

The Beauceant – Go Forth In Glory

A paper by

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We are told in the ritual of the Order of the Temple that the Beauceant was the “Battle Flag of the Ancient Templars.” Battle flags, or battle standards, are a type of field sign. Field signs are unique markings to identify friend from foe, or even combatant from civilian, and have been in use since the Bronze age. The modern term “standard,” in fact, derives from an old Frankish term for field sign. The use of flags or banners as field signs first appears in Asia during the Iron Age, most probably in India or China.

Early banner or standard type field signs are also termed *vexilloid*, meaning “flag like.” The Roman *vexillum*, the gold letters “SPQR” on a crimson field, is an example of a flag-like field sign. The term derives from the Latin *velium*, which means sail. Standards, attached to a horizontal crossbar and suspended from a staff, literally resembled “little sails”, or *vexilla*. The Beauceant, as displayed in our Commanderies of Knights Templar, is clearly *vexilloid*.

From the time when one prehistoric tribe first picked up rocks and sticks to fend off another tribe, combat has been noisy, confusing, and chaotic. The term “fog of war” aptly describes these conditions. Shouting, while perhaps an early effective method of communication, could hardly control larger forces on ever expanding battlefields. Over time, flags, along with drums and horns, became highly effective modes of communication in battle, and continued to be such until radio communications became more prevalent.

But more than just an effective communication method, or a marker to identify a unit's position in the field, battle flags tap into strong subconscious and primal emotional feelings of identification and belonging. British regiments, and of course, regiments in the American Civil War, were recruited from the same local area. That each soldier often knew his fellow soldiers motivated him to perform better, as no man wants to appear a coward in front of his neighbors. That strong local bond, coupled with the identification of their unit by their battle flag, created a powerful motivation and an esprit d'corps.

As a unit's reputation grew, their battle flag could serve another purpose – striking fear into the hearts of their enemies. Imagine looking across the lines and seeing the battle flag of the 69th New York, the “Fighting Irish”, part of the famed Irish Brigade, headed towards you. The flag would be visible long before the individual soldiers, and that would heighten the effect of the natural fear one would experience waiting for the fighting to start. As units gained fame and reputation, the psychological effect of their banner waving as they advanced could demoralize and even sap the enemy's will to fight.

As previously stated, the Beauceant was the Battle Flag of the Templars. It served as a rallying point for Templars on the field, much as Civil War colors would centuries later. It was regarded as almost sacred and there were a number of rules concerning its use and purpose. Up to ten Templar Knights were appointed to guard the Beauceant and its bearer. These Knights were instructed to overwhelm all the enemies around the banner, and stay as near the banner as possible, so if necessary, they could assist and defend it. The Beauceant would not leave the field as long as the Templars were engaged in battle, and as the Templars were sworn to never leave the field if the Beauceant was still flying, the battle would not end until the enemy was vanquished or the Templars were all killed.

The word *beauceant* is an old French word, comprised of two parts. While in present day French the word “*beau*” is translated as “beautiful”, in older times the word was used more to mean “magnificent” or “glorious.” The word “*seant*,” today an adjective meaning “seemly” was formerly used to signify the process of being or becoming. So one could reasonably conclude that the word *Beauceant*, translated from older French, would mean “be glorious.”

By all accounts, the Templars were fierce fighters. Varying sources indicate that they were the “shock troops” of the Crusades, that their armor, heavy horses, rigorous discipline, and superior training gave them all the advantages that overwhelming firepower gives on contemporary battlefields. It has been said that a dozen Templar knights, on horseback, would function like tanks on today's battlefield, scattering perhaps 100 to 200 Saracens. Other sources indicate that Templars advanced on their enemy in total silence. This is very unusual, as human nature often gives rise to a passionate battle cry when charging into battle. Whether mounted as shock troops, or overcoming the passionate instinct to scream as they advanced, there can be no doubt that the site of the *Beauceant* on the field must have struck fear into the hearts of the Saracens and infidels long before individual knights were visible.

The Order of the Temple ritual informs us that the *Beauceant* is “half white and half black; signifying that those Christian Warriors were fair and favorable to the friends of Christ, but dark and terrible to His enemies.” This duality of black and white, or darkness and light, is found in almost every culture and religion, most always representing evil and good.

The book of Genesis indicates that in the beginning all was darkness. Darkness, the absence of light, was chaos. And when God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light, God divided the light from the darkness, and began creating order in the world.

Freemasonry itself is built upon the notion that man is a creature who, to improve and become his best self, must move from darkness to light. A candidate for Masonry begins his journey hoodwinked. The reason for this, as he is informed in an early lecture, is because if he will not consent to abide by the tenets of Masonry, he can be removed from the lodge by his cabletow, without ever having discovered the form of the lodge. But more than this, and a fact he must discover for himself through contemplation, the hoodwink illustrates the metaphor that he is, truly, in darkness when he begins his journey. As the hoodwink is withdrawn and he is first brought to light, one of the things he will see, although not brought to his attention at the time, is the black and white mosaic pavement of the lodge. He is later informed that this is an emblem of human life, checkered with good and evil. So from this very first exposure to the Masonic fraternity, he is confronted with the black and the white, and all of the symbolism contained therein.

As we further contemplate this duality, we learn from science that white light is composed of all colors, reflected outward. A prism will divide the white light into its component colors, which are familiar to us all: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet, the colors of the rainbow. The rainbow is a natural prismatic effect when light passes through moisture in the air, and was used by God as a symbol of His covenant with Noah, that never more would all life on Earth be destroyed by flood.

Masonically, the rainbow is the inspiration for the International Order of Rainbow for Girls, and each color represents a specific virtue to be inculcated, all combining to the white of goodness and order.

Black, the antithesis of white, is the absence of color. In black no color is reflected outward, but instead all color is drawn in and absorbed.

In the *Societas Rosicruciana In Civitatibus Foederatis* Second Grade of Theoricus, the Zelator is lead four times around the Temple, stopping each time by one of the Ancients, representing the pillars of Air, Fire, Water and Earth. The colors associated with Air, Fire and Water are Yellow, Red and Blue. Earth is represented by Black. The ritual informs us that “the earth is cold and dry, and is considered passive and fixed.” While Earth is perhaps not inherently evil, as one might surmise from the color Black, it can be noted that little growth can occur when something is passive and fixed. The Book of Genesis indicates that Man was formed from the dust of the earth, and to that dust he must return upon his death, and so it is against this passive and fixed nature that is inherently inside him that each man must strive to grow, toward the white light, combined of many colors, that contains the virtues of a good and godly life.

And so the Beauceant, comprised of these two colors, white and black, is upon deeper reflection, so much more than we are told in the ritual of the Order of the Temple. More than just a reminder of how to treat friends and foes, it taps into the deep subconscious and primal emotion of our identification as a Knight Templar and as a Soldier Of Christ. It is each Knight's clarion call to be glorious. It is his reminder that, like that white light, he should reflect all goodness outward, giving of himself to his brethren and to the innocents in the world at peril from evil. It is his reminder to follow his Savior's greatest commandment, to “love one another as I have loved you.”

And like the Templars of old, that giving, that loving, that “going forth in glory,” should continue as long as the Beauceant is on our present day battlefield or unto our death.

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