia remains a heretic.

## THE BEEHIVE

After his death, Bernard was made the patron saint of bees and beekeepers. Bees and beehives were important symbols in the European mystical tradition, and often featured in depictions of Bernard. As bees work selflessly and obediently for the good of the whole, it is thought that they symbolized industry and self-sacrifice. The purpose or motivation of bees, however, is not work for its own sake, but the production of honey. The significance of bees was linked to the notion that honey was the mythical life sustenance of John the Baptist.<sup>48</sup> “Honey” was not to be taken in the literal sense. In the Old Testament, the Promised Land was described as “flowing with milk and honey” over twenty times. And for Jewish scribes, “eating honey” meant absorbing the Word of God.

“Son of man, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. And he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.” Then I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.

Ezekiel 3:1-3

So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, “Take it and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.” And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth...And I was told, “You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”

Revelation 10:9-11

John the Baptist “ate wild honey” so he embodied God’s Word. Bernard himself was described as being “honey-tongued,” which did not mean he was a “sweet talker.” The beehive represented the Johannite community, the source on earth for God’s Word, and the true repository of “honey.” Numerous Western European municipalities have bees and beehives on their coat-of-arms, which are vestiges of the Johannite past of their leading citizenry [Plate 55].

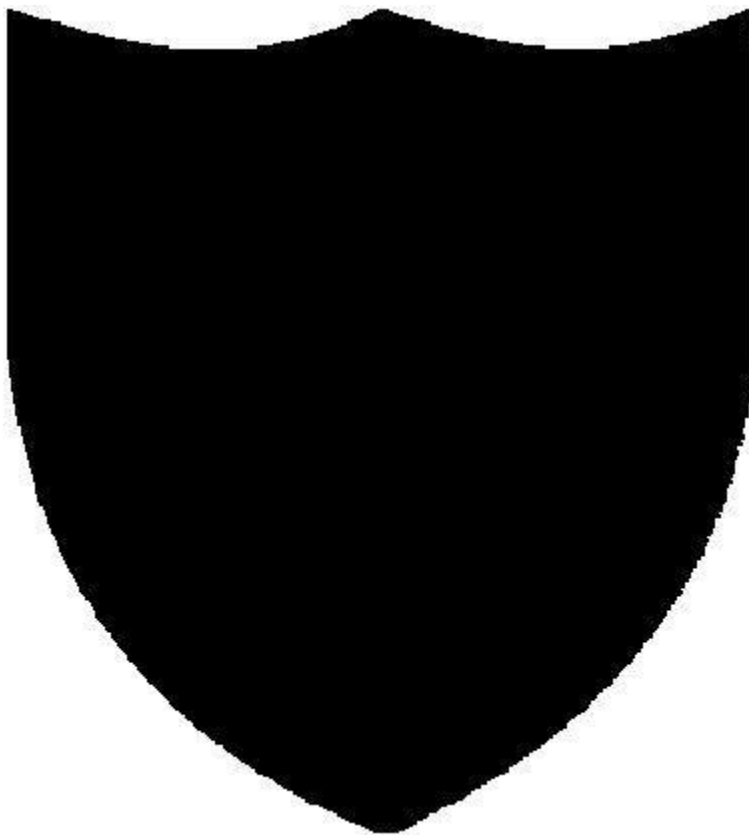
Leonardo Da Vinci was appointed the royal court painter and engineer to King Louis XII of France. When Leonardo ran into legal difficulties with the monks at Milan over his initial painting of “The Virgin on the Rocks,” Louis intervened on his behalf to resolve the dispute. The king was Leonardo’s protector, and as such, it would be naïve to imagine that he was unaware of Leonardo’s Johannite views. On the contrary, Louis sympathized with them. The main emblem on the king’s coat-of-arms was the beehive. When he subdued the Genoese in 1507, Louis famously entered Genoa with bees and beehives embroidered into his tunic and armor [Plate 60].

The bee and the beehive denoted a line of ancestral descent. The bee was a recurring emblem of the French monarchy, used most widely by Louis XIV, but thought to have originated with the Merovingian dynasty which ruled much of France between the fifth

and eighth centuries. Bees were adopted as symbols of Imperial authority by Napoleon Bonaparte in his quest for legitimacy. The “king bee” was associated with royal titles in many ancient cultures, especially in Egyptian civilization. The bee symbol then, implied a messianic connection to those who used it.



Coat of Arms, Wiltz, Luxembourg, Plate 55



Coat of Arms, La Chaux de Fonds, Switzerland



Plate 60. Jean Bourdichot, *Conquest of Genoa*, 1507

## THE ALBIGENSIAN CRUSADE

Often referred to as the first recorded case of genocide in Western Europe, the Albigensian crusade called by Pope Innocent III in 1209, was targeted not at Moslems, but at Christian heretics. The Albigensians, more commonly known as ‘Cathars,’ were named after the town of Albi, in southern France, a major centre of the Cathar religion. The Languedoc region of modern day France was the major Cathar stronghold, and at the time was a wealthy and independent state.

Essentially, Cathars were Gnostic dualists who adhered to the ancient Manichean heresy that the material world was created by Satan.<sup>49</sup> Historians claim that the Cathars were originally converted by Bogomil missionaries who had fled Bulgaria to escape persecution by the Constantinople Church for their Gnostic beliefs. But what so incensed Rome were not the finer points of Gnostic philosophy, but the deeply offensive Cathar teaching that Mary Magdalene was Jesus’ concubine.

The Albigensian crusade lasted almost forty years and resulted in the death of an estimated 100,000 Cathar men, women, and children, and the devastation of the region. Entire populations of towns and villages were slaughtered wholesale. All these events took place during the peak period of Templar influence, in an area of France studded with Templar churches and castles. The Pope commanded Templar participation in the campaign to crush the rebels; no doubt their experience in siege warfare was most welcome. The knights complied, burning Albi and Toulouse in 1209, but afterward they kept a low profile.

Modern writers have suggested that the Knights Templar were either strictly neutral during the conflict or were secretly Cathar sympathizers. This is based partly on the anti-Roman Catholicism of the Templars -- “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” -- but mostly on the veneration for Mary Magdalene that they shared with Cathars. The Templar’s fixation with Mary Magdalene, however, could not possibly have been for the same reasons as the Cathars. If anything, her close association with Jesus would have tainted Mary.

When Philip, King of France, declared war on the Knights Templar in 1307, he handpicked William de Nogatel to be his prosecutor-in-chief. William’s parents had been Cathars, and were tortured and burnt at the stake by the Inquisition. So he was no friend of Rome. But the ruthless manner in which William hounded the Templars, suggested that he had an axe to grind with *them*. He did not regard the Knights Templar as champions of the Cathar cause.

Not only were Cathars vehemently opposed to baptism, they regarded John the Baptist as an envoy of Satan. Jesus was the younger son of God. Satan was the older son of God, and Jesus’ older brother. John was sent by Satan to destroy Jesus. It was sibling rivalry. Cathars believed that the Roman Catholic Church followed the satanic traditions of John the Baptist. The leadership of the Johannite Church would not have tolerated these opinions, and would have sought to eradicate those who preached them by any means possible.

Part of the text of the Bogomil/Cathar, *Book of John the Evangelist* was discerned from archives of the Inquisition at Carcassonne,<sup>50</sup> and the following excerpts articulate Cathar theology on John the Baptist:

And Satan the prince of this world perceived that I was come to seek and save

them that were lost, and sent his angel, even Elijah the prophet, baptizing with water: who is called John the Baptist. And Elijah asked the prince of this world: How can I know him? Then his lord said: On whomsoever thou shalt see the spirit descending like a dove and resting upon him, he it is that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost unto forgiveness of sins: thou wilt be able to destroy him and to save.

And again I, John (the Evangelist), asked the Lord (Jesus): Can a man be saved by the baptism of John without thy baptism? And the Lord answered: Unless I have baptized him unto forgiveness of sins, by the baptism of water can no man see the kingdom of heaven. And I asked the Lord: How do all men receive the baptism of John, but thine not at all? And the Lord answered: Because their deeds are evil and they come not unto the light.

The Catholic Church insisted on water baptism for salvation, although generally as a onetime only event. However, the writers of the New Testament stressed that Jesus did not practice water baptism,

I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming... he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.  
Luke 3:16

Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples).  
John 4:2

Compared to his own plan of salvation, Jesus considered water baptism redundant. Preoccupation with baptism was, to all intents and purposes, a hindrance to his mission,

I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!  
Luke 12:49

In many ways, the religion of Jesus never stood a chance. His premature death ensured that it did not genuinely take root with his followers. Water baptism was simply another outmoded tradition that Jesus' disciples co-opted from the Baptist movement.

## **FREEMASONS**

The loss of the Holy Land, coupled with the official demise of the Knights Templar, signified that the Church of John needed a new strategy. Centuries passed before such a high public profile could be risked again. Following the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church lost its stranglehold over certain parts of Europe. Legends of the Templar's survival surfaced in areas where the Church was seriously weakened. Of the organizations claiming to be heirs of the lost Templar legacy, largest and most powerful was the Freemasons.

The United Grand Lodge of England was officially established in 24<sup>th</sup> June 1717 (the supposed birthday of John the Baptist, and Day of the feast of St. John the Baptist in the Catholic Church), but it had existed as an unofficial secret society long before. John the Baptist is the patron saint of Freemasonry.

Researchers have traced the roots of modern Freemasonry to Templars who immigrated to Scotland to avoid persecution. Conclusive proof remains elusive, but Templar support appears to have been the deciding factor in the victory of Robert the Bruce over the English at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. The date of the battle was set on the Templar's holiest day of the year, June 24<sup>th</sup>.

Allegedly, the Sinclairs of Rosslyn were initial sponsors of the Knights Templar in Scotland. For two centuries, the Templars were merged with the Hospitallers into a single order known as The Order of the Temple and St. John. This Order was later outlawed by the Scottish Reformation Parliament.

Ever since their formal inception, Freemasons have been the subject of controversy. Popes have excommunicated them, and Archbishops of Canterbury have denounced them. Wild speculation about Freemasonry is always current, and books on Masonic conspiracy theories constitute a profitable niche market. Most modern Masons are baffled by this negative attention, and attribute it to their movement's secretive traditions, which have made outsiders suspicious and quick to reach unwarranted conclusions. Although Freemasonry prides itself on a tradition of philanthropy and spirit of altruism, as far as the outside world is concerned, Freemasonry exists only to benefit Freemasons.

As with the Knights Templar, Freemasonry is based on ceremonial initiations and rites of passage through a series of hierarchical grades. And similar to the Templars, as Freemasonry grew in power, prestige, and wealth, its ideological aspects diminished and became a concern only for those at the highest levels. Modern Freemasonry has lost connection with its origins, and the vast majority of Freemasons are ignorant of the meanings behind their rituals and symbolism. They might claim, for example, that Freemasonry's foundations date from the building of Solomon's Temple, or to ancient Egypt and the building of the Pyramids, but whenever they are asked, members are at a loss to explain why John the Baptist should be so important to them.

Freemasons claim to be deist, but affiliated with no particular religious or theological viewpoint. Masonic lodges do not have pictures or statues of Jesus displayed, nor does Jesus feature in Masonic teachings. Yet for some reason they chose to put John the Baptist on the highest pedestal, and who had more religious conviction than he?

## **OLIVER CROMWELL**

Some of history's most influential figures are suspected of having been Freemasons. In certain cases, George Washington for example, Masonic links are beyond dispute, but for others, such as Sir Isaac Newton, the connection is unproven. Oliver Cromwell (1599-1656) is thought to have been a Freemason, and many historians believe Freemasons were in leadership positions on both Parliamentarian and Royalist sides during the English civil war.

Cromwell was far more radical than other Freemasons of his era. John the Baptist loomed large in his life. He was christened in the church of St John the Baptist in Huntingdon on April 29th, 1599, and eight of his children were baptized there. He went to school at the John the Baptist Grammar School, which had formerly been a monastic hospital from the late twelfth century -- zenith of the Templar era, when numerous churches and hospitals dedicated to John the Baptist sprung up in England.

In 1645, during the siege of Chester, where the King's forces were holding out, the

hospital of St. John the Baptist (founded around 1190) was demolished to provide stones for defenders to reinforce the city walls. Once in power, Cromwell provided a new site and lands to the local city corporation for the rebuilding of the hospital.

When mutiny broke out in the ranks of the Parliamentarian army, Cromwell chased down the leadership and imprisoned them in the Church of John the Baptist in Burford, Oxford, built circa 1175. He even gave them a sermon from the church pulpit.

Cromwell had an ideological agenda towards religion. He was passionately against Roman Catholicism, which he denounced as the “anti Christ,” and destroyed as many Catholic churches as he was able. He particularly sought to demolish statues of the Madonna and Child. Older churches that had Templar affiliations, which included Rosslyn Chapel, were undisturbed. In fact, Cromwell’s men were billeted there during the siege of Rosslyn Castle.

Throughout the period of his rule (1647-1659) Cromwell banned Christmas, declaring it an ordinary working day of no special significance. Easter and other Christian holidays were also cancelled. Furthermore, all Church baptisms and marriages were prohibited. This ban, apparently, was not universally applied, and certain churches were excused. One such church was the Church of St. John the Baptist in Ruardean, Gloucestershire, which dates from the twelfth century. The church building is noticeably carved with Templar symbols, including a St. George on horseback spearing a dragon over the inner arched doorway entrance, very rare in English churches. A baptismal font in the church is genuinely dated at 1657, and thus was built during the period that baptism was forbidden. The font has an octagonal base, which is unusual in Christian churches, but not in Templar churches and Masonic Lodges. During Cromwell’s rule, baptism into the ‘Johannite’ church was sanctioned and encouraged.

As ‘Protector’ of the realm, Cromwell disestablished the Church of England and abolished the Anglican Hierarchy. He welcomed all manner of radical Protestant sects into the ranks of his “New Model Army,” and allowed Jews to re-enter the country with no restrictions on practicing their religion. But Cromwell’s tolerance was not without limits. He explained the boundaries of his forbearance to the Catholic Irish defenders of New Ross in 1649, while negotiating the surrender of the town, -- “if by liberty of conscience you mean the liberty to exercise the Mass... where the Parliament of England has authority, that will not be allowed of.” In a letter to the Irish Catholic Bishops later that year, Cromwell wrote, “you are part of the Anti-Christ and before long you must have, all of you, blood to drink.” His condemnation of the Catholic Mass made him an exonerator of the Knights Templar, who were condemned by the Inquisition for refusing to say the words of the Mass sacrament.

Expressions of Christianity that were centered on traditional interpretations of Jesus were anathema to Cromwell. He was not, as some have suggested, a socialist or communist, and he was absolutely not an atheist. He did not advocate a specific theology belonging to a particular Christian sect. In his public statements, he only counseled the Puritan ascetic lifestyle -- a way of life owned by John the Baptist.

After Cromwell’s death, the monarchy was restored, and King Charles II ordered his body exhumed. Finally, he suffered the Baptist’s fate. Cromwell’s corpse was beheaded in a special ceremony, and the head was displayed in public for twenty years.

## **JOHANNITES IN AMERICA**

In recent years, popular books and films have theorized a revisionist history of the discovery of America. The central hypothesis is that the Knights Templar knew of America's existence long before the voyages of Columbus. Colonization and conquest of the American continent was a long term covert Johannite project. After their expulsion from Europe, Templars visited American shores and brought with them the legendary Templar treasure. America was the Promised Land, not merely a refuge from the Inquisition, but home of the New Jerusalem. Even the word "America" was a Johannite title, derived from a Mandaean tradition of a mythical "star in the West" named "Merica."

None of these claims have been proven. However, legitimate conclusions concerning possible Johannite influences on the origins of America can be drawn from one historical fact -- the Coat of Arms of Puerto Rico.

Christopher Columbus discovered Puerto Rico in November 1493. For a supposedly Catholic sponsored expedition, it is remarkable that no Catholic priests were allowed on his vessels. The flagship, *Santa Maria*, flew the Templar ensign. According to Columbus' diary, his mission was bankrolled by Johannite nobles such as Rene d'Anjou, and not by Queen Isabella of Spain, as legend claims. Puerto Rico was originally named San Juan Bautista (St. John the Baptist), but the island was neglected until 1508, when Juan Ponce de Leon, who had traveled with Columbus in 1493, invaded with a small retinue of soldiers and became Puerto Rico's first governor. Native inhabitants, whose primitive weaponry was no match for the Spaniards, were turned into slaves and forced to do mining work. Later, when the island's name was changed to Puerto Rico, its capital was named San Juan (Saint John). Puerto Rico's Coat of Arms, recognized by the Spanish crown in 1511, is a strong declaration of allegiance to the Johannite Church [Plate 37].

In the center of the shield, the Lamb of God holds the Templar standard of Saint George, and sits on the Book of Revelation and the seven seals of the Apocalypse. Beneath, the Latin Vulgate *Joannes est Nomen ejus*, means "John is his name." Words written by Zacharias in Luke 1:68. Among the symbols surrounding the Lamb is the flag of the crusader kingdom of Jerusalem, and the crowned lion, familiar symbol of the messianic bloodline. At the sides, the crowned letters "F" and "Y," representing King Ferdinand and Queen Ysabel of Spain, are dwarfed by the larger crown above the shield. This crown does not signify the Spanish monarchy, but is the symbol of the messianic royalty of the Lamb of God. The crown belongs to the dynasty of John the Baptist. It is inconceivable that the Puerto Rican Coat of Arms was designed by Roman Catholics.



Plate 37. Coat of Arms, Puerto Rico. Illustration by Mark Gibbs

The Latin inscription means “John is his name.”

It is common knowledge that Freemasons were instrumental in the foundation of the United States of America,<sup>51</sup> and that George Washington, the First President, was a Mason. In fact, numerous American Presidents have been Freemasons. As with Cromwell, Washington was publicly circumspect about his religious beliefs. Though often assumed to have been a devout Christian, the word “Jesus” occurs nowhere in any of Washington’s surviving letters. On his deathbed, Washington refused to see a clergyman. He did not receive a Christian burial, and was laid to rest at Mount Vernon with full Masonic honors. The Washington Monument, built to honor his achievements, is a pyramid-capped Egyptian obelisk. His acknowledged inspiration owed more to esoteric Egyptian lore, than to Jesus Christ. Early Christians made the same observation about Simon Magus, the most infamous Johannite of them all.

At West Point military academy in 1779, Washington conspicuously led a Masonic procession to celebrate John the Baptist, which included a number of speeches, sermons

and toasts. This function was a highly effective recruitment event on a grand social scale. Masonic lodges in the region mushroomed in number shortly afterward, and despite being a secret society without transparency or public accountability, the Masonic network soon dominated the institutions of the young democracy, Separation of Church and State was a definite Masonic goal. Although lauded today by civil libertarians, it was not designed to further the cause of freedom and democracy, but to replace the trappings of Christianity in public life with the symbolism of an elitist cult. Numerous public buildings constructed in the nation's capital and beyond were decorated with Masonic symbols, zodiacs, and pagan gods. Elaborate Masonic ceremonies preceded the laying of the cornerstone, and records show that these events were not dated in the traditional manner, i.e. by counting the years after Jesus' birth. The year was given as the number of years since the Declaration of Independence. So instead of say, 1806, the date was officially recorded as year 30.

Not all Americans were satisfied with the role of Freemasonry in the development of the nation. The country appeared to be under the control of a privileged and tightly-knit clique, who were above the law and responsible only to each other. By the 1830s anti-Masonic feelings, exacerbated by the acquittals of Freemasons in high profile court cases, were running high in the general population.

During this time, the mason-dominated Congress of the United States commissioned the sculptor Horatio Greenough to make a marble statue of George Washington [Plate 38]. When the statue was unveiled to the public, however, it caused a storm of controversy. It was moved to various locations, but nobody wanted it. The official explanation for the statue's unpopularity was that its classical style was not to the taste of the American public. Now it is a tourist attraction in the Smithsonian Institute.

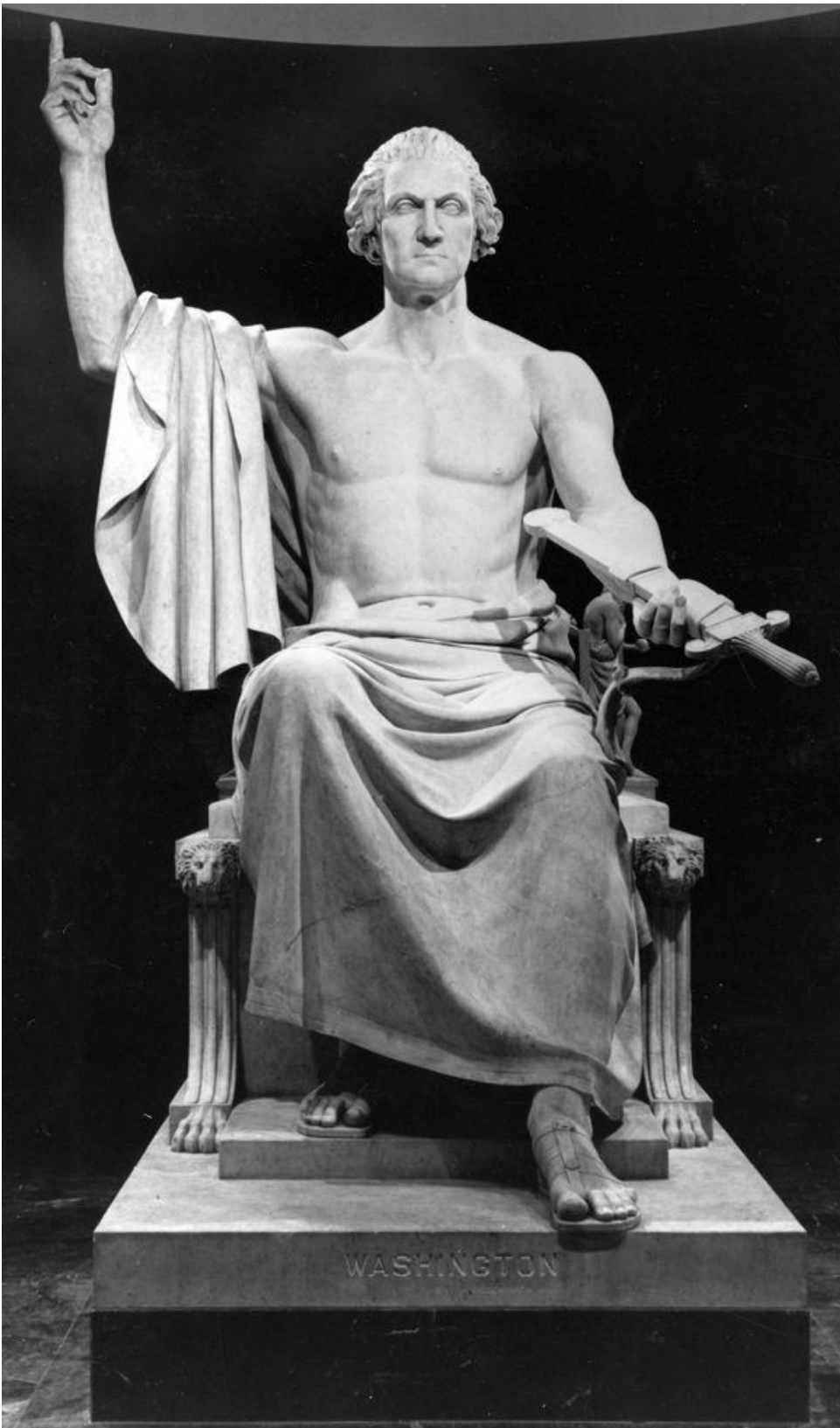


Plate 38. Horatio Greenough, *George Washington*, Washington DC (Art Resource)

Greenough had earlier visited Italy, and had possibly been influenced by what he had seen there. The argument follows that his statue of Washington was modeled on classical Greek images of Zeus, and so was considered blasphemous by Christians. But Greenough's depiction of Washington was based on the traditions of the Florentine Renaissance masters, so pagan influences were mixed with Johannite symbolism. For this

reason, Washington's right arm was raised and his right forefinger pointed upward in the classic "John gesture." The sculpture of Washington reflected the hermetic school of thought to which the mason-dominated Congress subscribed.

The popular backlash against Masonry split the Masonic movement. Dissenting Masons, dissatisfied with the direction of the leadership and the exclusion of a specific theology from public life, instituted and evangelized a new religion for the United States. Intended to preserve Johannite traditions behind an outwardly Christian appearance, the Mormon Church was founded by Joseph Smith. The son of a Mason, Smith was also a Mason as were *all* the original members of the Mormon Church.

Masonic symbols adorn Mormon Temples. Mason compasses and squares are even stitched into the fabric of Mormon underwear to remind them of their oaths to maintain sexual purity. Mormon rites-of-passage closely parallel those of the Masons, which is not disputed by Mormons. The beehive, the essential Johannite totem, was a central component of Masonic iconography and the most prominent symbol of early Mormonism. The beehive became the state symbol of Utah, the Mormon state. Evidently, the founders of Mormonism believed that they, and not the Freemasons, were the authentic torch bearers of John the Baptist's legacy.

Mainstream Freemasonry initially condemned the Mormon Church, accusing it of stealing its rituals and of betraying its secrets. The Mormon Church responded by prohibiting membership to Freemasons. The two organizations were at loggerheads until a mutual truce was agreed about twenty years ago.

Mormon Temples are not places of worship in the normal church sense. They are for ceremonial purposes centered on ritual baptism. Joseph Smith claimed that John the Baptist appeared to him and bequeathed the keys of the Aaronic priesthood. These had been taken away from the failed Church of Peter, with Jesus' agreement. These priestly keys are symbolically passed to Mormon initiates during baptism by the spirit of John the Baptist himself. In this way, Mormon theology restored John the Baptist his lost priestly Messiah status.

The Mormon concept that all people are destined to become 'gods' is a teaching also found in the Gnostic texts at Nag Hammadi. Mormon scholars have claimed that this proves Mormonism's early roots. Furthermore, certain passages from the Book of Mormon are remarkably similar to, and appear to have been copied from, verses in the gospel of John, a quasi-Gnostic document. However, as explained previously in this chapter, early Gnosticism derived from Baptist, not Christian sources.

Masonic authors have stated that some rituals of Freemasonry resemble those of the Mandaeans, and also appear to be directly connected with practices at Qumran.<sup>52</sup> Surprisingly, Mormon scholars are reluctant to claim a Qumran connection. But then again, no Christian or quasi-Christian theology could peacefully co-exist and also acknowledge Jesus as the "Wicked Priest," even if they could survive the idea of John the Baptist as the "Teacher of Righteousness."



Statue of John the Baptist in Temple Square, Salt Lake City. John bequeaths the keys of the Aaronic priesthood to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdrey

Joseph Smith held the view that Masonic ritual was a corrupted form of the original Priesthood, but claimed that “many things were perfect” in Freemasonry.<sup>53</sup> He was also quoted as saying that the Christian Church was an “apostate religion,”<sup>54</sup> but Mormonism is not anti-Jesus. By presenting Jesus as a cosmic celestial savior figure, but requiring John the Baptist for individual redemption, Mormon theology attempts to square the circle. Thus it unites the elder and younger messianic brothers. The problem is that despite the impressive religious facade, the unity is forced and is without substance.

The symbol of the cross is not used in Mormonism because, as in ancient Judaism, the salvation dynamic is centered on lineage. Hence the Mormon Church’s interest in tracking and recording the world’s genealogical information. Undoubtedly, it has been successful in terms of growth, and is now recognized as one of the world’s fastest-growing religions. All things considered, Mormon theology is no less plausible than that of any other church.

The success of the Freemasons in the American Revolution gave encouragement to Freemasonry in Europe. Many writers believe that the French Revolution was instigated and nurtured by Freemasons, and that while he was the leader of the French forces fighting on the American side in the Revolutionary War, La Fayette was himself inducted by George Washington. The Jacobin Club, a central focus of the revolutionary movement in France, was founded by prominent Freemasons.<sup>55</sup> Robespierre was head of the Jacobin Club when the reign of terror begun.

The king of France was beheaded, but then the revolutionaries went much further than Cromwell. Church lands were confiscated and all religious orders suppressed. The cathedral of Notre Dame was looted and converted into a Temple of Reason. In June

1794, Robespierre proclaimed the cult of the Supreme Being. Among the thousands killed during this period, an unknown number of Catholic priests were massacred. The Catholic Church was never in any doubt that the whole enterprise was orchestrated by Freemasons.<sup>56</sup> However, none of the Masons' Christian opponents ever explained that the source of extreme hostility toward the Church was rooted in Jesus' perceived betrayal of John the Baptist.

Napoleon Bonaparte, no great lover of the Catholic Church, flirted with Johannism for his own reasons. He made the bee his personal symbol, and kept the Mona Lisa in his private bed chamber. He even authorized the quasi-restoration of the Knights Templar in 1804 by a small group of Masons. This Order prospered a short while, but soon split into Johannite and Catholic factions. After the Grand Master, Bernard-Raymond Fabré-Palaprat (1773-1838), founded the 'Johannite Church of Primitive Christians' in 1812, he demanded that all Templars should adopt his "faith." This caused a schism that remained unresolved until the order folded in 1866.

Modern Johannite churches have been started by Masons who felt that Lodges do not provide enough spiritual food. By its own admittance, the Apostolic Johannite Church has a priesthood which is entirely comprised of Masons, but membership is open to the general public. The word 'Christ' is used regularly in their pronouncements, but Jesus has no official part in their creed. If used in reference to an historical man, 'Christ' is understood as John the Baptist.

The modern Baptist movement in the West appears factionalized and diluted. It was never able to overcome the powerful mythology of Jesus and its hold on popular imagination. As time passed, numbers dwindled as adherents lost their passion. Diehards joined or formed secret societies. And of course, we don't know much about them. The fabled Priory of Sion, much loved by conspiracy writers, is likely to be a Johannite cult. Grand Masters of the Priory assume the title "John" for reasons unspecified. The famous French chapel at Rennes-le Chateau that has mysterious and well-documented ties to the Priory of Sion is decorated inside in a manner that gives John the Baptist precedence over Jesus.

It is fair to say that as the Christian Church split into numerous and conflicting branches, so too did the Baptist movement. Ultimately, and if they hope to persuade the scientifically-trained modern mind, neither religious ideology can be successfully revived in a previously experienced format.

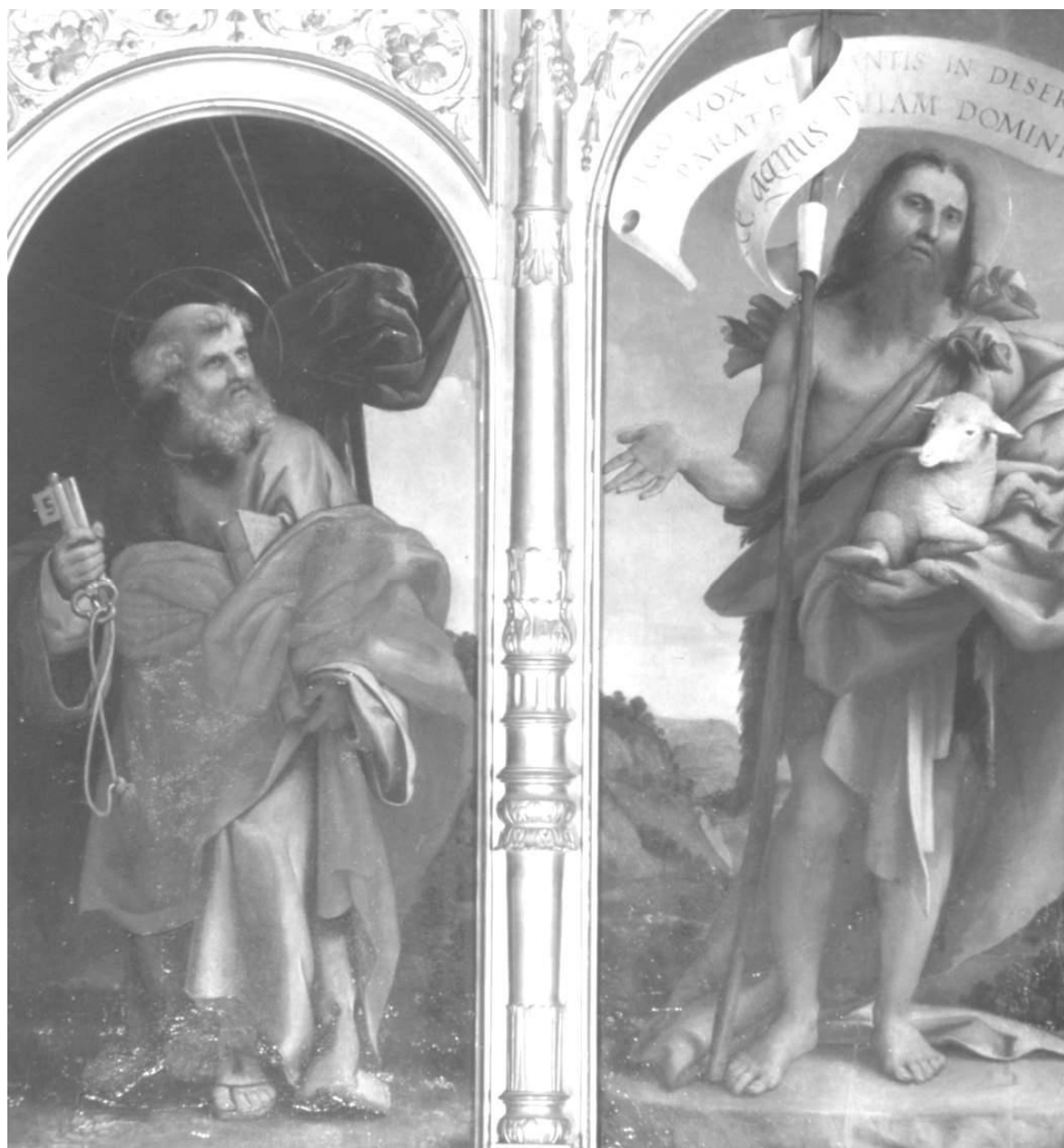


Plate 39. Lorenzo Lotto, *Peter and John the Baptist*, sixteenth century .

Peter, looking warily at John, clutches the keys to the kingdom of Heaven. Despite John's plaintive request, Peter refuses to hand over the keys. (Art Resource.)