

The Chinon Decree

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The **Chinon Decree** is a document written by three Cardinals, under Papal authority, that records the trials of five leaders of the Knights Templar that took place at Chinon, France, between 17th and 20th August 1308.

It states, quite clearly, the Vatican's finding that the Templar induction ceremony, which was the subject of all of the charges, contained "nothing... that was not proper". It also "extended the mercy of absolution" to the Templar Order, "restoring [it] to unity with the Church and reinstating [it] to communion of the faithful and sacraments of the Church".

Although the term "absolution" implies forgiveness for sins, none of the accusations were ever proven nor accepted, and no adverse findings were ever made by the Vatican. Indeed, the **Chinon Decree** did conclude that "nothing was improper". Therefore, by granting "absolution", the Vatican declared all charges irrelevant, effectively exonerating and vindicating the Templar Order.

The **Chinon Decree** was supported by the more direct Papal Bull "*Faciens Misericordiam*" ('Granting forgiveness'), issued by Pope Clement V himself, at the conclusion of the examination, conducted by his Pontifical Commission, and dated 12th August 1308. The Bull declared to the French King Philip IV that the Templar Order and its leaders were absolved and reconciled with the Church, and that any power to judge them further was exclusively reserved to the Pope alone.

You will, no doubt, have noted that the Bull was dated 5 days before the Chinon hearings began, and 8 days before the **Chinon Decree** was issued. This may be a secretarial error, or it might indicate a predetermined result of the Chinon process, with the intent to protect the Templar Order.

The opening sentences of the **Chinon Decree** emphasize that it is an "official proclamation", by the Vatican, as the result of Pope Clement V having "initiated an inquiry" into the Templar Order. It confirms that the three presiding Cardinals had been verbally, but officially, "ordered and commissioned", by the Pope, to conduct the enquiry. This establishes that the **Chinon Decree**, while technically not a Papal Bull, is in fact a Pontifical decree by the Vatican.

The introduction describes the process as “an inquiry into matters concerning the Knights adherence to the Catholic faith, and the Rule of the Order”. This evidently refers to “the Knights” in general and thus collectively as an Order. The “Rule of the Order” is considered its Constitution, evidencing that this was an examination evaluating the Order as a whole, and its “adherence to the Catholic faith”.

The introduction also features a key admission, by the Vatican, that the Templar trials by the French Inquisition, and the subsequent Papal examination at Chinon, all occurred in response to “receiving word of mouth and also clamorous reports” from the French King, “because of which [the Templar Order] suffered public infamy”. This evidences that the entire process was driven by inflammatory rumours and related public defamation, all initiated by the French royalty and nobility.

Also, in the **Chinon Decree**, [Pope Clement V](#) explains that the Templar leaders were supposed to have been brought to Poitiers in order to be questioned by himself, but "since some of them were so unwell at that time that they could not ride and could not by any means be brought into our presence" three Cardinals were sent to perform the necessary inquiries at Chinon.

You may ask "why Poitiers, France and not Rome?" This was a time of great upheaval between the monarchy of France and the Papacy in Rome, resulting in [King Philip IV](#) of France forcing a deadlocked Papal conclave to elect the French [Raymond Bertrand de Got](#), the [Archbishop of Bordeaux](#), as Pope on [5th June 1305](#). [De Got](#) took the name [Clement V](#) and refused to sit in Rome, holding the Vatican Court at Poitiers from [1305 to 1309](#), before moving the Court to Avignon, where it remained, under his successors, until [January 1377](#), when it returned to Rome. From this, you will realise that the French monarchy had a great deal of influence upon the Papacy of that time, which was to prove most unfortunate for the Order of Knights Templar.

The background to these hearings is that, on [Friday 13th October 1307](#), hundreds of Knight Templars were arrested in France. This was an action, apparently, financially motivated and undertaken to increase the prestige of the crown. [King Philip IV](#), also known as "[Philip le Bel](#)", or "[Philip the Fair](#)", was the force behind this move. From the very day of [Pope Clement V's](#) coronation, the King charged the Templars with usury, credit inflation, fraud, heresy, sodomy, immorality, and other abuses.

The Knights Templar, together with other protected Orders such as the Cistercians, were generally immune from the Inquisition, subject only to a narrow exception of suspected “heresy”. Precisely for this reason, [King Philip IV](#) ordered the French authorities to concentrate their manufactured charges on

that vulnerability of “heresy”, as the only way to penetrate the near-absolute immunity of the Templar Order.

Although the Pope owed his position to the King, it appears that he may not have been in entire agreement with his motives and means of execution. It seems that the scruples of the Pope were heightened by a growing sense that the burgeoning French State might not wait for the Church to consider the charges made against the Templars, but would proceed independently. His fears proved well-founded.

Of the various trials held in France, the first, and one of the larger trials, ran from **19th October to 24th November 1307**, and was held in Paris. A total of 138 prisoners gave a full testimony and almost all admitted guilt to one or more charges. Since torture was used to elicit these confessions, the reliability of their testimony, before this and other inquisitional tribunals, remains an open question.

The Vatican continued resisting the accusations against the Templars, resulting in a large group of the Knight Templars, previously arrested under the directive of the King, appearing before **Pope Clement V** and his commissioners in Poitiers, between **28th June and 2nd July 1308**. After the Templars were questioned and confessed their sins, they were granted plenary absolution by the Pope on **2nd July**.

There confessions, generally, followed the lines of their previous testimonies given to their French inquisitors. When asked, if their statements were freely given, many said that, while they had been tortured or threatened, restricted to bread and water, and other forms of harsh treatments had been imposed on them, their confessions were not the results of any torture.

On **12th August 1308**, the charges were increased, stating that the Templars worshipped idols, specifically made of a cat and a head, the latter having three faces. The lists of articles, from 86 to 127[3], would add many other charges. It should be noted that none of these "idols" were ever produced.

As previously mentioned, in addition to the above Templars, five high-ranking members of the Order were also supposed to have been delivered before the Pope, but, due to their ill-health, they were diverted to the castle of Chinon. **Pope Clement V** understood that his inquiry would not be complete without interrogating the leaders of the Order who remained at Chinon.

The Pope, therefore, arranged for three Cardinals to act as his plenipotentiaries and to travel to Chinon, a town approximately 60 miles north of Poitiers. It is, probably, because of that distance and the travelling conditions in those days, the reasons why the Pope did not wish to undertake the journey himself.

The five Templar leaders that were to be questioned were: [Jacques de Molay](#), Grandmaster of the Order of Knights Templar; [Raymbaud de Caron](#), Preceptor of the Commandaries of Templar Knights in Outremer; [Hugo de Pérraud](#), Preceptor of France; [Geoffroi de Gonneville](#), Preceptor of Aquitania and Poitou; and [Geoffroi de Charney](#), Preceptor of Normandy.

[Raymbaud de Caron](#) was the first to be interrogated, on [17th August 1308](#). Also interrogated on the same day were [Geoffroi de Charney](#) and [Geoffroi de Gonneville](#). On [19th August](#), [Hugo de Pérraud](#) was the fourth Templar to be interrogated and the Grandmaster, [Jacques de Molay](#), was interrogated last, on [20th August](#). According to the document, all interrogations of the accused were always in the presence of the 'notaries public' and the gathered witnesses.

The initial charge against the Templars was heresy; more specifically "when professing their loyalty to the Templars, the brothers were required to deny Christ, to spit on the Cross, and to place three 'obscene kisses' on the lower spine, the navel and the mouth; they were obliged to indulge in carnal relations with other members of the order, if requested; and finally they wore a small belt which had been consecrated by touching a strange idol, which looked like a human head with a long beard."

The body of the text of the **Chinon Decree** details the appearances of the accused, their swearings-in, the charges against them, and the modes of questioning to which they were subjected. In the interrogation of [de Molay](#), when he was asked whether he had confessed to these things due to a request, reward, gratitude, favour, fear, hatred or persuasion by someone else, or the use of force, or fear of impending torture, he replied that he did not. When he was asked whether he, after being apprehended, was submitted to any questioning or torture, he replied that he was not.

The text further details the denunciations, requests by the accused for absolution, and the granting of absolution by the agents of the Pope. All of this was always in the presence of witnesses. Part of the pardons given to [de Molay](#) thus reads:

"After this, we concluded to extend the mercy of pardons for these acts to Brother [Jacques de Molay](#), the Grandmaster of the said Order, who, in the form and manner described above, had denounced, in our presence, the described and any other heresy, and swore in person, on the Lord's Holy Gospel, and

humbly asked for the mercy of pardon [from excommunication], restoring him to unity with the Church and reinstating him to communion of the faithful and the sacraments of the Church."

Analysis of the **Chinon Decree**, as well as other materials of the Templar trials, disclose that, while three of the accused admitted to having been asked by their receptors, during their initiation, to denounce the Cross and spit upon the crucifix, their stories are inconsistent. [Geoffroi de Gonneville](#), for example, stated that he had not succumbed under duress to denouncing and spitting on the Cross; despite this, he was admitted to the order, implying that the denial of the cross may have been a test of some sort. The other accused men admitted to "denouncing in words only, not in spirit".

The denial of the cross, given in various testimonies, forms the basis for the prevailing theory among many scholars, that the Templars wanted to impress upon new Knights the intensity of the Muslim opposition they would face in battle. Thus, a sample denunciation would serve as a warning of how their faith would be mocked, disgraced and trampled by their enemies, especially if they were ever captured.

All of the accused denied practicing sodomy, or ever witnessing it. However, kisses were admitted, leading to the obvious implications of forbidden homosexuality, allegedly related to the Templar induction ceremony. However, the historical record proves that this was merely a metaphorical spiritual teaching from 1st century early Christianity.

The Gnostic scriptures of Mary Magdalene refer to Jesus "kissing her often on the mouth". This was an early Christian reference to the Templar belief that Mary Magdalene was a "Gnostic Apostle" of Jesus, consistent with Saint Augustine having recognized her as "Apostle to the Apostles".

The phrase "kissing on the mouth" reflects an ancient esoteric principle of conveying sacred wisdom and Holy Spirit energy, metaphorically symbolized as spiritual "breath" from the "mouth", which was conceptually related to the "word" of God. In Christianity, this spiritual concept of "kissing on the mouth" was first found in one of the 2nd century Cistercian Chants, which were also sung by the original 12th century Knights Templar.

Although it is possible that some Templars could have performed a symbolic enactment of this spiritual metaphorical teaching, there is no evidence that any such practice was ever part of any Templar induction ceremony. Most likely, this was merely a theme of quasi-heretical teachings from early

Christianity favoured by the Templars, which was taken literally out of context, and transformed into an accusation by the French Inquisition.

[Hugo de Pérraud](#) alone stated that, during his initiation, he had been told "to abstain from partnership with women, and, if they were unable to restrain their lust, to join themselves with brothers of the Order". All other Templars denied being encouraged to "join" with other brothers.

[Hugo de Pérraud](#) was also the only one to claim to have seen the "head of an idol" that the Templars were accused of worshipping. This had been at Montpellier, France, and in the possession of [Peter Alemandin](#), Preceptor of Montpellier. It is highly significant that this is the only testimony admitting the existence of any such "head of an idol", whereas all the others insisted they knew nothing of it. It is revealing that this purported admission was very specific, naming a particular person and place where the claimed "head" artefact could be found, and yet no such object was ever found during any of the Templar trials.

They all added that, as with any Roman Catholic, any transgressions of the Roman Catholic faith were fully confessed to a priest or bishop, penances made, and absolutions granted.

The commissioned envoys were instructed to create an official record of their investigations, which is now known as the **Chinon Decree**. The text details the denunciations, requests by the accused for absolution, and the granting of absolution by the agents of the Pope. All this was always in the presence of witnesses. The Papal Bull, "*Faciens Misericordiam*" ('*Granting forgiveness*'), records the document was presented to the Pope as "the confessions and testimonies of the aforementioned Master and Commanders, written down as spoken, as a legal record by notarial attestation."

The **Chinon Decree** can be interpreted as a failed attempt by the Pope to preserve the Templars from the machinations of the King, through establishing that the Order was not heretical and was capable of reform under the aegis of the Church. As we know, the Templars were rich in land and money and this may well have had some bearing on the Church's enthusiasm to assume authority over them.

According to the **Chinon Decree**, the other 'notaries public' made three other, more detailed, copies of the hearings. All documents were sealed and signed by the participants. Also, that the words and confessions were written down exactly in the way that they are included by the notaries, in the presence

of witnesses. They also ordered that these things be drawn up in an official form and validated by the protection of their seals.

One of these other Chinon decrees, which is dated **20th August 1308**, was published in **1693** and again in **1751** and was addressed to **King Philip IV** of France. The decree states that absolution had been granted to all those Templars who had confessed to heresy, and that the writers had "restored them to the Sacraments and to the unity of the Church".

Outside of France, the dissolution of the Order was achieved with far less bloodshed, and surviving members of the Order were absorbed into other religious institutions. In **1309**, when French Inquisitors questioned the Knights Templar in England, where torture was prohibited by law, none of the Templars would confess to any of the charges. Further proving that the French confessions were obtained solely by torture.

The conclusion to this sorry affair, was that several Papal commissions were held in Paris in **1310**. At the hearing on **23rd April 1310**, Templar **Pierre de Bologna**, who was trained as a canon lawyer and was the Templar representative to the papal court in Rome, along with **Renaud de Provins** and others, went before the commission and demanded what amounts to full disclosure of their accusers and all the information and evidence gathered in the case. They also requested a ban on witnesses conversing with one another and that all proceedings should be kept secret, until they were sent to the Pope.

In **May 1310**, the **Archbishop of Sens, Philippe de Marigny**, took over the trial of the Templars from the original commission. **De Marigny** conducted the proceedings against the Templars, until his death in **1316**. **Pope Clement V** interceded and directed that actual trials take place. However, **King Philip** sought to thwart this effort, and had several Templars burned at the stake as heretics to prevent their participation in the trials. Two days after this directive by the Pope, 54 Templars were burned outside of Paris.

When the Papal commission met on **3rd November 1310**, they found that the Templars had no defenders and adjourned the hearings until **27th December**. At this time the prisoners insisted that **Pierre de Bologna** and **Renaud de Provins** defend them, but were told that the priests had appeared before the commission of the **Archbishop of Sens**, found guilty of crimes and been imprisoned.

[King Philip](#) continued to pressure and threaten the Pope to officially disband the Order. As it became apparent that the King had determined upon the extermination of the Order and, particularly, the confiscation of its considerable wealth and property within his kingdom, the Pope abandoned the Templars to their fates.

On **22nd March 1312**, after the commissions of the Council of Vienne had reviewed all documents regarding the Templars, [Pope Clement V](#) issued the Papal Bull "*Vox in excelso*" ("*Voice on High*") suppressing the Order of the Templars. It should be noted that this Bull did not dissolve the Order, as is widely believed, but was taken as a solely administrative measure, limited to the Vatican's own relations with the otherwise independent Order, which continued to exist in full legitimacy.

In **May 1312**, the Papal Bull "*Ad Providam*" ("*to foresee*") directed that all assets of the Order of the Temple were to be given to Knights Hospitaller, to maintain the original purposes of the gifts to aid the Holy Land. It further made a distinction between Templars who remained unrepentant and those not found guilty of any crimes, or who had been reconciled to the Church.

[King Philip](#), however, confiscated a huge sum of money, from the Hospitallers, in "compensation" for the "costs" of the proceedings against the Templars, namely 200,000 livres tournois. The livres being the currency at that time and "tournois" the place of its minting, namely the abbey of Saint Martin in the Touraine region of France. A livre was equal to one pound of silver and, in today's money, is equivalent to approximately £35m.

On **18th March 1314**, [Jacques de Molay](#) and [Geoffroi de Charney](#), recanted their confessions, stating they were innocent of the charges and they were only guilty of betraying their Order by confessing under duress to something they had not done. They were immediately found guilty of being relapsed heretics, for which the punishment was death. This effectively silenced the other Templars.

The situation came to a shameful end, on **18th March 1314**, with the public execution, by burning at the stake, of [Jacques de Molay](#) and [Geoffroi de Charney](#).