

Service in the Order of Malta
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This paper is adapted from a presentation given in New York City by Father Hollas at the 2015 Chaplains Convocation of the American Association.

I. Introduction.

It's an honor to be able to speak to you today about the charism of the Order of Malta, though I'm not sure that I have all that many words of wisdom to impart. Still, I hope to share some of my experience as a medieval historian, as somebody interested in the history of the Order of Malta, and as a chaplain in the Order for twelve years. It's also great to be in New York, because New York has always been a very special place for me. I have spent a lot of my life in the area, going to college at Princeton in New Jersey and graduate school at Yale in Connecticut. So New York was naturally the nice intermediate point for a regular escape. More particularly, New York has always figured in the life of my own community, Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, MN.

Some of you may be aware that for almost ninety years, the monks of Saint John's Abbey staffed two parishes in New York: Saint Anselm's and Saint Benedict's in the Bronx. Msgr. Ritchie himself is a native of St. Benedict's Parish. And among the many other vocations that were fostered there, there was a young kid whose mother, on her death bed, handed her son over to the pastor, Fr. Terence, for whom he had been named. Fr. Terence later took young Terry to seminary and then showed up at all of the other significant events in his life, including the day he got his cardinal's hat. So that was Cardinal Cooke, who was a native of our parish. And one of the great memories that circulates in our monastery is of a visit by Cardinal Cooke with Fr. Terence in his last years. It was an inspiration to see the two of them walking the halls of the monastery, visiting about the old days.

I've been interested in the Order of Malta for a long time, but I knew about the Order's history long before I knew about its current work. We all tend naturally to focus on the current work of the Order and its outreach to the sick and the poor, but on occasion, we think of its military exploits as well. But especially for those who have never visited Malta to see the architectural legacy of the Order, it can be easy to overlook not only the history of the Order but also the huge amount of documentation that the Order has accumulated through the centuries. For nine years, I was the director of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library at Saint John's University in Minnesota, and for nearly fifty years HMML, the acronym for that library, has done preservation work of medieval and renaissance manuscripts. For the last forty years we have worked to microfilm and now to digitize the archives of the Order of Malta at the National Library in Valletta, and I was privileged to be a part of that while I was director.

When Napoleon expelled the Order of Malta from the island of Malta in 1798, the Knights took as much as they could with them, but they could not take their archives. When we at HMML started working at the National Library in the 1970's, there were

piles and piles of documents, gathered and bound up like so many bales of hay. No one had really sorted through them in a long time, and more than a few of them had gone unread in the time since Napoleon had left. So we've worked there for all these years, trying to put some order into those collections of documents. More recently, we've worked with the archives at the Grand Magistry in Rome, assisting the staff there in the digitization of those records. So we should never forget that the Order has a huge treasure trove of documentation, both in Malta and in Rome, as well as scattered in libraries throughout Europe.

That was my introduction to the Order of Malta. As the director of the library, I was able to go to Malta several times to see the work progressing. Eventually, I left as director and then took a sabbatical at Woodside Priory, a Benedictine house outside of San Francisco, where I got my introduction to the Western Association. There was a monk there, Fr. Egon Javor, who had worked for thirty years as a chaplain in the Order of Malta, and he had been the spiritual tutor to a generation of people who had joined the Order in the Western Association. He was approaching ninety years and had decided that it was time for him to let go. But he had never given up on the hope that a Benedictine would continue his work, though there was no one in his community who was particularly interested in that. When he found out that I knew the history of the Order, he asked me if I would be interested. I said I was, and that's when I found out what the Order does today.

That's also when I realized this particular point of contrast: I knew what the Order used to do, but I didn't know what the Order does today. As a result of Fr. Egon's introduction, I went on to meet many wonderful people in the Western Association, and I discovered that the Order of Malta is a vibrant living organization with a great future. And what made me want to join was not an academic interest in the Order's history. What made me want to join is perhaps what made some of you want to join. As priests most of you don't need extra work, and I presume you were not looking for extra stuff to fill in the big empty gaps your calendar. Nor was I. But I was willing to step into something where members had to do something more than just write a check and march in a procession.

The people in the Western Association expected to serve, and they expected their colleagues in the Order to serve. And when I saw these accomplished professionals serving the sick and the poor, I found that very compelling. That was the reason I was willing to get involved in the Order of Malta. But as time went on, my own involvement intensified, and soon enough I found myself involved in a wide variety of activities that I had never bargained for. More particularly, I'm now the chief chaplain of the Subpriory of Our Lady of Philermo in the Western Association, which means I do an awful lot of retreats. We have a five-day retreat for the Subpriory every year, for example, plus a one-day day of reflection. And I've been privileged to work with the Association's monthly Masses in San Francisco, and on occasion in Los Angeles as well. And more recently I've had the chance to give retreats in the American and Federal Associations, and that's been a really mind-expanding experience for me as well.

In the process, I've met some extraordinary people, and because of that, I've also been pushed to explore the spirituality of the Order of Malta. Previously, we learned about the growing numbers of members who are seeking spiritual nourishment through their involvement in the Order of Malta. In short, they seek to serve the sick and the poor, but they are also looking for something that will stimulate their own life in Jesus Christ. And that correlates with my own experience. Like many of you, I've discovered that people who join the Order today are not looking for another medal, after which they can retire and do little or nothing. On the contrary, people today are incredibly busy. And if they're going to join something, and if they're going to invest their resources, they're also interested in investing their time. They also want to do something of value for the Church and for society. Not surprisingly that means that they want to invest in their own spiritual growth. People consistently talk about their desire for spiritual nourishment, and I think that's where we as chaplains come into our own. Here's where we have something of unique value to offer them through our own service.

I suspect when you joined as chaplains, you may have joined for all sorts of reasons, one of which was to offer spiritual guidance to people. But as time goes on, depending on where your local area happens to be in its development, the demand for spiritual input may or may not have been significant. But it is becoming more and more important as we go forward. And so, if we're going to be of use to the Order, if we are going to be the servants of the servants of the sick and the poor, then we have to be well-prepared for this. That's our job, and it's our own vocation within the Order of Malta. And so it is that, occasionally, we need to remind ourselves that we bring to the table something that the members are craving. What they want is spiritual insight and spiritual growth, and we've each become a chaplain to help provide that. And it's why I continue as a chaplain, because the demand for this service has not diminished as the years have passed.

You and I have done a lot of work on behalf of the Order, but we also have to stand in awe of those chaplains and leaders who served in the centuries before us and did so much to make the Order what it is today. And so, as I reflect today on a few points from the historical experience of the Order, I want to suggest that the Order has a real genius for reinventing itself. It has evolved and developed in response to challenge, but at the same time I think the Order has succeeded because we've stuck to core concepts that have served us well over time. And I want to touch on some of those today.

My subtext is this: we ought never depart from or cast off our core principles, or we'll run the risk of untethering ourselves from what gives us life and what best serves us. I liken this to a house and its infrastructure. It's something that over time we can take for granted, but if we don't take time out to rebuild the plumbing or repair the roof, eventually we can fall into disrepair. And that's always the risk for any lively organization that accepts new people who bring with them into the Order vitality and wonderful ideas. Those ideas can rejuvenate an organization, but they can also cause it to veer off track from its core mission. So periodically, leaders have to stand back and reflect on what it is that makes us who we are, and what defines the Order of Malta's unique contribution to the life of the Church.

II. The Early History of the Order: a normative experience.

The early history of the Order of Malta is terribly important to us, I think, and not just because it satisfies some intellectual curiosity. In fact, the early experience of the Order is what determines the Order's identity today. And I think the Easter season, which we are celebrating right now, offers a good point of departure to consider this. During these days of the Easter season, our Eucharistic readings from the Acts of the Apostles show that the early Church went through the very same formative experience. In brief, in the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples of Jesus had to confront a series of dilemmas, and they had to make decisions that drew from the formative period of listening to the Lord Jesus. We believe in retrospect that the Holy Spirit informed their decisions, and that their decisions became normative for the life of the Church. So it is that we certainly must adapt the message of Jesus to each new generation of believers, but we do not have the right to reinvent the Church every few years.

So formative was this experience in the early Church that I can think of only one experiment in the Acts of the Apostles that the disciples later decided to toss aside. And that was the practice of shared goods -- actualized by the selling of their houses and placing the proceeds from the sale at the feet of the apostles. It's the only instance in the Acts of the Apostles in which the disciples reflected on what they had done and said: "Well, I guess that didn't work out so well." Everything else, however, became normative. And I think that same dynamic applies to the history of the Order of Malta. So it is that we must always have a healthy appreciation for what happened in the Order in its earliest years.

With that in mind, the first major point I'd like to make is this: for hundreds of years, the Order was part and parcel of Mediterranean history. And if history is not your forte, I apologize. But after all, you are members of and stuck in an Order with an awful lot of history. So you and I may as well get over it. We were part of the history of the Middle East, and that impacts us today.

Given that, it's important to keep in mind that the members of the Order of Malta, long before they ever got to Malta, were first the Knights of St. John. Eventually they became the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem and of Rhodes and of Malta. And all through those centuries of pilgrimage, they never threw much of anything away. It's one reason why they shipped their archives with them when they left the Holy Land. It's a bit startling to realize that in the first decades of exile, the Knights of Saint John had every intention of returning to Jerusalem. It was their home, and Jerusalem was the locus of their ministry. Rhodes, and even Malta, were places of exile, but Jerusalem was home. And this idea is important to keep in mind. The eastern Mediterranean always had a major place in the imagination of the Order. In popular usage the name may have shortened to the "Knights of Malta," but in their hearts they became the "Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta." They threw nothing away, in other words.

So it was that there was one constant in the life of the Order: it was part of the landscape of the Mediterranean, and that orientation remained so until Napoleon. And along with that Mediterranean orientation, the Order was -- for better or for worse -- a force to be reckoned with. Militarily, the Order obviously was the central player at the siege of Rhodes, and then again at the siege of Malta. But it also became a major player in the commercial life of the Mediterranean, and it became a participant in the political and social life of Western Europe. And as a result of those kinds of experiences, the Order of Malta found a sweet spot in the imagination of the people of western Europe.

The Order of Malta loomed large in the popular imagination of Christians in medieval Europe, and no doubt many younger sons of nobles had fantasies about becoming a knight, and perhaps specifically a Knight of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem. Parenthetically, I would submit that this is one of those items that still tugs at people's minds when they think of the Middle Ages and the Order of Malta. This is part of the baggage that we still carry in the Order of Malta today, and, for better and for worse, it's part of our heritage. Whether it serves us well or poorly today is secondary. It's what we did for a while. But it's not what we do today.

That military involvement went on for centuries, but in the crucible of time, that activity did not become normative for the mission of the Order of Malta. That explains why today, we are a military order in name only, and no one seems to regret the absence of a military section in the Order today. That has practical implications, because most of the members of the Order of Malta whom I know are simply unfit for duty on the battlefield. At the risk of offending you with this thought, I'll say it anyway. If we and our peers in the Order of Malta all marched off to war today, we'd last only a few minutes on the battlefield. But the very idea of having been a military force once upon a time is important to remember. We have to remember that we no longer do that, and we must be sure to keep the romantic element in check, lest we get carried away. It was something that the Order did once, but it's not what we do today; and I doubt that a proposal to militarize our membership would elicit little more than gales of laughter, were it introduced at a meeting of the Sovereign Council.

In any case, this aspect of the Order's past tugs at our imagination, and because it does, it both helps and hinders us. The Order of Malta has always had star power, and I've always been surprised that there haven't been movies made about some of the more dramatic moments in the history of the Order. The siege of Rhodes and the siege of Malta both should have powerful box office appeal. But for whatever reason, those epics have never made it beyond Hollywood's back offices.

But the allure is there, and it's been there for a long time. Henry VIII of England, for example, had a fascination with the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem and of Rhodes. Outside of his bedroom at Windsor Castle, he had a big mural painted on the wall, depicting the siege of Rhodes. Later, when the Emperor Charles V gave the island of Malta to the Order, Henry VIII wrote a letter of congratulation to the Grand Master. That letter is still at the library in Valetta, and you should ask to see it if you go there. That

letter is a bit ironic, however, because shortly thereafter Henry seized the Order's assets in England. We tend to forget that the English crown owned several properties that once belonged to the Order of Saint John, including Hampton Court.

In any case, if Henry VIII was fascinated by the Order, it gives you a sense of how others likely looked at it. They looked at it with respect. They looked at it with admiration and with envy. And because of that, the Order was very lucky that it never shared the fate of the Order of the Temple, whose riches were just too much to resist. I would submit that the Order of the Temple put itself in a difficult position simply because it departed from its charism. If guarding the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem is your mission, and then you vacate the premises, you have to come up with something in a hurry to replace that mission. The Templars chose the medieval equivalent of banking, and with banks come robbers. By contrast, the Order of Saint John had this advantage: it could pursue its core mission of serving the sick and the poor anywhere it happened to be. It was nice to run a hospice in Jerusalem, but there were sick and poor outside of the sacred city as well. Then and now, members of the Order of Saint John could pursue its mission virtually anywhere in the world.

All of this hints at one of the challenges we sometimes face as the Order confronts the 21st century. We have lots of people who enter the Order for all the right reasons, but we are also emerging from a period when a lot of people entered the Order because of their fascination with its history, and because they thought of membership in the Order as an honor. All of us as chaplains have to deal with those tendencies, especially if we may have been dazzled by them as well. Years ago people got invested, and that was that. It was something that they were proud of, but they never realized there was a component of service that went with the honor. Thankfully, however, that is changing rather quickly.

New members in the Order of Malta now want the whole nine yards. Some few still think of membership in the Order of Malta as an honor, but I suspect it is not the primary motivation for most incoming members. To their credit, I think most new members have come to serve. For any and all members, then, dwelling on some aspects of our history is nice, but not entirely helpful. But there is one bit of history that is important to remember: every member of Order of Malta, whether newly-invested or long-time veteran, should keep in mind that even in the 12th century, the Knights never forgot their prime directive. They did indeed build and staff romantic castles, but they were in the Middle East primarily to serve the sick and the poor. They never forgot that. And along with that, they nourished a commitment to personal sanctification and spiritual growth.

We can easily forget that the first generations of the Knights of Saint John were men who had a deep religious commitment. They felt the personal call to holiness, and they practiced a spirituality that is not unfamiliar to us today. So they had spiritual lives. They had lives of service, even if at times they experimented with other things, like military commitment. With that in mind, it's important to remember that it didn't have to be that way. The Knights of the Order of Saint John could have gone to the Holy Land for personal gain. They could have gone there to carve out little territories for

themselves, much like many of their relatives from France had done. But they didn't. They chose, instead, to serve the sick and the poor.

There's no doubt that the early leaders of the Order were conscious of this temptation, and they regularly hammered home the idea that personal gain was not what they sought in the Holy Land. They were not there to carve out kingdoms for themselves. They were not there to enrich themselves at the expense of the local population. Instead they were there to be in service to others, and they were there to share what they had with the poor. This is certainly an explicit element in the Rule of Raymond Dupuy, the first rule for the Order. And I want to cite a short excerpt from it, because it vividly makes the point that these people were not in it for themselves. They were there to serve other people -- particularly the sick and the poor. And the disciplinary measures of Raymond Dupuy suggest that they meant business.

Written in the 1120s, the Rule of Raymond Dupuy was uncompromising in its punishment of knights who amassed personal property. "If anyone of the brethren who has died has kept property of his own and has not during his lifetime shown it to his Master, let no divine office be performed for him; but he should be buried as if he had been excommunicated. And if a brother who is alive and well has kept property and has hidden it from his Master and it is afterwards found on him, let that money be tied to his neck and let him be led naked through the hospital of Jerusalem and through the other houses of the Order where he has lived, and let him be beaten and let him fast for forty days, taking bread and water on Wednesdays and Fridays." There are other precepts similar to that, but the important point is that they really did mean business when it came to personal poverty. And we shouldn't apologize for the crudeness of a Rule from the 12th century, because in some respects, you're dealing with people who are not as sophisticated as we are today. Today we rely on psychological sanctions; but that's not how they did it in a more violent culture.

Be that as it may, they wanted to stress that the common purpose of the Order transcended all else. The call to holiness is what animated them, and from this we should conclude that the call to holiness should animate us as well.

Another important point has to do with the Benedictine roots of the Order. While its spirit has elements of the Benedictine ethos, it never became a Benedictine-style order. Instead, the rule that they eventually adopted for themselves was the Rule of Saint Augustine, and the facts of the early experience of the Order warrant a simple overview, because yet again, these became normative for the life of the Order for centuries to come. And, I would submit, they are today normative for us as well.

In the 1050's, merchants from Amalfi had set up a trading station in Jerusalem, under the auspices of the regional rulers, the Muslim sultans in Egypt. In time, they brought in a group of Benedictine monks from Italy, and in the course of their work, these monks established a hospice to care for pilgrims who fell sick while in Jerusalem. They set this up next to the church of Saint John, where tradition says that the birth of John the

Baptist had been announced. From that happy coincidence derives the name "Order of Saint John of Jerusalem."

As the hospice developed, the group that tended to the pilgrims lived with something of a Benedictine spirit, but it eventually adopted an organizational structure that owed more to the inspiration of the Rule of St. Augustine. So it is that the Rule of Raymond Dupuy owes more to Augustine than to Benedict, but the spirituality, I would submit, comes from Benedict. In 1113, Pope Paschal II authorized in his bull the establishment of the Order of St. John as a religious order, and it names Gerard as the warden of that new order.

This bit of history is significant, because 1113 may be the date of the charter of Pope Pascal II, but it was not the moment when the Order came into being. The Order that was authorized in 1113 had been there, in evolution, for nearly forty years. Those years were formative, and in key ways they became normative for the later experience of the Order. So it was that when the Crusaders came to the gates of Jerusalem in 1099, members of the Order were already there to give them medical assistance. So it is incorrect to say that the Order was a product of the Crusades. It was quite the opposite, and the pre-crusader experience of the Order had a defining impact on its later development.

Then as now, Middle Eastern politics was enormously complicated, and we westerners tend to blur together all the Muslim religious groups. In fact, the Muslim group that welcomed the Amalfitans to Jerusalem was under the political control of the relatively benevolent sultans of Egypt. It was one of those sultans who gave his blessing to the monks from Italy who set up this hospice. Only later, after the capture of Jerusalem by the Muslim Turks, did serious religious conflict and the persecution of Christians follow. And with it came the destruction of church properties.

Under the oversight of Muslims from Egypt, Frá Gerard and his disciples had a benign sponsor and the authorization to serve the sick and the poor pilgrims. But the blessing came with the condition that they serve people of any and all faiths. This was a key point, because in effect the sultan asked them to serve Christians, Jews and Muslims; and that has been a normative experience for the Order of Malta ever since. It explains why, for example, the Order continues to run a maternity hospital in Jerusalem that today serves Arab women who are for the most part Muslim. We've put our money where our mouth is because we believe that everyone is created in the image of God. We serve everyone, and this attitude of unbiased service has its roots in the Order's pre-Crusader experience.

When the Crusaders came, it was Gerard's natural impulse to help them, but at the same time his hospice continued to help the people it had been helping for forty years. Gerard was an incredibly gifted organizer, and by the time he got the papal charter, his followers had seven hospices across the Mediterranean. These straddled the pilgrimage route to Jerusalem; they served all sorts of people, and coincidentally they facilitated the importation of resources from Western Europe. By 1113, it had become

so well organized that Pascal II chartered the organization as a religious Order within the Catholic Church.

What's to take away from this experience up through and including Pascal II? For one thing, the Order had separated itself from the Benedictine community of Saint Mary. But as important as that may have been, with Pascal's letter the Order gained the right to elect from within its members a successor to Frá Gerard. Since that time the Order has protected this right -- sometimes fiercely -- and with a succession of seventy-nine grand masters, that's a record matched by few institutions in the world. That in itself is a singular accomplishment, but it has implications that can be difficult to appreciate today. What it has meant is that it's had a leadership with a focus fixed primarily on the Order, its well-being, and its work. Had it transferred leadership to some other person or some outside force, who knows how long the Order would have stayed on track? In any case, the Order has always elected its own leadership, and that has been vital to its continuity as well as to its vitality.

The second big take-away is something that derives from expectation that the Order of Saint John would serve all. From the beginning, the followers of Blessed Gerard served everybody: Muslims, Christians and Jews, and not just Latin Christians. And while this openness may have been imposed on them by the sultan, it also flows nicely from the Christology of the Rule of Saint Benedict. In his , Benedict writes that the monks should see the face of Christ in the abbot, in the novices and in the elderly monks as well. But above all, monks should receive all guests as if they were Christ himself. This, obviously, is not exclusive to the Benedictine outlook by any means, because it's part and parcel of our Christian heritage. But it's something that would have been at the forefront of the Benedictine life that Gerard would have been exposed to at the Abbey of Saint Mary. And this vision is something he adapts to the Order of Saint John when he speaks of our Lords, the sick and the poor. There is here a double entendre. On the one hand, he is talking about our Lord Jesus Christ; and these people most definitely are the face of Christ. But secondly, he's speaking about the sick and the poor in terms of lords -- as liege lords. Knights were there to serve these people as if they were their social lords, and it showed in the hospitals in Jerusalem, and in Rhodes and then again, in Malta. They serve the sick and the poor with deference and respect; and visibly this took the form of service on silver platters, as if they were nobility.

Finally, what emerges from this early period are hospices that united a life of prayer to a mission of service. Gerard's hospice was extraordinarily successful, but this rested on his awareness from day one that service to the sick and the poor was too important to be constricted by the requirement to live in a cloister. This is hugely significant, and what Gerard did is centuries ahead of everybody else in the Church. A hundred years before, there were people like Saint Francis, who dared to leave the cloister to go out and minister to people, Gerard was insisting that his followers do that. Long before Trent, with its emphasis on religious orders that did all kinds of good works and staffed public services like orphanages and schools, Gerard was asking his followers to go out and serve all sorts of people. Pascal's bull that authorized an Order designed to serve

the public is way ahead of its time -- by centuries. This, then, is a real pioneering action, and it was not lost on people in the twelfth century.

What was also a significant break from the religious life of the time was the fact that the people who came to join the Order of Saint John were adults. Religious life in the Middle Ages both flourished and had problems because so many members came as kids, as child oblates. Young people would be dropped off at age five or eleven and they'd grow up in the monastery and be educated there. At age eighteen, they could choose to leave or to stay and profess vows as a monk. But consider that their choices were rather limited in the twelfth century. They could go back to what was then a rather simple agrarian life, or they could have a much more sophisticated life in the cloister or the cathedral school.

This adolescence in the monastery, or in a cathedral school, brought with it educational opportunities that were generally absent elsewhere. Such people grew up learned and sophisticated. They knew Latin and they were schooled theologically. They learned things like music and mathematics and the other subjects that were part and parcel of being an educated person in the twelfth century. But consider the young men who left France to fight in the Crusades. They had neither the education nor the discipline that came from a youth spent in a monastery.

Ultimately what this means is that Blessed Gerard opened up religious life to a class of people for whom it had not been possible. And what also resulted was an adult membership that was there as a result of adult conversion. These followers of Gerard were there because they wanted to be there, not because they'd always been there. And that is a crucial difference, and it shows up first of all in the enthusiasm that they must have brought to the work. It also meant that this was not going to be a clerical order. For the first Knights of Saint John it was already too late in life for them to consider ordination because it was too late to learn Latin. It was also a little late to do an apprenticeship under some parish priest. The result was a different kind of order -- one in which members would not be monks, nor would they be clerics. And since they had not grown up in the Order, they were there primarily because they had chosen to be there.

I would suggest as a footnote that this is one of the great gifts of the Order of Malta today. People joined then and now because they wanted to join, not because they had never known any other way of life. Given the twelfth century, this makes for a pretty radical organization. And over all of this, Frá Gerard imposed a structure that has served the Order well ever since. For one thing, he centralized the Order. He gave it a grand master, and everything flowed down from him as if flowing down from a pyramid. And because you had a grand master, chosen by a group of knights, you had one person who could oversee and impose an ethos for the entire order.

The common ethos that bound together all the members of the Order was one that spread internationally. To appreciate this, you have to realize how society in western Europe in the Middle Ages was so completely local. This was a world in which every

region had its own language. But in the Order of Saint John, you have an organization trying to gather together people from dozens of ethnic groups. They conceded differences in language and culture through the establishment of "the langues," but the point of the langues was to harness for good those elements that might unravel an organization that had a central mission. Not coincidentally, this nod to local differences facilitated the only practice that could keep the order alive in its work in Jerusalem and then later in Rhodes and Malta. This was an organization that had to bring wealth from where it was to where it needed to be.

When the Order set itself up in Jerusalem, it could not very well ask either the local Muslim population or the indigenous Christian community to support its work. Like every missionary group in the history of the Church, the Knights of Saint John had to rely on people back in Europe to send them money to make a go of it. And that's precisely what the Order organized itself to do. From hindsight, I would say that this is yet again one of the signature aspects of the early history of the Order that impacts us today. After all these centuries, the Order of Malta collects money from where it is and forwards it to where it isn't but where it is definitely needed. Without such an international structure and the commitment that could make this transfer of wealth happen, the Order never could have done its work, nor continue it today.

What emerged under the centralized leadership of the grand master was an extensive network of priories and estates that funneled money and people from Western Europe into the Middle East. This, by the way, foreshadowed the work of non-profits today; and this altruism distinguished the Order from so many of the crusaders who left France to go to the Middle East. Too many of them went to the Holy Land to set up their personal kingdoms; members of the Order of Saint John did not. Granted that the Order did build castles and supported armies, and it continued to do so in Rhodes and Malta, it's still important to keep in mind just how much of their resources went into non-profit ventures like hospitals. If you've ever been to Malta or Rhodes, you will see the enormous hospitals that still exist. In Malta, the hospital for men had five hundred beds, while the one for women had two hundred beds. This required a lot of money to run, particularly if you served everyone on silver trays. That lavish expenditure is a vivid reminder that the primary work of the Order was service to the sick and the poor. Whatever else they may have done happened as a sideline. It's what Gerard was there to do, and it's what his followers did for centuries thereafter.

What does this mean today? What's the point of all this? For one thing it's important for our new members to appreciate the international character of the Order of Malta today. Not surprisingly, many of our members have no sense of the scale of the Order's International relief efforts, nor the scope of its day-to-day work in the far corners of the world. They have little sense of the fact that there are 14,000 members scattered all over the place. Only when they go to Lourdes for the first time do the size and international character of the Order start to sink in, and it's one of the reasons why members should go. Only then do they begin to realize that this has been part of the nature of the Order from the beginning. It was one of the things that facilitated the success of the Order historically, and it makes it happen today as well.

So the awareness of our tradition is significant, and not just for sentimental reasons. At the very least, we need to know about the organizational principles that have shaped and guided the Order from the beginning, because if we drift away from those principles, we run the risk of decay and disintegration. Above all, it's important not to be distracted by all the castles the Order has built, or the navies it has staffed, or its involvement in international diplomacy. Rather, the service to the sick and the poor is what has always come first, and it's what comes first today. And if Hollywood and the popular imagination might overlook this altruistic effort, it's still the common thread that runs through the history of the Order from day one through today.

The international character of the Order has been important from the beginning and in its first days and now, it allows the Order to accomplish a great deal. Among other things this has allowed the Order to bring money and human resources from where they are and take them to where they are most needed. And while local members serve local needs, the mission to serve wherever people are suffering remains a central part of our ethos. And we do all of this because we are rooted in a Christian spirituality. We do this out of a spirituality that says we see Christ not only in the poor and the sick in New York, but we see Christ especially in the people whom we don't know nor will likely ever see. But they are Christ as well.

This Christocentric underpinning is what distinguishes us from the Red Cross. The Red Cross does great work, but it does its work without regard to the race, creed or color or anything else of the people who are its members and who support it. By contrast, we in the Order of Malta serve out of a commitment that is spiritual and that has a Christocentric worldview. We see Christ in the sick and in the poor, but we do it with an eye toward our own spiritual growth. And if we don't do it through life in a cloister, I would submit that we do strive to achieve this through a community that transcends regions and international boundaries.

III. Contemporary Challenges, Opportunities, and Caveats.

What are some of the challenges that we face today -- challenges that you and I as chaplains can address as the Order moves forward? Well, first of all, I think that the creation of a spirituality that serves our members is terribly important. Most of you are aware of the *Journal of Spirituality* that the Order has published in recent years. These are small volumes, and the first issues were a noble attempt to at least get something started. These initial efforts were certainly not the last words on the subject, and we've gotten more sophisticated as we've gone along. But they've been helpful, and I encourage you to read through them if you've not had the chance. They are useful steps in the ongoing effort to develop a spirituality that speaks to our members today.

Along those lines, I find it interesting that the Order of Malta has been so dedicated to the service of the sick and the poor for the last nine hundred years that it's never had time to start schools or universities. It's never devoted the resources to train its members to be great scholars who could enunciate a developed spirituality of the Order. To appreciate this, go to any Catholic library, and there you will see two or three ranges of volumes on Franciscan spirituality or Jesuit Spirituality or Benedictine spirituality. Then go and look for the section on the spirituality of the Order of Malta. It's hard to find because it is not that extensive. What that implies is this: for nine hundred years we've been doers of the Word, rather than reflectors on the Word. So there's never been a contingent of scholars working on that spirituality. But that's where we as chaplains can make a contribution today.

So where do we start? First of all, one benefit of the scarcity of texts on the Order's spirituality is that you can get through most of the sources in short order. At the same time, that very scarcity means that chaplains today can make an original contribution as they reflect on the ideals of the Order and the lived experience of the members. And so here is where I begin a reflection that comes out of my own musings over the years.

If our spirituality is Christocentric, it can be useful to look at its embodiment in patron saints, or models. And I like to look at four saints from whom we can tease out a spirituality that can serve our members today. Two come directly from the Order of Malta's experience, and the first is Gerard. He's an obvious model for us, simply because he guided the Order in its first years and bequeathed to the Order its mission to the sick and the poor. That's what he did, and that mission remains the central plank in our job description today. Against this benchmark, all new initiatives must be measured. And so, if some initiative has little or nothing to do with service to the sick and the poor, it may not contribute to the life of the Order.

The second person of inspiration is Saint John the Baptist, who in every respect was a happy accident for the Order. It was a stroke of luck that the hospice in Jerusalem was located near his church, rather than alongside somebody else's church. And I say this because John the Baptist is a great inspiration for all Christians of all times. He was a voice crying in the wilderness. And when Jesus first came into his view, he pointed with

his finger to Jesus and said "behold the Lamb of God. Behold Him who takes away the sins of the world."

John's message is as important for us now as it was for Gerard and his first coworkers. For starters, John the Baptist reminds us that his work was not about himself, nor is our work about ourselves. We are not in this business for our own sake, because what we do, we do for the sake of Jesus. This is a servant spirituality, and our work should point to Christ, just as John the Baptist pointed to Jesus with his finger.

A third person who obviously figures in all of this is Mary, the Mother of God. For starters, I think Mary's prayer, the *Magnificat*, is the perfect meditation for members of our Order, because it describes what should be our own experience. With Mary, we can rightly say that "our souls magnify the Lord. Behold the Lord has done great things for us." Mary says that, and all of us as members of the Order of Malta should recognize it about ourselves. For one thing, on a practical level, the Lord has indeed done great things for our members. They are talented people, and much of this was gift. Most of them were blessed to have parents who encouraged them and instilled great values in them. And armed with those values, our members became successful professionals. Thankfully, too, God has imbued in them a strong sense of service, and that's what they've come to do in the Order. So like Mary, they can proclaim that the Lord has done great things for them, and the Lord continues to do His work through them. And holy is His name. And sacred is the work God does through our hands.

Finally, I think of Mother Theresa as a significant inspiration to us all, and it's my own opinion that we should give her a posthumous membership in the Order of Malta. And we should do so because she epitomized what we try to do in our own feeble ways. She went out and picked up people off of the streets. From an economic point of view, many would say that this was a waste of her time and talent. Certainly she could have done something better with her life -- she could have done great things with her organizational expertise. But in fact, she lived the Christocentric vision of creation. She saw the face of Christ in the people in the gutter. By any standard except a Christian standard, these people were worthless; but for her they were a gift from God. That, I think, is the kind of inspiration that we need to animate our lives as members of the Order of Malta.

What might be the other issues or opportunities that we as chaplains of the Order might confront? Well, I think that preaching a spirituality of service is something you and I ought to do when we address the members of the Order of Malta. It can be very tempting in our spiritual conferences to get off message and talk about other issues in the Church. And while those issues and causes are important, the Church already has other groups that address those things. By contrast, an emphasis on service to the sick and the poor is uniquely central to the life of the Order of Malta, and we need to maintain the focus of our members on this activity. We need to keep our focus on the poor and the sick. It can be very enticing to go off on tangents and shift our gaze to the cause of the week -- and there are worthy causes galore. But to the extent that we

allow ourselves as chaplains to drift away from service to our lords the sick and the poor, we stray from our mission.

Along with an eye to the core traditions of the Order, I think we also have to keep our eyes open to the stirrings of the Spirit in our own day. This is exemplified in the role of women in the Order today. I've always believed that the loss of our military role has not harmed the Order all that much, and in fact Napoleon may have done the Order of Malta a big favor when he dislodged us from that island-fortress. The Order has not suffered in the least by losing its navy and army. And whatever losses we suffered, we have more than compensated with the presence of women in the Order. As one wag recently commented, once we allowed women into the Order, we started reading the mission statement with a renewed fervor and got down the serious business of service.

Yet another issue of adaptation involves nobility. Historically, the Order has been a noble Order, and this is a challenging issue for the European membership -- though less so for Americans. Social change in Europe has reduced the pool of nobility from which the Order traditionally drew its members. If other approaches are not implemented, membership in Europe will continue to shrink. Fortunately, outside of Europe the Order has not required that candidates provide the proofs of nobility that Europeans have needed. Still, for Americans, this does have consequences to which we should be attentive. In recent years the Grand Master has attempted to transition membership in the Order from a nobility of blood to a nobility of purpose. As an American, it is easy for me to say that people are noble not because of something that their ancestors did five hundred years ago, but because of our selfless service to others. It is service that makes us noble, not our bloodline. But that said, these are contentious words in some circles, particularly in Europe. We could spend time on that today, but how it teases out in the American experience is something we must be conscious of. This is an Order in which people distinguish themselves by their service to the sick and the poor. It is not an honorific Order.

In that spirit, we've all read biographies of people who have included in their list of honors, membership in the Order of Malta, and here we have a bit of a dilemma. We welcome into the Order people who have in some way or other distinguished themselves in their service as Catholic Christians. But I suppose the best way to balance this is to remind people, in season and out, that membership in the Order of Malta does not mean that they are now finished with their work of service. In fact, it means that they are now authorized to serve even further. It is now a vocation which they embrace freely; and the insignia that they wear on their lapel is meant to communicate that vocation. It is meant to signify that when the poor and the sick need help, this is a person to whom they can turn. The lapel decoration signifies that they are there to step forward when help is needed. They are proclaiming their availability to serve. And clearly this is not an honor, but a vocation. But for some of our more senior members, this is a difficult transition to make.

I think then it is our job as chaplains to remind people that membership in the Order of Malta is a call to serve, rather than a call to be personally enthroned. I think we need to

be attentive to this as an Order, always. And here I would like to make quick reference to the Knights of Justice. It's the Knights of Justice who make us a religious order in the canonical sense of the term. If you have not thought about this, you should know that in the organization of the Church, the Order of Malta falls under the jurisdiction of the Congregation of Religious. And we fit there because of the Knights of Justice, who profess vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. As such, we do not fit into the category of service organizations like the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, or any of a number of such associations in the Church. We are a religious order because of the Knights of Justice, and I would submit that that makes a huge difference for us.

I was struck by this the other day when I was looking through a list of papal honors that the Holy See bestows on worthy individuals in the Church. It's a long list that includes levels of honors in the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. Absent from that list is any reference to membership in the Order of Malta. Membership at any of its levels is authorized by the Grand Master and the Sovereign Council -- meaning, the Order continues to be self-governing, as it has for over nine hundred years.

Given that, it's important that we as chaplains encourage those who might have a vocation to be a Knight of Justice. We need to support them, and not only for the sake of their own religious calling, but for the very selfish reason that the Order depends on the presence of those Knights for its continued existence. For better or worse, some positions of responsibility within the Order are reserved to Knights of Justice. And our place within the Congregation of Religious is dependent entirely on the continued presence of these vowed religious within our midst. Without them, we will cease to be an Order in its current configuration, and we'll be folded into some other jurisdiction. At the very least, with the loss of the Order's self-determination will come the loss of much of its vitality.

Finally, I'd like to make a few comments on my own work as a chaplain, and perhaps they mirror some of the experience that you have had up to this point. As a chaplain, I am well aware that I minister to some very talented people. When I am in a room with members, I freely admit that I'm not the smartest person in the group. I'm certainly not the most accomplished in the group. And I'm well aware that many, if not most of the members, have experience in business or the professions that leave me in the dust. But I also realize that my job is not to be overawed by them, nor feel second-class compared to them. I'm there for the sole purpose of ministering to them. I'm there to be the servant of the servants of the sick and the poor, and so I have a unique place in any gathering of members of the Order of Malta.

I am also aware of other temptations that I face as a chaplain, including the temptation to get involved in the internal politics of the Order. I try to resist that tooth and nail, because I see little to be gained by interfering in these sorts of issues. I would like to say that scarcely any of that exists in the Order of Malta, but then I'd have to go to confession right afterward. In any case, I stay out of these spats because at the end of the day I cannot have compromised my objectivity. At the end of the day, I must be a

chaplain to everyone in the room who wants to ask me for my help. I cannot disqualify myself because I've given the impression that I've taken sides in some conflict.

This can be very difficult to resist, for a lot of reasons. First of all, some issues really are important. But secondly, there's also the natural influence that we as chaplains exercise within our groups. There are more than a few people who curry our favor simply because they see us as a prize to be won over in their quest for power or influence. To give but one example of this, in my work with formation for candidates for Knights of Justice, I have raised this issue, and to a man they cannot believe that such a thing would happen. But no sooner than they are clothed as novices, they discover that they have all sorts of newfound friends who want to be close to them. To a man, they have come back to thank me for the warning. This is one instance in which I wish I had been wrong, but the dynamic within the Order means that some will see us as people to be used for their own ends, and we need to be conscious of that, day in and day out.

Yet another temptation is to get involved and try to run things from the benefit of our own experience. Again, for better and for worse, we are all experienced in the ways of the Church and have valuable insights into shepherding religious groups. Sometimes it's almost too much to resist telling people what or how to do things for the sake of efficiency. But the fact of the matter is that it's not my organization. It is primarily a lay order, with a grand master and sovereign council and local leadership that is not clerical. So I try to give myself a break by letting them run their organization. And if for no other reason, I do it for this reason: I'm well aware that the Lord Jesus quite often prefers to run the world through other people and not through me. So I try to give the Lord room to do it, both for the sake of my humility and for my own peace of mind.

IV. Conclusion: Allowing God to Work Through Others.

Ultimately then, our vocation as chaplains in the Order is one of service, and our job specifically is to let the Lord do his work in the lives of the people of the Order. In that vein, I'd like to close with two stories that I've found quite touching when I think about them, and I think about them often.

The first has to do with a boy of thirteen who started life with malformed hands and feet. He was born with stubs for fingers and feet that were scarcely any better. But to give him digits to grasp things, they amputated his hands and grafted his feet on to his forearms. And he had metal feet, which he was not at all bashful about showing. He was a Malade at Lourdes several years ago, and I have to say that I've never seen anyone like him in my life. He was outgoing, cheerful, and he played soccer with the other kids. No one in the group could believe how astounding this kid was, and how unselfconscious of his condition he was. It was such that, as the cross-bearer at a Tri-Association Mass, he wore shorts.

On that same pilgrimage was a Malade, a marine, returning from Iraq. After Lourdes he was scheduled to have one foot amputated, and of course he was depressed and cried now and again. No one blamed him, because we'd all do the same if we were in his situation. One afternoon as he sat on a bench, depressed, the thirteen-year-old saw him and came over and sat with him. They talked for about fifteen minutes, and at the end of their chat, the kid said to the marine: "It's not so bad, you know." The marine was stunned, and he reached into his pocket, pulled out his Purple Heart, and handed it to the kid with these words: "Here kid, you've earned it." I'm not sure what the kid thought, but he probably didn't think it was a graced moment. He may have said "cool. What's this?" But regardless of what he thought, it was a turning point for the marine and a graced moment for the handful of people privileged to witness this. They had just seen the Lord working through this thirteen-year-old. It was an awesome epiphany of the divine, whether the kid knew it or not.

Many of our members say that the greatest miracles of Lourdes take place in those who serve the sick and the poor. Over and above the spiritual healing that takes place in the malades, it's the servers who see the real miracles all around them. And this short exchange between a thirteen-year-old kid and a marine touched the lives of the people who watched them. And their story continues to move all who hear it.

I have a friend who works regularly with a team of members of the Order of Malta in a soup kitchen in Los Angeles. He says that if you look at the people who come in the door, you see that they are not all that malnourished. None is starving, and they aren't skin and bones; and maybe it's because we and others serve them well. Anyway, they are not desperate for food. Obviously food is important, but it's not the only reason why they are there. When he began to understand this, my friend realized what he could do best in that situation. "I no longer go to that soup kitchen week in and week out so that I can serve them a bowl of soup and some bread. Rather, I go there so that I can smile

to each person who comes through that line. Mine might be the only smile that they get all day. So I figure if I try to see Christ in their faces, then perhaps they might see Christ in my face and feel a little bit better about the world and about themselves. It's not often that I don't get a smile in return, and that makes the trip to the soup kitchen worth it for me."

That, I would submit, is how we see the power of Christ working in and through us. That's how Jesus Christ transforms you and me. That's how Jesus Christ makes us his instruments, called to serve the poor and the sick. When we realize that, then we come to understand that all the organizational issues are secondary, if not tertiary. We do not exist to keep an organization going. We exist to run an organization that allows Christ to be present in the people we serve, and hopefully they will see the face of Christ in us. That's why I continue to be a chaplain in the Order of Malta. And I stay -- not because I'm necessarily the face of Christ to a lot of people -- but because I'm privileged to see the face of Christ in so many others. Those are the most gifted moments of my life.

Thank you.

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