

## SEPARATING FACT FROM FANTASY: KNIGHTS TEMPLARS AND VIENNE

It stands to reason, if you lived in a bucolic town of 32,293 (roughly the size of Savage, MN) boasting a 1st century BC Temple of Augustus and Livia, you may be even less inclined to notice that your hometown also once was the host site for the Church's **15th** ecumenical council. Yet, such is precisely the case for **Vienne**. No, this is not a misprint. It was not held in Vienna, Austria, but the **papal fief** of Vienne, France. Safely tucked within the Holy Roman Empire 22 miles south of the city of Lyon, Vienne was transformed into a Roman colony under **Julius Caesar** in 47 BC. It was only in the mid-15th century that the resident Archbishops ceded their territorial powers to France. These were the days of the **Avignon** Papacy (1309-1377), when Pope Clement V fled Rome for a "less stressful" climate. He himself was from SW France.

**Pope Clement V** convened the Council of Vienne at the insistence of **Philip the Fair** (*Philippe le Bel*) of France. *Bel* is French for "attractive." Perhaps his wife assigned him that epithet? He had demanded the suppression of the **Knights Templars**, one of the religious military orders founded during the Crusades. Philip was no friend of the papacy, and in fact, his **tussles** with Church **authority** in large part led to the Avignon Papacy in the first place. He married (at age 16!) and acceded to the throne within a year. The **grandson** of **St. Louis**, King of France, Philip disapproved that Pope Boniface VIII had forbidden lay taxation of clergy without papal approval— it **reduced** his treasury. Even Boniface's canonization of St. Louis did little to mollify Philip. From the opening sermon delivered by Pope Clement (16 October 1311), we learn the main goals of Vienne: the case of the Templars, the business of the Holy Land, and the reform of the church.

Vatican II described the Church as "at the same time holy and always in need of being purified" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 8), so that's nothing new. It is the case against the Templars that is fascinating. Their **alleged** offense? Denying Christ and worshipping idols. Wow! In the end, "for the good of the Church" the Pope **suppressed** their order. If you can spare a cool **\$8000**, you may purchase a facsimile commentary on the numerous trials of the Knights Templar. Entitled *Processus Contra Templarios (Papal Inquiry into the Trial of the Templars)*, part of its original materials includes the **Chinon Parchment**. It seems that it was misplaced in the Vatican Archives for centuries until its "discovery" in 2001 by **Barbara Frale**, an Italian Vatican paleographer. It had been incorrectly catalogued (who knows when?); if you like conspiracy theories, perhaps it was purposely hidden!

Why is this misplaced manuscript important? For one thing, there is this **common belief** that the Knights Templar went "underground" only to resurface as the **Masonic Order**. If you have seen *The DaVinci Code* or played a popular video game, you may know of that alleged connection. There isn't a **scintilla of truth** in that claim! As Fr. Joseph Carola, SJ (professor of Patristics at the Gregorian University in Rome) has written: "St. Irenaeus, for example, had to contend with the Gnostics, effectively second-century New Agers who attempted to supplant the apostolic faith with their own private esoteric beliefs in Christian guise. *The Da Vinci Code* is, in fact, a prime example of twenty-first-century neo-gnosticism." Secondly, it clears up many misconceptions about the Templars. The recent discovery of the parchment confirms a significant aspect of the trial, namely the pope's **exoneration** of the Knights from doctrinal heresy!

What was King Philip's beef with the Templars? It allegedly included spitting on the Cross as part of the ceremony. Such an **initiation** ceremony was most troubling, **if** true. Scholars believe it was likely employed to strengthen and prepare them for torture in the event they were captured by

Muslims! It is quite likely that such “confessions” were the result of strict interrogation methods—**coerced** confessions—employed in the proceedings. Let’s start with their properties, as they possessed fortified castles and had amassed significant financial resources. In the Corbières wine region of France, their castles still stand today, occasionally appearing on the real estate market! **Zillow**— medieval style! But it was their **independence**—assured by popes in the early 12th century—that was perceived as a threat to the Crown. Hardly a reason for suppression.

Templars were **exempt** from paying **taxes** and permitted to erect their own chapels. At one time they owned the island of **Cyprus** and even had their own banks! Most significantly, they were **subject** to no one’s **authority** except the Pope’s. One may liken it to a certain degree of diplomatic immunity, as they were not subject to princes, abbots, bishops, Kings, etc. This was a recipe for **intrigue** and **conflict**. Their direct link with the pope, who in this case—sadly— capitulated to royal pressure— resulted in their demise. We mustn’t forget that they were fierce fighters during the Crusades, motivated by religious zeal to protect free access to the Holy Land for all Christians. Sometimes it takes centuries for a **clearer picture** of the facts to emerge. Even then, much remains a mystery.

- I received an e-mail from the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center informing me that the “**Cathedral Fox**” completed its full recovery and was released to the wild— in **Aitkin, MN!** Anyone up for a field trip? A generous rehabilitation expert from that area “adopted” our fox in his final stages of recovery! Quite the journey out of the deep Cathedral window well for our lovable fox! *Ad multos annos!*
- **Canceled!** The city of Los Angeles has removed a statue of **St. Junipero Serra** from a downtown park bearing his name. Mayor Eric Garcetti indicated the **name** of the park would be **changed**. Archbishops Gomez (Los Angeles) and Cordileone (San Francisco) had noted both that “history can be complicated and facts matter.” Despite their protestations, civil officials were undeterred.
- “**Godfather, Part IV**”? Not just the stuff of Hollywood film fare, a Sicilian Archdiocese is taking on the mafia! Due to the near complete secularization of the role, for the next three years **godparents** may not be recorded in Baptismal Registers in the Archdiocese of Catania. Too often, it has been used for strengthening “**ritual kinship,**” a reference to organized crime. Church Law is clear that godparents are to be practicing Catholics.
- Congratulations to **Bishop Andrew Cozzens**, newly appointed as the 8th **Bishop of Crookston**. His joyous (and tireless!) ministry here as Auxiliary Bishop since 2013 brought many blessings. We will host a special Farewell Mass and Reception on Sunday, November 28, prior to his December 6, 2021 installation in Crookston.
- “For whom (or when finally!) the **bell tolls.**” With a tip of the cap to Ernest Hemingway, I report that after significant supply chain delays, the central issue with our church bells was finally **repaired** this past week. We desire to **utilize our bells** more frequently, including its funeral toll and at the consecration at the 10:00 Mass. For now, the bells finally sound the Westminster melody properly.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector