

The Knights Templar was a military order, founded by Hugues de Payens. It was active between the twelfth and fourteenth century. Their rule, under the authority of Bernard of Clairvaux, was written at the time of the Council of Troyes in 1129. The Rule depicts the hierarchical statutes, the eating practices, the judgement and punishments of knights, and the regulations of conventual life. However, this essay will examine primarily the emphasis on obedience, what that meant to the Templars, and how it was practically exhibited. It will also detail the strict rules of dress and the reasons behind them according to the rule. Finally, it will touch upon how the role of the Knights as *milites Christi* is depicted in the Rule itself.

The Rule of the Temple begins by specifying who the rule is designated for. It is for all those who ‘secretly despise their own will and desire with a pure heart to serve the sovereign king as a knight...and wear permanently, the very noble armour of obedience.’¹ Based upon the Rule of St. Benedict, the Templar’s emphasis on obedience followed the monastic ideal of renouncing one’s own will, completely.² Repeatedly, the same idea crops up in different ways and phrases, calling the knights to ‘abandon their own wills,’³ or to restrain from acting ‘according to his own will.’⁴ The foundation for this as the rule states is found within Jesus Christ’s own words that he has come not “to do my own will, but the will of my father who sent me.”⁵ In imitation of Christ, the Knights were expected to submit in the same way to the Master of the Templars. They were not to rest when they desired or fight when they desired, only when given permission or instructed by the Master. They were to obey him without delay as though it was a command from Christ, himself.⁶ Another example of the importance of obedience can be seen in Templar’s rule that no child should take the vow until he is old enough to understand and truly desire to submit himself to the rules.⁷

Obedience was the bridge between the militaristic culture and religious service, and it allowed for the Templars to flourish as so-called “Warrior Monks.” Because they were fighting enemies who were faster and more agile than the Frankish knights, they needed to retain strict formation and hierarchy.⁸ It was also an expression of their monkhood as ‘the worst hardship of monastic life is not self-denial or celibacy, but obedience to a superior’s least command.’⁹ It was a form of martyrdom, dying to oneself, even in practical, menial choices like asking permission from the Master before going out to the town or city.¹⁰

¹ Judith Upton-Ward, *The Rule of the Templars* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992), para. 1.

² Kristjan Toomaspoeg, ‘Chapter 8: Templars, Hospitallers, and Teutonic Knights,’ *A Companion to Medieval Rules and Customaries*, p. 242 DOI: https://doi-org.uwtsd.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/9789004431546_009

³ *ibid.*, para. 40.

⁴ *ibid.*, para. 41.

⁵ Upton-Ward, *The Rule of the Templars*, para. 41.

⁶ *ibid.*, para. 39.

⁷ *ibid.*, para. 14.

⁸ John Howe, ‘Military Secrets of the Knights Templar: The Rule,’ *Medieval Warfare*, 6, 5 (2016), p. 22.

⁹ Desmond Seward, *The Monks of War: The Military Religious Orders*, p. 35.

¹⁰ Upton-Ward, *The Rule of the Templars*, para. 41.

The brothers were designated by their white, brown, or black habits. Their white cloaks were symbols of their purity and chastity and the fact that they had left their paths of darkness to be 'reconciled to their creator.'¹¹ Because of this weighty symbolism, no one who was not a member of the Knights of Christ was allowed to wear a white cloak.¹² Their robes were simple to stave off any inclination to pride or envy, with no ornamentation or fur. This was paralleled in their weaponry and saddles which were plain and unadorned with silver or gold.¹³ Because of the heat in Eastern Europe, the knights were allowed to wear a linen shirt. It was also important for them to be able to slip in and out of their boots easily, so shoelaces and pointed-toe shoes were prohibited. The ideals of asceticism and chastity can be seen through their uniforms and their strict observances that 'no excess may be noted on their bodies.'¹⁴

The strict rules and obedience are only expanded as the knights were called to sacrifice themselves for the brothers 'defending the land from the unbelieving pagans who are the enemies of the son of the virgin Mary.'¹⁵ This is where their nature as soldiers for God--*milites Christi*--comes forth. Having taken the vows of a monk, they were still allowed to take up their swords and kill. The Knights Templar were the first to ever do so.¹⁶ Desmond Seward says that 'if mendicant brethren preached the Gospel, military brethren defended it.'¹⁷ Warfare united with religious devotion allowed the knights to 'kill the enemies of the cross without sinning.'¹⁸ This separated them from lay knights who were entrenched in the sin and temptations of the world.¹⁹ God chose the Knights of the Temple to defend the church and because of their dedication to the Lord and to his precepts, they did not need to fear going into battle for their souls were saved.²⁰ When they fought the pagans and those who opposed Christ, it was as if they were killing the evil one himself.²¹

The Knights Templar were monks who took a vow of chastity, poverty, and obedience. However, unlike traditional monks, they lived as warriors, defending pilgrims and the Holy Land. Within their rule, an emphasis on obedience as the renunciation of their own will—a concept stemming from the Rule of St. Benedict—tied their military endeavors to their religious devotion. Their dress was chaste and ascetic, with a few changes from traditional monastic dress due to their roles as Knights inhabiting Eastern Europe. The Rule of the Templars also addressed

¹¹ *ibid.*, para. 17.

¹² *ibid.*, para. 17.

¹³ Seward, *The Monks of War*, p. 32.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, para. 21.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, para. 56

¹⁶ Steven R. Talley, & Filmroos Inc., 'The Knights Templar,' *In Search of History*, (1997) [Video/DVD], 5:30. <<https://video-alexanderstreet-com.uwtsd.idm.oclc.org/watch/the-knights-templar/details>>

¹⁷ Seward, *The Monks of War*, p. 19.

¹⁸ Upton-Ward, *The Rule of the Templars*, para. 57.

¹⁹ Toomaspoeg, 'Ch. 8: Templars, Hospitallers, and Teutonic Knights,' *A Companion to Medieval Rules and Customaries*, p. 226.

²⁰ *ibid.*, para. 9.

²¹ Toomaspoeg, 'Ch. 8: Templars, Hospitallers, and Teutonic Knights,' *A Companion to Medieval Rules and Customaries*, p. 226.

their purpose which was to sacrifice their soul for that of their brothers as Christ had done on the cross. Because of their defense of the church, they were given absolution for killing the enemies of Christianity.

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