



## 47. THE COLLAPSE OF TRADITION IN WESTERN EUROPE

Dante predicted that two popes, who that time were still alive, were destined to hell. They were Boniface VIII<sup>1</sup> and Clement V<sup>2</sup>. The former was the most fanatical supporter of the temporal supremacy of the Church over the Emperor, the kings and princes of western Christianity; the grey eminence behind the papacy of his predecessor, Celestine V. Boniface played an important role in inducing that mild and shy pope to abdicate.



### 1. Boniface VIII

In this way, with a rigged conclave, he took over the power from Celestine, who had returned to hermit life. However, dubious of Celestine's sincere renunciation and fearful of a possible reaction from his supporters, he threw him in imprisonment where he eventually died. Meanwhile, the Empire was going through a period of crisis because the candidate Emperor, Adolf of Nassau, King of Germany, had been deposed by the same princes who had him elected, thus triggering a tragic civil war. Therefore, Boniface VIII was well aware that the Empire did not pose any threat to his politics. Instead, he feared the growing power of the King Philip IV of France. For this reason, he approached the King of England, who was then also Duke of Aquitaine, and thus more than a simple nuisance to France. Despite this alliance and the violence with which he exercised power over the State of the Church<sup>3</sup>, the pope had no choice but to come to terms with Philip IV. He agreed to crown the king's cousin, Charles of Anjou, as king of Naples and to sanctify his grandfather, Louis IX. Therefore, he unscrupulously used excommunication, inquisition and canonization<sup>4</sup> as political instruments.



### 2. Templars take refuge in Cyprus

However, his claims of temporal power were frustrated precisely by those national sovereigns that the papacy, for two and a half centuries, had instigated to become autonomous from the Empire. Death caught him at a time when all the major powers, the senate and the people of Rome were openly averse to him.

<sup>1</sup> *Divine Comedy, Inferno*, XIX.53-72.

<sup>2</sup> *Divine Comedy, Inferno*, XIX.79-117; *Paradiso*, XVII.82; *Paradiso*, XXX.142-148.

<sup>3</sup> The destruction of the city of Palestrina is an example. Also Dante became victim of Boniface's hatred. It was this very pope who asked the Commune of Florence to condemn him to death, to expropriate him of all his possessions, thus forcing the Poet to exile from his homeland.

<sup>4</sup> With the canonization, the sanctity of a person is officially recognized and his public veneration is permitted. It will be seen later how canonization has been used as a political tool until the contemporary era.



The second pope placed in hell by Dante, Clement V, was the protagonist, together with the King of France, of the infamous persecution against the Knights Templar. After the fall the city of Acre (1291), the last three hundred monks-knights stationed in the East withdrew from the Holy Land to Cyprus under the guidance of Grand Master Jean de Montfort<sup>1</sup>. On that island, these survivors dedicated themselves to ascetic life. Once dissipated their warrior zeal, the Knights Templar had turned to contemplative life. Even the knights who had remained in Europe to administer fiefdoms, commanderies and castles, gradually lost the ancient ascetic-military inclination and retired to religious life.



### 3. Clement V and Philip the Fair

This drift contributed to the weakening of the Order's function, that of presiding over and coordinating the initiatory organizations of the West. While living their daily lives in frugality, the Templars had accumulated an immense fortune from donations and offerings from the princes and lords of the time. Their function of controlling the coinage of the Christian States<sup>2</sup> also made them powerful; and thus numerous rulers increasingly turned to them for loans and financial support. King Philip IV of France, known as 'the Fair', got heavily into debt with the Order in order to strengthen the royal power<sup>3</sup>.

Aware of not being able to repay the loans and fuelled by the greed for the immense wealth of the Order of the Temple, he decided to take possession of it<sup>4</sup>. On October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1307, he had all the Templars of the Kingdom of France arrested in a single night<sup>5</sup>. They were incriminated with unfounded charges of heresy<sup>6</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the second half of the 13th century, the military incompetence of Louis IX of France, Edward I of England and Charles I of Anjou, king of Sicily, led to irreparable disasters, at the cost of many human lives. The Templars did their best to repair the delirious strategic decisions of these greedy sovereigns, paying a high price in the number of fallen knights.

<sup>2</sup> Philip the Fair was also responsible for tampering with the minting of gold and silver coins of his kingdom, contravening the control of the Order of the Temple. *Paradiso*, XXXIII. 118-120.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the transformation of the feudal kingdom of France into a centralized and absolute national monarchy had already been largely accomplished by Louis IX. He had placed the administration of public affairs in the hands of plebeian jurists, reducing and limiting feudal privileges and centralizing the power of the State in his hands. Devoted to an entirely Gallican religiosity, insubordinate to the pretensions of the papal political hegemony, he supported mendicant orders (especially the Franciscans) in opposition to ecclesiastical hierarchies. Philip the Fair inherited and aggravated this friction with Rome.

<sup>4</sup> The verses of Dante (*Purgatorio*, XX.85-96) testify to Philip's greed for the riches of the Temple. On the illicit love affair between Philip IV (the giant) and the Church (the whore), see *Purgatory* XXXII.148-160.

<sup>5</sup> This shows the efficiency achieved by the "police regime" of the absolute sovereign. There was no resistance from the Templars, deceived by the "fiscal" motivations of the summons. This however also denotes unpreparedness, naivety and weakness on their part. The anti-Templar operation was prepared as early as 1305, when the French ruler had gathered the vindictive slanders of some knights expelled from the Order for unworthiness. Some royal emissaries were then infiltrated into the Order as spies. These were the architects of the first confessions during the arrests. Nevertheless, these traitors were not spared from being convicted. Jules Michelet, *Procès des Templiers*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1851, vol. I, p. 458.

<sup>6</sup> No doctrinal heresy was ever proved. The only anomaly found was the following: every Holy Thursday the knights received the Eucharist only with wine. The absence of bread was considered heretical. In reality such a rite confirmed that the Templars continued the initiatic ritual tradition of drinking the blood of Christ from the Grail vessel.



idolatry<sup>1</sup> and sodomy. Clement V, the French pope elected in 1305 thanks to the pressure exercised by Philip the Fair<sup>2</sup>, although aware of the one-sidedness of this farce trial, suspended the Order and disposed that all its patrimony was to be donated to the rival Hospitaller Order. Unsurprisingly, in France it was the King who took over everything, including what had been assigned to the Hospitaller Knights<sup>3</sup>.



#### 4. The burning of Jacques de Molay

The trial against the Templars lasted until 1314. By means of the most ruthless tortures, false confessions were extorted from about sixty knights, often retracting at the end of torture<sup>4</sup>. The tragedy ended with the condemnation of the Grand Master Jacques de Molay, who was burned at the stake. Molay is said to have serenely faced the torture and predicted the imminent death of those responsible for that horror. In fact, within a year both the pope and Philip IV died<sup>5</sup>. The fleeing knights took refuge in England, Scotland<sup>6</sup>, in the kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula and in the principalities of Germany and Italy, where they were welcomed into local chivalric orders and craft guilds (sskrt. *śreṇi*)<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> During the trial, attempts were made to accuse the Templars of worshipping an idol called Baphomet, represented by a head. The inquisitors argued that it was a cult addressed to Muhammad (in French Mahomet). Now, it is known that Saladin had beheaded all the Templars he had occasion to capture because it was impossible to convert them to Islam. Probably, under the name of Baphomet - altogether made up by the inquisitors - the Templars venerated the "The Veronica" or the folded Shroud, holy relics that had been in the possession of the Order.

<sup>2</sup> That pope was a real puppet in the hands of the French ruler, who induced him to abandon the traditional Roman See and to move it to France. There the popes remained from 1313 to 1377 at the mercy of the political will of the kings. The cowardice of Clement V was such that he allowed the mass executions of knights who had been acquitted religiously for not having committed any fault. The various studies by Barbara Frale, who would like to absolve Clement V of his responsibilities, underline instead the cowardice and complicity of the pope in the massacre. In a circular letter dated March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1311, the pope asked all the princes and inquisitors of Europe to arrest and subject the Templars to torture. Robert L. John, *Dante Templare*, Milan, Hoepli, 1991 (1st ed. *Dante*, Wien, Springer-Verlag, 1946), p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> This could happen because in 1307 chaos reigned in the imperial territories of Germany and Italy. In fact, the feudal lords, now almost completely secularized, and the Communes that declared themselves free, fought one another for the control of Imperial territories, markets and assets. Albert I of Habsburg, after winning and killing Adolf of Nassau in battle, rekindled the civil war in Germany. In an attempt to be crowned Emperor, he allied himself to the king of France and abandoned the "Garden of the Empire", Italy, to his fate. For such misdeeds, Dante cursed him in *Purgatorio* (VI.100-102).

<sup>4</sup> Between those who did not survive the torture and those who were sent to the stake, around one hundred knights died. However, the approximately two thousand survivors were sentenced to life isolation. This prevented the continuation of the *paramparā*. Georges Lizerand (Éd.), *Le dossier de l'Affaire des Templiers*, Paris, Soc. d'Édition «Les Belles Lettres», 1964, pp. III-XII.

<sup>5</sup> Guillaume Nogaret, Philip's plebeian minister, inspirer of such a massacre, died mysteriously before the final sentence.

<sup>6</sup> They were welcomed with open arms by King Robert Bruce.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, some knights were "accepted" into the Kilwinning stone-cutter guild. "Acceptance", in the language of the guilds, consisted of recognizing an initiate of a different way, chivalrous, corporative or, in ancient times, monastic (in later times, hermetists and qabbalists were also "accepted" and considered, rightly or wrongly, as initiates and were even allowed to participate in rituals. In times of decadence, also simple profanes who did not exercise any corporative craft were considered as "accepted"). Those who were "accepted" could attend the art rituals without actively participating because they were foreign to the profession. Contrary to what Ramsey claimed, the "acceptance" of Templars in the aforementioned lodge did not made all the guild workers "knights" (René



In the other States of Europe, the dissolution of the Order of the Temple was carried out according to papal dictates; without, however, the same iron fist that marked the arrests and trials ordered in the kingdom of France. Yet, the Templars' main centre had always been in France, therefore the anti-traditional action of Philip the Fair had successfully beheaded the entire magisterial hierarchy. The general situation of the initiatic organizations connected or subordinated to the Temple was of maximum alarm and widespread confusion. It is no coincidence that Dante himself happened to be present in Paris during the Templar trial; the secret head of the Christian initiatic ways and member to the Third Order of the Temple could not help rushing to pick up some legacy. This is, indeed, the most mysterious episode of his life; so much so that many academics are inclined towards the unlikelihood of his stay in Paris<sup>1</sup>.



## 5. Robert Bruce, King of Scotland

In the meantime, other events had occurred. In 1308, after the death of Albert of Habsburg, the Templar Henry VII of Luxembourg became king of Germany and of Arles. After re-establishing order in Germany, he descended in Italy to be crowned Emperor.



## 6. Tomb of Henry VII

The military expedition of the monarch, although opposed by Philip the Fair, by Robert of Anjou, King of Naples, and by the many Communes that, at the papal instigation, had rebelled against the Imperial

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Le Forestier, *La Franc-Maçonnerie Templière et Occultiste*, Paris, La Table d'Émeraude, 1987, vol. I, pp. 53-56; *ibid.* vol. II. p. 781, n. 54). This shows that "Templarism" is a sort of ideal link that lacks, however, a real transmission (Gastone Ventura, *Templari and Templarismo*, Rome, "Atanòr", 1980). Dante too had to be accepted into the guild of physicians and apothecaries in Florence; or else, as an aristocrat, he could have no longer participated in the political life of the bourgeois communal regime.

<sup>1</sup> R. L. John presents well his argumentation on the Parisian stay of the Poet in 1311 (*cit.* pp. 47-51). However, it is indicative that Dante had been a student of theology at the Sorbonne in the year 1294; in the same year and in the same university where Meister Eckhart was *lector* of theology. Eckhart returned to the Sorbonne as master (*magister*) where he taught from 1311 to 1313. Therefore, is it possible to consider the simultaneous presence in Paris of the two greatest representatives of Western initiatic wisdom a mere coincidence? An article on Meister Eckhart is underway and will be published on this Site soon.





authority, was largely a success. Henry was crowned King of Italy, King of the Romans and, in 1312, Emperor. While the dreadful events of Paris described above were unfolding, the Faithfuls of Love and the Italian Templars saw in Henry's crowning the possibility of a restoration of the traditional order. Dante himself appeared almost as the sapiential inspirer of that thrilling adventure. However, the dream came to an abrupt end. In 1313 the Emperor suddenly died, poisoned with arsenic, probably at the hands of his Franciscan confessor. It was the collapse of all hope. Templars and Troubadours dispersed. Many of them fell into the hands of the Inquisition. Dante himself, although under the protection of knights of the highest rank who hosted him as a guest, became aware of the unfavourable signs of the times and transformed his work, the *Divine Comedy*, into the Testament to all Western initiatic wisdom for future times. Tradition wants that he predicted that the meaning of his message would only be understood six hundred years after his death. And so it happened.



## 7. Petrarch, Boccaccio and the Imperial Latin poet Claudianus

After Dante's passing, no one evidently succeeded him in the role of *guru*, although there was a new generation of Faithful of Love of great importance that include Petrarch and Boccaccio. The latter made a special effort to confuse the ideas of the uninitiated with regard to the Holy Faith.



## 8. Cola di Rienzo

While the Black Death, the plague of 1348, was ravaging the population of all Europe, one last attempt to restore the tradition was made. Cola di Rienzo, who is said to have been the natural son of Henry VII, took over the city of Rome, which was in a state of absolute decline after being abandoned by the popes and prey to the depredations of powerful rival families. His attempt was to re-establish the *res publica* of ancient Rome, while maintaining Rome as the capital of both the Empire and papacy. But times had



changed. After the first successes, despite both Imperial and papal support, he was killed by the wrath of the Roman populace<sup>1</sup>.

The tradition in the West had now interrupted. From that moment on, a mercantile civilization prevailed, dedicated to the worst follies of individualism, magic and naturalism<sup>2</sup>. The modern world was born.

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<sup>1</sup> Carmela Crescenti, *Cola di Rienzo. Simboli e allegorie*, Parma, Ed. Insegna del Veltro, 2003. The author of this excellent essay does justice to the character, clearly explaining that Cola di Rienzo did not intend to found a bourgeois Commune nor a personal tyranny, let alone an Italian republic, as it has been described in the past three centuries. However, the book overbalances when comparing the attempt at the traditional restoration by a Faithfuls of Love, however unrealistic, with the utterly suspicious adventure of Joan of Arc.

<sup>2</sup> It is indicative that nowadays novels, films and videogames have resumed the defamation of the Templars of the Middle Ages portraying them as the worst acolytes of evil and corrupt criminals in history. The persecution, therefore, continues with the only purpose of sowing hatred against tradition and in defence of the last two dreadful centuries of western history.