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Armoured in Righteousness: The Insular Mindset of the Teutonic Knights and Their Affinity for Lutheranism

From the mid-thirteenth until the early sixteenth century, the Teutonic Order existed as one of the most unusual political entities in Europe. Founded in late twelfth century Palestine as a German crusading order with close ties to the Holy Roman Emperor, the Order's focus would not remain long in Palestine as it began a long series of wars to conquer, convert, and settle the regions bordering the eastern portions of the Baltic Sea.¹ Uniquely among crusading orders, the Teutonic Knights would become increasingly important territorial rulers in that region over the course of the thirteenth, fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, before a gradual decline began in the fifteenth century. Military attacks led to losses in territory, even as rhetorical ones threatened the Order's legitimacy, pushing it into a precarious position by the early sixteenth century. In 1525, the Order's leading figures secularized the Prussian *Ordensstaat* by their official conversion to Lutheranism, thereby creating the first territorial Lutheran state in Europe.² At the same time, the former Grandmaster, now Duke of Prussia, accepted Polish sovereignty and became a subject of the Polish Crown, securing the stability of the new state.³

¹ As the first of several necessary clarifications of terms, I refer to "the Order" throughout this essay in reference to the Teutonic Order (a.k.a. "The Order of Brothers of the German House of Saint Mary in Jerusalem," "The Order of the Blessed Virgin at Jerusalem," or "the Teutonic Knights"). Regarding other Orders, e.g. the Templar or Hospitaller Knights, I will always include more specific vocabulary.

² The Order's conversion occurred shortly after that of the Free City of Nuremberg, but as Nuremberg was a free city, the Order was nonetheless the first *Flächenstaat* (territorial state) to convert. Nuremberg did control a number of towns and villages within its vicinity, to which proselytizers from the city proper had mixed success in spreading Luther's message: Philip J. Broadhead, "Public Worship, Liturgy and the Introduction of the Lutheran Reformation in the Territorial Lands of Nuremberg," *English Historical Review* 120, no. 486 (2005): 277-302.

³ The word secular has two meanings according to my usage. First and foremost, I use it as a negatory adjective in the Western Christian sense, to describe institutions or entities not officially affiliated with the church. I use the nominalized form with definite article attached, "the secular," to

Various historians have treated this series of events in 1525 as the culminating moment in extended moral, economic, or military decline for the Order.⁴ Such factors all contributed to creating the Knights' precarious position at the beginning of the sixteenth century. But they cannot explain the novel and unusual manner in which the Knights chose to ameliorate their situation: by becoming the first territorial state to convert to Lutheranism, a new and controversial denomination. The coincident subjection to the Polish crown would temper the response of the new duchy's closest Catholic rival, but conversion alienated most of the emerging "West," including earning the ire of both pope and emperor.⁵ Rather than dismissing the risk attached to such an unprecedented action, I contend that conversion to Lutheranism reflected the deep appeal that Lutheran ideals held for the members of the Teutonic Order. Other factors were important in pushing the Teutonic Order to accept the Polish king as their sovereign, but the

refer to the shifting and wide-ranging grouping of things deemed secular according to Western theology. As such, my use of the term secularization refers to the moment at which the monastically controlled lands and members of the *Ordensstaat* became a secular duchy, a non-religious entity even if one still fundamentally influenced and shaped by Lutheran theology. This sort of secularization fits only obliquely into the secularization theory posited by Talal Asad, which describes the active effort to remove signs of religion from the public sphere according to Western conventions. The Knights' decision to break their oaths was certainly a step towards the secularization schemes of later Western liberal democracies, but it was not nearly so conscious a choice, nor one driven by the same motives. See Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

⁴ The moment of secularization is most often considered as a curiosity or an afterthought in the historiography: Sidney Bradshaw Fay describes secularization as an opportunistic effort by the Grandmaster Albrecht of Brandenburg to salvage the *Ordensstaat* and add to Hohenzollern territory, *The Rise of Brandenburg-Prussia to 1786* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1937), 37-38; Francis L. Carsten's Marxist outlook hardly pays any heed to secularization in its focus on the changing class dynamic in Prussia caused by the growth of urban mercantile populations, *The Origins of Prussia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954); Christiansen provides the most well-rounded account of the events leading up to 1525 but still describes how the Order's knights had been transformed into "bad monks" by their inability to recognize their crusading mandate had expired. Ultimately, even Christiansen describes how the knights were forced by changing circumstances to choose between secularisation and emigration, with the former eventually "imposed on the Prussian brothers by the grandmaster." Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades: The Baltic and the Catholic Frontier, 1100-1525, 2ed.* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 1997), 394-400.

⁵ I use the terms "the West" and "Western" with some trepidation, but fail to see any alternative term that captures the sense I am looking for. The possible alternative "Christian" associates all forms of Christianity – Latin, Orthodox, Nestorian, Coptic, etc. – with a cultural system that arose in only one part of that sphere. The West is a blurry entity laden with deep meanings, but for the purposes of this essay I will define my use of that term as referring to the cultural system arising from medieval Latin Christendom over the course of the early modern period, whose adherents came to associate it with (usually secular) rational thought and economic progress. The reified historical narratives of the West – Dark Ages, Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, etc. – suggest some of the priorities and values inherent to this system.

conversion to Lutheranism instead reflects the ideological attraction that many of the primary tenets of Martin Luther's teachings held for the Order's leading members.

Contextualizing the secularization of the Teutonic Order requires reference to broader themes in the development of the Christian religion and Western cultural system. Robert Markus describes the emergence of a medieval theology that collapsed the earlier Augustinian trichotomous model of sacred, profane, and secular by collapsing the latter two categories into one.⁶ This erasure of the secular led to a binary outlook that divided the world into sacred and profane, good and evil.⁷ In a related vein, Daniel Colucciello Barber describes how Western Christianity adopted an increasingly dualist outlook, elevating belief and intent to become the primary arbiters of salvations or wrongdoing.⁸ A natural consequence of such an outlook was the development of a heresiological policy that hotly debated and policed the thoughts of others, as well as allowing the turn towards Western public secularism as religious symbols became redundant or even signs of misbelief. Where Martin Luther's teachings became widespread, religious acts could be reduced to the barest minimum: salvation came by faith "alone," regardless of acts, deeds, or performances.⁹

The Teutonic Knights in the early sixteenth century were a unique fragment of Christian society, whose early secularization suggests the ideological similarities between their particularly insulated, aggressive iteration of Christianity and the more recent iteration voiced by Luther. That the *Ordensstaat* became the first Lutheran territorial state was no coincidence: the long-standing ideology of the

⁶ Robert A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2006), 31-48.

⁷ I use binary throughout this essay to refer to this axis of good-evil and the related one of sacred-profane, reserving dualist for Barber's use of the term, which refers to a mental dichotomy of belief and action, or mind and matter.

⁸ Barber's arguments are complex, but ultimately ask for a reconsideration of Christianity's separation of the spiritual and material planes of existence. The dualist attitudes that I will discuss at length in this essay fall apart as soon as they encounter any notion of immanence, the theological and philosophical concept described by Barber in his first chapter of *On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion, and Secularity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011).

⁹ The connection between Luther and Western secularism cannot be understated. Without Luther's scriptural transformation of salvation into an accomplishment by faith "alone," Western secularization would have been far less likely to take hold.

Knights shared a number of theological traits with Lutheran Christianity. These traits generally reflect the trends of Christian theology traced over time by Markus and Barber, which appear more clearly because of the theological underpinnings of monastic crusading orders and the unique contexts in which the Teutonic Knights found themselves.

Viewing the trajectory of the Teutonic Knights' ideology from a very broad perspective makes clearer how they turned out to have so strong an affinity for Luther's teachings, in the process demonstrating that ideology was a necessary element for the *Ordensstaat's* secularization, rather than something abandoned during the Order's decline. Secularization was the culmination of a long-term process involving deep structural elements of the Order's ideology. Some of these elements were present from the early years of the Order in the thirteenth century, including its militant antagonism to perceived enemies of Christendom, a starkly binary understanding of the world, and its membership's foundation in the German territories of the Holy Roman Empire. At the Order's peak in the fourteenth century, it redefined itself in terms of Christian chivalry as it faced challenges to its legitimacy as a religious institution, presenting its monastic knights as the quintessence of contemporary ideals of knighthood. Finally, during the Order's decline, it did not abandon its ideology, but rather clung to it, further insulating itself from critiques voiced across the Western cultural sphere. After direct appeals to the Order's knights from Martin Luther, the Knights secularized after alienation not from their ideology or faith, but from the rest of the Western Christian community.

Foundations of Ideology: Monasticism, Militancy and Monoculturalism

Decisions and events in the early years of the Order's history established lasting structures that remained core ideological elements at the moment of secularization in 1525. These structures were products of the crusading atmosphere in which the Order formed, shortly before the turn of the thirteenth century during the Third Crusade. In Palestine, the Teutonic Order's ideology and organization initially drew heavily on the example of the earlier crusading orders, but its

relocation to new arenas on Europe's eastern and northern frontiers created a uniquely consolidated and powerful theocratic state based in Prussia. This state was characterized by a particularly aggressive binary outlook, which altered its early mandate to justify violence to expand Christendom, whereas the other crusading orders only condoned attacks deemed defensive or repercussive. In line with Markus' arguments about Christianity as a whole, the Knights' spirituality turned aggressively inwards to search for sin, and as aggressively shifted its outward perception of the non-Christian world.¹⁰ Non-Christians became automatic, diabolical enemies requiring conversion or destruction.

The Order's very early beginnings are hazy in terms of events, reflecting the uncertain legitimacy of the Order's mandate. The mythologized origins of the Order date back to the Hospital of the Blessed Virgin founded in Jerusalem shortly after the city's capture in 1099; the firmer date for the Order's beginning was the establishment of a hospital for wounded German crusaders during the siege of Acre from 1189 to 1191.¹¹ This hospital developed into the Order with the support of the German nobility, especially the Holy Roman Emperors of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, who desired a predominantly German crusading order.¹² The Hohenstaufens were largely successful: the Teutonic Order was almost from its inception almost exclusively German in membership, populated mainly by the minor

¹⁰ Fitting within the broader context of the turn to a dichotomous model built around asceticism, as described by Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 74.

¹¹ The ideological importance of this story is strikingly evident, positioning the origins of the Teutonic Order spatially and temporally alongside those of the earlier and better established Orders of the Temple and Hospital of Jerusalem (Templar and Hospitaller Knights). I am skeptical that members of the Jerusalem hospital had much to do at all with the formation of the Order: Ludwig H. Heydenreich's research supports this skepticism, suggesting that the Order took on the name only after the hospital was symbolically granted to them by Emperor Frederick II in 1229: *800 Jahre Deutscher Orden: Ausstellung des Germanischen Nationalmuseums Nürnberg in Zusammenarbeit mit der Internationalen Historischen Kommission zur Erforschung des Deutschen Ordens*, ed. Arnold (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Lexikon Verlag, 1990), 10. Conversely, Frederick Charles Woodhouse's much older account delves in great detail into the story of the German hospital in Jerusalem: *The Military Religious Orders of the Middle Ages: the Hospitallers, the Templars, the Teutonic Knights, and others*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1879), 263-266.

¹² The relative patronage of the Hohenstaufens is hard to overestimate: "From 1190 to 1210 the Order received eighteen recorded donations; from 1211 to 1230 sixty-one, of which seventeen came from Frederick [II Hohenstaufen] and his son [Henry VII]." Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 147; included as well were tax exemptions for the Order's holdings, 148. See also Udo Arnold, ed., "Chapter I. Mittelmeerraum und Deutsches Reich bis 1525," *800 Jahre Deutscher Orden*, 1-44.

nobles known as *ministeriales*.¹³ The Knights began to amass territory and wealth, notably the early headquarters at Acre and the castle of Montfort northeast of the city.¹⁴

The Order's early survival was thus intrinsically tied to the Holy Roman Empire and its associated German-speaking territories.¹⁵ Whereas the Templar and Hospitaller Knights derived their names from their associated holy sites within Jerusalem, the Teutonic Knights defined themselves in terms of an ethnic and linguistic identity. Populated by *ministeriales* from the minor nobility and supported by the Hohenstaufens and other prominent members of the German nobility, the Teutonic Order weathered a storm of demands to the papacy from the Hospitaller and Templar Orders, who argued that the German organization's existence was redundant and it should be subsumed into their own.¹⁶ These claims had merit: the Order began as a hospital, and originally copied many of the customs and regulations of the Hospitaller knights. By 1198, the Order had militarized and was made into a *Ritterorden* ("knightly order") by papal decree. At this point, it once again merely followed the Rule of the Templars, and chose to retain that rule exactly even once given the right to determine its own statutes in 1220.¹⁷ The Teutonic Order was defined by its German-ness, as its name suggested, but its

¹³ Woodhouse's antiquated account claims that German ethnicity was a requirement to become a knight or clergyman of the Order, *Military Religious Orders*, 267; Christiansen states that the Order's knights were "all, or nearly all, German," *The Northern Crusades*, 147; 158. While German identity and at the least language appear to have been a requirement for the Order, those categories were much looser than they are generally imagined to be today. For example, Johannes A. Mol has published extensively on the role of Dutch knights in the Order. See for example Mol, "The Dutch Presence in the Teutonic Order," in *Beyond Traditional Borders. Eight Centuries of Latvian-Dutch Relations* (Riga: Apgads Zelta Grauds, 2006).

¹⁴ Arnold, *800 Jahre Deutscher Orden*, 9; Bashford Dean, *800 Jahre Deutscher Orden*, 15-16.

¹⁵ I will try to avoid use of the words "nation" and "nationalism" because of the ideological baggage they acquired (especially in the German context) over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At times, it may be difficult to avoid their use, however, so please bear in mind that I use them generally in reference to people who speak German dialects that were generally found within the lands of the medieval Holy Roman Empire.

¹⁶ Such demands continued until the second half of the 13th century. Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 148-150.

¹⁷ This rule created a fairly static hierarchy within the Order headed by the knights of the Order, who held to the military Templar Rule, and the clerics who had existed since the Order's first papal recognition in 1191: *800 Jahre Deutscher Orden*, 18-32. This essay's discussion of ideology pertains only to these full members of the Order: clergy and knights. Others probably adhered to it, but sources describing the attitudes of the lower echelons of the Order are scarce. See also, Christiansen, *The Northern Crusade*, 148.

character was shaped by the frameworks created by the earlier crusading orders, especially the Templars.

The Templar Rule followed by the Teutonic Knights combined the Benedictine rule with modifications designed to allow for the physical rigours of training as a knight, shaping the daily habits and outlook of its followers in the process. The formative Latin Rule of the Templars established at the Council of Trent (1129) included typical monastic elements like rules restricting dress, consumption, and contact with women, but also had alterations such as an exemption from the need to rise for prayer at Matins.¹⁸ The rule treated the Order's members as knights as well as monks: they required the discipline and obedience of monks, but the martial ability and action of knights. Moreover, the theological basis for following this rule created a particularly heresiological outlook: by discipline and faith according to the Order's rule, the knights found meaning and a purposeful mandate. Moreover, they found in the rule a written source of authority that ensured their salvation while encouraging military action.

The new Order was not unique in Palestine outside of its ties to German speakers, but became a unique and dynamic force as it slowly shifted its focus to northern and eastern Europe. Upon request from King Andrew II of Hungary, the Grandmaster of the Order agreed to settle and fortify the Transylvanian frontier region of Burzenland in 1211. Received as a royal fief from Andrew, this formative moment saw the Order take on new roles as colonizer and missionary, settling and pacifying a region that had previously posed a threat to Andrew's realm.¹⁹ Despite the Order's successful settlement of the land, complaints from the Hungarian nobility led to the knights' eviction from the Burzenland by the Hungarian king in 1225. The Knights had found a new purpose outside of the original crusading lands, but were prevented from fully completing their mission by their failure to gain

¹⁸ The rule (Article 17, p39) excusing "exhausted" knights from rising at Matins still requires them to wake up and recite thirteen standard prayers: Malcolm Barber & Keith Bate trans. & ed., *The Templars: selected sources translated and annotated* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 31-53.

¹⁹ The Transylvanian Saxons continued to live in the region in large numbers well into the twentieth century, with a major expulsion at the end of the Second World War and mass emigration during the 1980s eventually bringing most of the population to (West) Germany.

legitimate title to their new lands. Questions about the Knights' legitimacy from other crusading orders had proved ineffective because of imperial sponsorship, but this attack on their right to Burzenland proved successful because of their lack of title from a higher authority. The pacification of Burzenland only lasted fourteen years, but showed the Order's suitability for such a task, as well as demonstrating to the Order's leading figures the need for secure sovereign rights.²⁰

The Duke of Mazovia asked the knights for similar help not long after their eviction from Burzenland, offering title to the pagan border territory of Kulmerland to secure his northern border. The Grandmaster would dispatch knights to begin the Order's centuries-long tenure in lands around the Baltic Sea, but only after receiving written confirmation of the Order's territorial rights from the higher authorities of Holy Roman Emperor and Pope. Moreover, those rights included title not only to Kulmerland, but also to any further pagan lands conquered, settled, and Christianized in the area.²¹ This legitimization not only made the Order into a powerful territorial state, but also gave it a fundamental legal right to expansionary warfare. No longer merely to act in defense of Christendom's holy places or even of its current or historic boundaries, the Order was legitimized as a militant and missionizing arm of both Holy Roman Empire and papacy.²² Any non-Christian populations around the Baltic became ready targets for the Order's aggression, supported by the Church's bishops and colonizing settlers and merchants from the Holy Roman Empire.

The Order's imperial connections contributed to its rapid growth in power around the Baltic, as its military activity galvanized a much broader and lengthier

²⁰ Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 153-154.

²¹ These rights were initially meant to be shared with missionary bishop Christian of Prussia, but his early imprisonment left the Order as the sole beneficiary of any territorial gains until 1243: Arnold, *800 Jahre Deutscher Orden*, 45; Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 153-154.

²² This mandate built on a historical precedent in the two orders commonly called the sword-brothers. Early settlement and colonization efforts by the bishop of Riga had lacked persistent military garrisons, leading to his creation of the Livonian Brothers of the Sword, who received papal confirmation in 1202. Twenty years later in 1228, the Prussian Order of Dobrin received similar papal confirmation, itself formed as a military tool of the first missionary bishop of Prussia (Christian of Oliva). Both of these smaller Orders began as tools of the bishops who founded them, meant for expansion of Christian territory as well as defense of established settlements. They provide another precedent for the Order, into which both would later be subsumed with varying levels of success. See Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 149-152.

process of German commercial expansion into Eastern and Northern Europe.²³ While mission remained their primary goal, the small population of German knights in charge of the Order found themselves ruling over a barely Christianized population of Baltic speakers with a sprinkling of German burghers and settlers. Through their coordination with the mercantile Hanseatic League, the Order's leaders were further enriched and isolated, as the Hanse's merchants created a new wealthy urban population that bridged the gap between knights and indigenous population.²⁴ The Order's ideology and cultural self-assurance cemented themselves in the Knights' new role as the upper elite of a new colonial society. The *ministeriales* and latter-born sons of the German nobility who tended to form the ranks of the Order's knighthood were distinctly different from the people over whom they ruled, who were comprised of a mix of German settlers of lower social standing, the indigenous Balts, and Polish settlers. Such stark social and cultural differences amplified the Order-Brothers' feelings about the importance of their unique mission and role in expanding Christendom.

The Knights' exposure to this new environment brought into focus a long-standing element of their monastic philosophy. All the knightly monastic orders, Templar, Hospitaller, Teutonic, or otherwise, built upon a much older tradition of ascetic monasticism. Almost from its inception, Western Christendom had had a tradition of ascetic holy figures who sought to expunge all their sins by isolating themselves from the world.²⁵ Markus describes the "ascetic model," which "set up a simple polarity between Christian perfection and, over against it, worldliness, the secular, the profane, all amalgamated in a single category: the world, the flesh, and

²³ This push was the early part of the now-infamous *Drang nach Osten*, a complex process whose effects linger today in much of Eastern Europe. For an overview, see Franz A. J. Szabo and Charles Ingrao, "Introduction" to *The Germans and the East*, eds. Ingrao and Szabo (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008), 1-8.

²⁴ The ties are clear – the extrapolation sometimes made from them that the Order's Baltic settlement was motivated entirely by economic reasons is not. The Order's colonization had an ideological basis that sets it apart from earlier efforts. For an example of this economic or commercial determinism, see Mark R. Muzinger, "The profits of the Cross: Merchant Involvement in the Baltic Crusade (c. 1180-1230)," *Journal of Medieval History* 32, 2 (2006): 163-185.

²⁵ The earliest tradition of asceticism in Western Christendom was in the form of a series of desert hermits, well-known examples of whom include St. Anthony and St. Jerome. Walter Nigg, *Warriors of God: the Great Religious Order and their Founders*, trans. Ilford (London: Secker and Warburg, 1959), 19-49.

the devil, as later Christian language would say.”²⁶ This binary outlook broke away from the earlier Augustinian trichotomous model, which had recognized the sacred and profane, but also a neutral secular that could be an instrument for either good or evil. The shift to all-encompassing binary thinking and the erasure of the secular was a basic principle of the ascetic ideal behind monkhood.²⁷ The premise for ascetic monasticism was profoundly binary: by removing oneself from the profane world and living a disciplined and obedient life according to the sin-free statutes of the rule, a monk or nun could live an entirely sacred life in service to God and opposition to the devil.

In the militant atmosphere of the Holy Land after the First Crusade, this binary outlook would develop further to see the entire territory as a battlefield between Christian good and heathen evil. The development of societies of warrior monks followed in this trend. According to Cistercian reformer Bernard of Clairvaux, crusading knights living under monastic rule could fight the devil on earth in the form of heathen warriors and the devil in spirit by holding to the sacred rule.²⁸ Following in the wake of the Templars and Hospitallers in terms of the developments of these attitudes, the Teutonic Knights would eventually develop them further on account of their new circumstances in the Baltic. With a papal mandate not to defend or reclaim “lost” parts of Christendom, but to expand it militarily through conquest and forced conversion, the Order’s mandate took on an aggressive outlook unique to its historical trajectory.

By the late thirteenth century, the Teutonic Order espoused a particularly aggressive form of militant monasticism, and could see their discipline rewarded in pagans conquered and converted, and the boundaries of Western Christendom expanded. As they fought inner devils with regular discipline and outer ones with martial prowess, the Order’s knights developed into a small elite driven by military action. The Order was successful in its early efforts in northern Europe, but its

²⁶ Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 74.

²⁷ Markus argues for Augustine’s conception of trichotomy in *Christianity and the Secular*, 31–48.

²⁸ While this type of monk may be new, Christiansen duly notes that Christian military monastic orders fit into a long tradition of holy warriors, whose service to a divine higher entity made their usually immoral killings into sacred acts. Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 140–144.

headquarters remained in Palestine at Acre, where the crusader kingdoms were continually shrinking. In 1291, the fall of Acre precipitated a new questioning of the effectiveness of and need for crusading orders. While other prominent orders fell or lost much of their power and influence, including the Templars famously in 1307, the Teutonic Knights' successes in northern Europe lent them a continued mandate and a legal legitimacy on account of the land titles granted by imperial and papal decree. Often seeming a redundant addition to the two earlier crusading orders while in Palestine, the Order would survive because of its imperial ties and its activities in northern Europe.

Criticism and Legitimation: Monastic Chivalry

While the Order persisted after 1291 with a new focus on its northern domains, it did not escape the criticisms and threats levelled at all crusading orders throughout the fourteenth century. A general reconsideration of the need for and effectiveness of crusading orders had begun that had culminated in the arrest and seizure of the property of the Knights Templar. Such a seizure was not possible for the Teutonic Knights, themselves rulers of a territorial state, but the criticism still had important effects, as the Order reinvented itself through an unprecedented outpouring of literature designed to outwardly establish its legitimacy and inwardly promote its ideological tenets. This literary outburst builds upon the ideology described earlier: a strict binary outlook pervades the literature, built around careful reference to scripture and an underlying assumption of the rightness of their mission to eradicate non-Christian religions around the Baltic. This reinvention did not escape its fourteenth century European context, as elements of the chivalric code and rituals of knighthood became critical to the Order's rituals and identity, transforming their fighting monks into figures much more akin to contemporary secular knights. The chivalry of the Order's knights and their unproblematic pagan targets garnered the attention and aid of knights and nobles from across Europe for the Order. At the height of its power and prestige, the fourteenth-century Teutonic Order broke from general Church opinion and began to establish firmly the primacy of its own policy and the scriptural justifications for its actions.

The move of the Order's headquarters to Marienburg in Prussia in 1309 sheltered them from the risk of physical attacks like that made on the Templar Knights, but rhetorical attacks on the Teutonic Order's rights to its Baltic territories continued unabated. From Christendom's centre, church figures such as Pierre de la Palude argued that new land taken by crusading orders belonged automatically to the Pope, who could then enfeoff whomever he wished, ignoring the right granted by pope and emperor to the Order to expand its territories at the expense of non-Christians.²⁹ De la Palude's far-off challenge to the Order's right to the *Ordensland* was matched by the much closer and more threatening rival of the Bishop of Riga.³⁰ These immediate threats were not unfounded: as mentioned above, the monastic orders were originally conceived as defenders of the Holy Land, not offensive colonizers as the Teutonic Knights had become. The members of the Order accepted their own legitimacy and had wholeheartedly embraced their new mission in the Baltic, however, and resisted such efforts to undermine their position. Using the various means at their disposal, the knights and clergy of the Order responded with the dissemination of a broad, new literature full of ideological tools and weapons.

First and foremost, the Order turned to their legal claims to the *Ordensland* gained through bulls from both emperor and pope. Especially in conflict with the archbishop of Riga, however, this argument would tend to fall flat: the bishops had also been given papal rights to expansion into new Baltic lands. With legal recourse limited, the Order defended its expansionism in the manner most obvious and powerful to its members: biblical interpretation. The books of Judith and Hester had an unusually high prominence in the libraries of the Order, both heroic feminine figures who combined sexual purity and the righteous fight against heathens or other followers of the devil.³¹ The Order placed a unique significance on the Book of

²⁹ Norman Housley, trans., *Documents of the Later Crusades, 1274-1580* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 49-50; Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 251-254.

³⁰ Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 247-251.

³¹ These interpretations are not as unique as is their proliferation in vernacular translation in the libraries of the Order. Fischer suggests these particularly powerful justifications for "religious motivated warfare" were translated both to read to knights of the Order and to attract secular knights to the higher calling of the Order: Mary Fischer, "Biblical Heroes and the Uses of Literature: The Teutonic Order in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries," in *Crusade and*

Maccabees, which had been tied to the crusading movement since its very beginning. Whereas earlier interpretations had refrained from equating the text to an explicit justification for physical warfare, however, the knights did so, going so far as to imagine that Judas Maccabeus was himself a knight of the Teutonic Order.³² Old and New Testament justifications were authoritative and thus powerful to medieval Christian ears, but the literature of the knights took even further steps to cement the legitimacy of their attacks on Baltic heathens.

The literature of the Teutonic Knights tapped into several broader literary modes to portray the Order's knights as the epitome of the Christian chivalric ideal. The Virgin Mary, whom the Teutonic Knights often treated as their patron saint, featured heavily in their iterations of *Minnesang*, a type of German chivalric poetry of the High Middle Ages. Whereas typical *Minnesang* described the acts of valour done by knights to win over beautiful maidens, the monastic knights of the Order hoped to win the favour of the Virgin.³³ As well as *Minnesang*, the Order's literature referred to epic Germanic poetry: the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle (c. 1290) appears to have been designed for a relatively popular (if still knightly) audience, filled with references to knighthood and battle rather than biblical example.³⁴ While the Order clearly utilized secular literary modes, especially German ones, it always adapted them to suggest the Order's knights were especially honourable, righteous, and martially skilled. The Order's literature fitted its knights neatly into the established category of the noble Christian knight.

This more secular literature was intended in part as a propaganda effort to attract broader support from the rest of Europe, but also reveals a shift in the Order's ideology. The Order's members began to imagine themselves in terms of secular knighthood, a tradition in which they had been raised before joining the

Conversion on the Baltic Frontier 1150-1500, ed. Murray (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2001), 265-266.

³² Fischer, "Biblical Heroes," 269-271.

³³ Fischer, "Biblical Heroes," 273. For more on the Marian cult within the Order, see Fischer, "*Di Himels Rote*": *The Idea of Christian Chivalry in the Chronicles of the Teutonic Order* (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1991); Marian Dygo, "The Political Role of the Cult of the Virgin Mary in Teutonic Prussia in the 14th and 15th Centuries," *Journal of Medieval History* 15, no. 1 (1989): 63-80.

³⁴ Alan V. Murray, "The Structure, Genre and Intended Audience of the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*" in *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier 1150-1500*, 241-248.

Order. Elements of chivalric and martial imagery began to drift into even the most fundamental aspects of Order ideology. In *The Chronicle of Prussia* (c. 1331-1341), Nicolaus von Jeroschin describes the symbolic merits of “physical and spiritual weapons” in religious and chivalric terms, followed by the appropriate reasons for their use.³⁵ Jeroschin’s description of the properties of the sword, the classic knightly weapon, are revelatory of the violence inherent in the Order’s chivalric ideology:

The sword represents good deeds, because faith without deeds is lifeless. Some weapons only protect the body from danger. The sword means those deeds which destroy the enemy; and because the sword is sharp and cuts on both sides of the blade, so the good deeds on one hand protect the perpetrators from the pains of hell and on the other hand lead them to the joys which no man can fully describe.³⁶

The earlier ideological elements of binary-rooted militancy are very much evident, but added to them are the symbolism and logic of knighthood. Moreover, the passage firmly reverses the traditional conception of appropriate use of force by crusading orders: attacking pagans defends the soul. Immediately after the above quotation comes a description of the six reasonable justifications for war, laden throughout with harsh sentiments of absolute good and evil couched in chivalric terms. According to Order ideology, humanity’s entire existence was struggle from the moment of birth: attacking heathens was merely another way of fighting the devil and proving God’s righteousness.³⁷ Righteous struggle rises to the forefront of the Order’s perception of itself during the fourteenth century, developing a particularly insular, ethnocentric viewpoint.

That viewpoint was further buttressed by the status of the Knights within the *Ordensstaat*, a tiny oligarchic and colonial elite disconnected from its Baltic subjects. By virtue of their status as pagans, Baltic tribespeople were assumed to have a backwards culture. Since the conversion of the last learned pagans in the fifth century, the word itself had become synonymous in Western terms with barbarism and cultural inferiority. Markus argues that with the disappearance of the last

³⁵ Nicolaus von Jeroschin, *The Chronicle of Prussia* by Nicolaus von Jeroschin: *A History of the Teutonic Knights in Prussia, 1190-1331*, trans. Fischer (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2010), 51-62.

³⁶ Jeroschin, *The Chronicle of Prussia*, 53.

³⁷ “For man’s life on earth is an endless battle, and as soon as he comes into the world he steps onto the battlefield to do battle with the hellish powers of the air, and against this enemy he uses not the weapons which fight physical battles, but power from God.” Jeroschin, *The Chronicle of Prussia*, 60.

learned pagans in the late sixth century, pagans in Christian terms had become “rural backwoodsmen to be coerced into decent Christian living and worship by their betters.”³⁸ By their successes in conquering and converting pagans, the Teutonic Knights could see themselves succeeding at an obviously godly task, reinforcing their Christian triumphalist attitude that society’s institutions and culture should be determined according to Christian mores and views.³⁹ Pagans could at best be worthy foes, but still foes at that, awaiting destruction or the realization of God.⁴⁰

These broader Christian attitudes played out in the participation of knights and nobles from across Europe in the Order’s *Reisen*, annual military expeditions into pagan lands carried out with all possible trappings of chivalry.⁴¹ Wigand of Marburg’s accounts of fourteenth-century *Reisen* overflow with commentary about Lithuanian culture, suggesting their natural duplicity and treachery.⁴² Along with character judgments, Wigand’s accounts express strikingly contrasting emotions towards pagan and Christian deaths, the former enough to warrant joy and the latter an expression of the pagan’s nature to kill and destroy.⁴³ Cultural judgments began to intermingle in a binary attitude grounded in Christian beliefs and practices, creating negative stereotypes and a complete lack of respect for traditional Baltic culture and peoples. This ethnocentrism would contribute to the spread of

³⁸ Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 86.

³⁹ Markus’ own definition of triumphalism: “approving, supporting, or, in their absence, hankering after the conditions which allow institutional religious influence or domination to bear on the legal, cultural, and political structures within the surrounding society [...]”, Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 5.

⁴⁰ Rasa Mazeika argues that Christians did see honour in pagans holding to their traditions, even in the reversion of King Mindaugas to the paganism of his forefathers, “When Crusader and Pagan Agree: Conversion as a Point of Honour in the Baptism of King Mindaugas of Lithuania (c.1240–1263),” in *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier, 1150–1500*, ed. Murray, 197–214.

⁴¹ The *Ehrentisch* is the classic example of the Order’s particular brand of chivalry, a ritualized feast partaken in before departing on a *Reise*.

⁴² For example: “The king [of Bohemia] judged this to be a shameful outcome of a ratified peace treaty, but he and King John learned that it is in the pagan’s nature to violate a peace.” Housley, trans., *Documents on the Later Crusades*, 54.

⁴³ “Everything was laid waste, many people massacred, women and children captured and carried off, and infinite destruction wrought in the manner of pagans.”; “[Those on the *Reise*] burnt the castle and returned to Prussia joyfully across the Wilderness, praising God from whom all [good comes].” Housley, *Documents on the Later Crusades*, 55; 57. Note especially the reference to Wilderness in the latter account, which may suggest the similarity of the Knights’ *Reisen* to the trials of the early ascetic hermits.

German language and culture around the Baltic shore by a long process of colonization, but also to the Knights' belief in their particularly violent understanding of Christianity.⁴⁴

Ethnocentrism and chivalric modes intertwined with the stark binary attitudes of the Order's earlier ideology to create an environment in which massacring pagan Balts was celebrated as the fulfillment of God-given duty, as divine as it was chivalrous. While the Teutonic Knights themselves held to these attributes most starkly, their martial prowess, unbending views, and commitment to their mission made the Teutonic Knight into a pan-European ideal of chivalry. In the process of creating this literature, the knights rationally sought to establish justifications for their attacks on pagans, create a literature that promulgated those views, and recruit far-flung knights and nobles to join them. The Knights carefully worked to outline their ideology in terms relatable to Western Christian mores, convincing both themselves and many of Europe's most prominent knights and nobles of the righteousness of their cause in the process.⁴⁵ The yearly *Reisen* were not haphazard or sudden, but rather complex logistical operations that demanded technical knowledge, manpower, and above all a driving motivation: the eradication of sin through the promotion of Christianity and destruction of paganism.

A critical reorientation of the ideology of the Teutonic Order occurred during its political, military and economic height in the fourteenth century. Knightly monks were now monastic knights. The Order remained committed to the ascetic ideal, grounded in German cultural roots, and convinced of the need for Christendom's military expansion. In fact, all three of those elements were sharpened and reinvigorated according to the terms of chivalric culture. The Order's members began to understand themselves less as an instrument for the defense of wider Christianity, and more as a unique entity at the moral vanguard of all of Western Christendom. Ideology grew starker despite critiques from

⁴⁴ Robert Bartlett highlights this colonization as a critical event in the formation of Europe as it appears today: *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).

⁴⁵ Christopher Tyerman describes the rational organization of crusading in broader terms in *How to Plan a Crusade: Reason and Religious War in the High Middle Ages* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

prominent church figures: the military support of Christendom's knights and nobles and continual wars with non-Christians deepened the confidence of the Knights. By the time the Order began to weaken in the early fifteenth century, its targets rapidly disappearing as they accepted Christianity, the Knights had plenty of evidence for the rightness of their convictions in the form of their defeated or converted neighbours. The role of other factors, economic, social, military and otherwise, in the decline of the Order over the course of the fifteenth century is undeniable. Yet the events leading up to the final dissolution of the *Ordensstaat* and its reconstitution as the Duchy of Prussia strongly indicate that the Order's ideology persisted to play an important part in the decision to convert and secularize in 1525. Weakened though they may have been, the Knights continued to hold to the ideology built by years of successful warfare, conversion and settlement.

The Teutonic Knights and Lutheranism: Reconsidering Secularization

A number of historians have approached the issue of the Teutonic Knights' secularization, but none have closely investigated the role of ideology in that decision. Generally, the fifteenth century appears as a time of gradual denouement, with the *Ordensstaat's* secularization explained as a concession to decline caused by other factors. A dangerously outdated and skewed nationalist interpretation pins the Order's decline on betrayal at the Battle of Tannenberg in 1410, but sees continuity between the Order and the various iterations of Prussia that developed out of it.⁴⁶ In his history of the crusading orders, Woodhouse attributed decline to moral failures, a loss of purpose and discipline that sapped the prestige, martial prowess and dedication that had brought the Order its earlier success.⁴⁷ Writing in 1937, Sidney Bradshaw Fay attributed the Order's downturn to their manner of rulership as a "selfish, soulless corporation, exercising monarchical power," which exploited the

⁴⁶ Heinrich von Treitschke, *Origins of Prussianism (The Teutonic Knights)*, trans. Paul and Paul (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969). Curiously enough, the cultural and mental continuity suggested by Treitschke is the closest to my own interpretation of the historiographical array surveyed in this paragraph. While he may have correctly perceived this continuity, I by no means approve of his own notions of the superiority of the German race.

⁴⁷ Woodhouse, *Military Religious Orders*, 282-292.

rest of Prussian society.⁴⁸ This narrative of downfall from aloofness was expanded upon in Francis L. Carsten's Marxist description of the development of a new urban society beneath the Templar oligarchy which exerted growing pressure upon the knights for increased economic and political freedom.⁴⁹ Most recently, Karin Friedrich has argued that the end of the Order is a unique moment within the broader story of the Hohenzollern dynasty's accumulation of territories.⁵⁰ Other interpretations emphasize the importance of military failures.⁵¹ Altogether, these works demonstrate a surprising lack of attention to ideology in the secularization of the ideologically-driven Order.

Nearly all of these works operate under an implicit assumption that the character of the Order and its knights changed during the fifteenth century.⁵² The *Ordensstaat* undoubtedly experienced significant decline economically, militarily and territorially during the fifteenth century, mostly to the advantage of the Polish kingdom. However, that decline is often used uncritically as an explanation for secularization in 1525; the event becomes merely the conclusion to a century-long decline, unremarkable because of the assumption that the Order's membership regressed into some combination of luxury, aloofness, desperation, and resignation. By this logic, in 1525 the Order had already become merely an organized collection of secular men in religious form; that its members forsook their monastic vows and the Catholic Church as a result of political or economic exigencies comes as no surprise. Moreover, those few knights who did not support secularization appear to

⁴⁸ This argument has an easy basis in the origins of the Thirteen Years War (1454-1466) between the Order and Poland, which began after Prussian burghers requested aid from the Polish king. The decisive Teutonic defeat and the cession of West Prussia that follows this war make this argument easy, but do not suggest any necessary change in the ideology of the knights themselves. Fay, *The Rise of Brandenburg-Prussia*, 33-38.

⁴⁹ Carsten, *The Origins of Prussia*; for a more recent reiteration of Carsten's argument, see Michael Burleigh, *Prussian Society and the German Order: An aristocratic corporation in crisis, c. 1410-1466* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁵⁰ Karin Friedrich, *Brandenburg-Prussia, 1466-1806. The Rise of a Composite State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁵¹ The military approach tends to attribute great significance to the Battle of Tannenberg. See for example, William Urban, *Tannenberg and After: Lithuania, Poland, and the Teutonic Order in Search of Immortality* (Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 1999).

⁵² The Marxist explanation of Carsten is an exception to this rule, focusing instead on the Order's failure to adapt to the development of a class consciousness amongst the burghers of the Prussian towns.

be the only truly devout knights remaining, the last monks of conviction remaining within the Order.⁵³ The role of the Order's religious belief and practice, tied to their long-standing ideology, receives little or no attention; in order to support secularization, these men must have been either irreligious or seeking a radical transformation of faith upon the arrival of Luther's teachings. In light of the above consideration of the ideology of the Order, I will view secularization without this assumption. Rather than seeing secularization – and the often glossed-over conversion to Lutheranism that came with it – as a political decision with religious ramifications, I view it as a religious decision made on account of a reasoned choice to adopt Lutheranism because of the sense its reforms made to the majority of knights and clerics of the Order. Historians have conclusively shown that ideology drove the Teutonic Knights' actions in the Baltic for most of its history. The *Ordensstaat's* secularization was not the exception to this rule.

In 1511, Albrecht of Brandenburg-Ansbach became Grandmaster of the Teutonic Knights, recruited for the position on account of his dynastic connections.⁵⁴ He would reinvigorate the flagging fortunes of the Order for a time, building alliances and waging war with Poland-Lithuania.⁵⁵ After this war ended in an armistice in 1521, Albrecht came into increasing contact with Lutheran ideas. Travelling to Wittenberg several times, he was at the very least receptive to Lutheran theology and according to some historians had converted by 1524. Albrecht's interest in Lutheran theology came as no surprise: the towns and bishoprics of Prussia were some of the first regions where Lutheranism took hold amongst the general population.⁵⁶ Famously, Luther himself would write a letter encouraging the knights of the Order to give up their monastic vows and embrace

⁵³ Most notable among those knights who refused to support secularization was the commander at Memel. However, those who refused to convert to Lutheranism formed a definite minority. Some historians, notably Christiansen (*The Northern Crusades*, 398-400), have argued that that minority would have been much larger had others merely been bold enough to act against the grandmaster, but this argument rests upon the assumption that "true" and "faithful" monks would naturally have been against conversion; the evidence I present for their affinity to Lutheranism points to the contrary.

⁵⁴ Albrecht was the nephew of Polish king Sigismund I (r. 1506-1548).

⁵⁵ The Order lost the war after help committed from the Holy Roman Empire failed to materialize.

⁵⁶ Cordula Nolte, *Familie, Hof und Herrschaft: Das verwandtschaftliche Beziehungs- und Kommunikationsnetz der Reichsfürsten am Beispiel der Markgrafen von Brandenburg-Ansbach (1440-1530)* (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2005), 131-133.

his reforms of the faith. The events of 1525 suggest that Luther's words found willing ears there: the *Ordensstaat* was dissolved, Polish suzerainty recognized and Lutheran practice confirmed.⁵⁷ Close examination of Luther's exhortation shows the similarities his arguments hold with the Order's own beliefs and practices.

Luther's exhortation to the Order argues that the Knights chose to follow ecclesiastical mandates over scriptural ones. As he argues against monastic vows, especially those for celibacy that prevent the taking of a wife, Luther contends that biblical evidence supersedes clerical:

Was sagen sie aber dazu, daß Gott älter ist, denn alle Concilia und Väter? So ist er je auch größer und mehr, denn alle Concilia und Väter. Item, die Schrift ist auch älter und mehr, denn alle Concila [sic] und Väter. Item, die Engel haltens alle mit Gott, und mit der Schrift. Item, so ist der Brauch von Adam her gewesen, auch älter, denn der Brauch durch die Päpste aufkommen.⁵⁸

The authority of clerical councils and the pope cannot match the authority of scripture, as Luther argued vociferously throughout his life. This scriptural focus incited Luther to translate and print his own vernacular German Bible: the Word needed to be available to all. These arguments surely rang true to the Order, which had itself long emphasized the creation of vernacular texts that were accessible to the less educated of its members and to the wider German society over which it ruled. Jeroschin's chronicle stands as a strong example of this trend, as do the translations of the books of Judith, Hester and the Maccabees found in such proliferation in the libraries of the Order.⁵⁹ An emphasis on biblical evidence lay behind not only the Order's dissemination of vernacular literature, but also its justifications for its continued aggression around the Baltic.

Even after its last legitimate Christian foes had disappeared, the Order continued to justify its attacks, defenses and conquests through claims that its

⁵⁷ So often referred to as secularization, the transformation of monastic lords into secular ones was probably the least primary of these three near-contemporaneous happenings. Accepting Polish sovereignty secured the now-duchy militarily and politically; converting to Lutheranism necessitated an end to monastic vows. Secularization was really a mere by-product of conversion, as there was by no means any suggestion that religion was being excluded from the public sphere (the meaning secularization usually holds today).

⁵⁸ Martin Luther, "XXV. An die herren Deutsches Ordens, das sie falsche Keuschheit meiden und zur rechten ehelichen Keuschheit reifen, Ermanung. 1525," in *Dr. Martin Luthers sämtliche Werke: Reformationshistorische und polemische deutsche Schriften, III. Band*, ed. Irmischer (Erlangen: Verlag von Carl Heyder, 1841), 21.

⁵⁹ Fischer, "Introduction" to *The Chronicle of Prussia*, 13-15.

enemies were either improper Christians, reverts to paganism, or tools of the devil.⁶⁰ Implicit behind these claims was the right of the Order to determine and declare correct practice through its direct interpretation of the Bible. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the interpretations espoused by the Order ran contrary to those espoused by most of the clergy in Western Europe, as evidenced in yet another challenge to the Order's legitimacy in 1415.⁶¹ The Order's response was a reassertion of its legal rights to territory, followed by an assertion that "fighting the unbelievers simply because they are unbelievers, to expand the Christian faith, is lawful."⁶² Moreover, the Polish king's supposed protection of heretics and pagans made his subjects a legitimate target as well, assigning them to the "bitterness of eternal damnation."⁶³ The Order had long founded its ideology upon a uniquely militant interpretation of scripture, which saw its own belief as the only proper and correct one.⁶⁴

This aspect of Order ideology suggests a particularly stark instance of Christianity's heresiological focus described by Barber that is echoed in Luther's rhetoric. A dualist emphasis on correct belief had long been a characteristic of the Christian Church, but became especially important for the Teutonic Knights, who legitimized centuries of violence by the argument that their opponents did not espouse correct belief. Barber describes the phenomenon generally:

Christianity recognized its identity through the naming of a heretical outside, and it recognized itself as proper religion through the naming of other, improper religions. The essences of Christianity and religion are in this sense intertwined, even mutually constitutive—but note that this identification of Christianity and

⁶⁰ With the conversion of Grand Duke Jogaila of Lithuania (Pol. Władysław II Jagiełło) in 1386, the last major pagan foe for the Order disappeared. Moreover, Jogaila's conversion came with a marriage that resulted in him uniting the Polish and Lithuanian crowns, in the process creating a single, powerful rival for the Order instead of two smaller ones. Attacks on Christian rivals were nothing new to the Order, however, stretching all the way back to the Knights' first conflict with a Christian ruler, the Duke of Pomerellia in 1242-1243. When attacked by the duke, the Order immediately claimed he was a tool of the devil. Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 186-189.

⁶¹ Housley, *Documents on the Later Crusades*, 108-111. These claims did have political undertones, being brought forward by the Polish embassy, but were couched entirely in religious terms to attack the basis for the Order's continued existence.

⁶² Housley, *Documents on the Later Crusades*, 113.

⁶³ Housley, *Documents on the Later Crusades*, 115.

⁶⁴ Obviously also playing a role in the Order's self-confidence in attacking its enemies was the ethnocentric attitude described above: the Order cast the label of heretic and pagan upon any opponent whose culture differed from their own.

religion can only take place against a backdrop of difference *between* Christian religions and other religions.⁶⁵ Both dualist and binary attitudes are implicit in this innate heresiological standpoint of Christianity: the Christian “we” defined by correct belief versus the non-Christian “them” defined by incorrect belief. Luther pushed this theme even further with his contention that salvation was determined solely by belief: belief became the critical element for Christian identity according to Luther and those who followed him. The Lutheran primacy of belief and confidence in its scriptural sources made aggressively heresiological attitudes natural for its followers. Such attitudes were already deeply ingrained into the Order’s ideology, founded in the antagonistic attitudes of the crusades and developed during long wars in the Baltic region. Both the Order and Luther vindicated outward antagonism through heresiological explanations, which relied on an absolute confidence in their ability to interpret scripture. Opinions of the Pope or other members of the clergy seemed to ignore the messages they saw in the gospels themselves, positioning them as natural opponents rather than authority figures.

Luther’s criticism of the clergy thus also had a natural logic to members of the Order. His critique of the clergy and Pope’s presumptions to understand the divine mandate rang true to an Order that had long actively produced its own interpretations of scripture according to its own ideology. Luther’s theology also appealed to their dualist sensibilities: his claim that the Pope was anti-Christ echoed the claims of the Order regarding its own enemy, the Polish king. Opposition to the Order’s actions suggested ties to the devil, or at least damnation, for the inability to see the truth of the Order’s arguments. Luther offered a reconsideration of the role of the Church on the basis of scriptural interpretation for which the Order’s members had a historic affinity. The heresiological, binary outlook of both parties encouraged Albrecht to first go to Wittenberg, then to enforce conversion, and finally for the majority of the Order to follow suit. Much more than an example of the selfish attitudes of the knights of the Order, conversion to Lutheranism was a turn to a new school of Christian theology to whose major tenets they already subscribed.

⁶⁵ Barber, *On Diaspora*, 136-137.

Conclusion. Luther and the Secular

The Order's decision to convert to Lutheranism, and secularize the *Ordensstaat* in the process, suggests features of both the Order and Luther that might otherwise go unnoticed. The fundamental characteristics of the Order's ideology were monasticism, militarism, and ties to German identity. The latter two ties carried over after secularization, but the former transformed for the Order much as it had for Luther himself, a monk earlier in life. Monastic heritage was not forsaken entirely, despite the relinquishing of monastic vows: both groups continued to hold to the binary attitudes common to the ascetic ideal, inward search for sin reflected in outward antagonism towards those who believed incorrectly. Neither Teutonic Knights nor Luther lacked such heresiological opponents. The knights chose to endanger themselves through conversion: pure political exigency would point towards them remaining Catholic under Polish rule rather than become the first state to adopt a still new religion. By closely viewing the similarities between the Lutheran and Order ideologies, it becomes clear that both were organic to the same sixteenth-century Christian German environment. As such, choosing to follow the teachings of Martin Luther was simply a rational choice for the Order's leading figures.

The analogies between the Order and Luther indicate that Luther's reformation was perhaps not so radical in terms of theology as often presented, as many of the ideas he espoused had been central elements of the Order's ideology since not long after its inception. Luther's critical innovation was his definitive move towards dualism: his denunciation of the sacraments in favour of salvation by faith alone limited the Christian faith entirely to the spiritual plane as outlined by Barber. Western theology had long contained dualist elements, and had certainly had binary ones as exemplified in the history of the Teutonic Order, but with this interpretation dualism took on novel qualities that eventually allowed for secularization in the modern sense of removal from the public sphere to occur. Converting to Lutheranism did not remove religion from the public sphere, but it did move the Order towards a configuration of religion explicitly grounded in a

confessional statement or belief rather than physical demonstrations of faith. That shift was a prerequisite for both the modern confessional conception of religion that prevails in Western cultures, and for later efforts to remove that religion from a central role in the public sphere to become tenable.

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