



A small group of Frenchmen, on August 25, 1883, founded the *Abbey of San Luigi* in Northern Africa. By its constitution this colony was independent, and was known as the Principality of San Luigi, with its princes elected by the citizens. The first prince established the Order of the Lion and Black Cross as a national order of knighthood. Plagued by disease and attacks by the natives, the remnants of this small band returned to France, abandoning the Abbey. But its short history was not to die, because on May 5, 1897, in an act legalized before the Mayor of Seine, France, the Prince of the Abbey-Principality submitted his claims and orders to the authority of Archbishop Joseph Rene Vilatte. It was in this manner that the second of the San Luigi Orders came into being.

In the United States, as the years passed, Archbishop Vilatte gained great recognition as a clergyman. It was in this capacity that he met the Episcopal priest, Fr. Francis John Barwell-Walker, who in the 1920s was a bishop nominee of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Indiana. In an era when ecumenicalism was not popular, the two church leaders nevertheless became great friends. In 1923, Dr. Walker was named Grand Master-designate. Dr. Walker, under the style and title of Prince Edmond de San Luigi, became Grand Master in 1929.



Another of Archbishop Vilatte's associates, Archbishop Frederick E. J. Lloyd, a former senator of the State of Illinois, established the Order of Antioch in 1928. It was after Archbishop Lloyd's death in 1933 that this order was placed under the protection of the Grand Master of the San Luigi Orders, where it has remained to the present day. Dr. Frank Dyer, who in the 1920s built what is now the Wilshire United Methodist Church, a California historical monument, recognizing the priority and legitimacy of the San Luigi Orders, merged another branch of the Order of Antioch under the protection of the Grand Mastership in June, 1963.



In 1962, Dr. Walker, Prince Edmond de San Luigi, resigned his several offices and named as his successor Dr. George A. E. Lyman, with the specific request that he use the title of Edmond II. After serving the order for almost 40 years, Dr. Walker passed away on April 2, 1963, at the age of 81 years.

The present Grand Master of this lineage, Dr. George A. E. Lyman, is employed in industrial relations and as a university executive. Brevetted a Lt. Colonel in a state militia, he has long been active in community and civic affairs.

While His Royal Majesty King Peter II of Yugoslavia was visiting Los Angeles in 1959, Dr. Lyman was hosted to a reception in his honor by the late President of the University of Southern California, Dr. Rufus B. von Kleinsmid, a longtime member of the San Luigi Orders. The King and the future grand master developed a friendship which eventually led to the Orthodox King's acceptance of the appointment as High Protector of the Order of the Crown of Thorns, and it is in his honor and memory that this position has remained vacant since his sudden death in 1970.

By virtue of their rank within the orders, Their Imperial Majesties the Crown Princes of Germany and Japan are the High Protectors respectively of the Order of Antioch and the Order of the Lion and Black Cross. These honors were granted in 1960.

One purpose of the Order of the Crown of Thorns as well as the Order of Antioch is to honor those persons of either sex, and of all races within Christendom, who have rendered noteworthy services to humanity in lives exemplified by charity. The Order of the Lion and Black Cross serves to honor those who emulate the above without distinction as to creed.

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## A Brief History of the San Luigi Orders

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Concerning Knights and Knighthood, the ordinary American citizen might first think of Sir Galahad and the Knights of the Round Table, and the old legends of Chivalry.

This is in essence correct. Many of the stories trace back to this source, to the search for the *Holy Grail*, the Holy Cup that Jesus used at the Last Supper.

The Grail story begins with Joseph of Arimathea.

Joseph worked as an official for the Roman tin mines in Cornwall, which in those days supplied the Roman Empire with tin, but he was in Jerusalem at the time of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

With Aristobolos, first missionary bishop of the British Isles, Joseph of Arimathea returned to Cornwall (The Welsh were called Britons), bringing the Grail with him, where it was enshrined at the Castle Corbenic, but later was lost.

Much of the Grail legend describes the search for the Holy Cup by King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

One Pentecost Sunday at Camelot, around the year 500 *Anno Domini*, a vision of the Holy Grail was seen that was so inspiring, that about 150 Knights decided to search throughout Britain for the Grail. Only three knights, Galahad, son of Sir Lancelot, Bors and Percival, according to legend, had the ideal qualities of knighthood, and thus were able to finally see the Holy Cup.

Most written stories about the Holy Grail date from the twelfth century. Before that time, the legend was passed on by word of mouth. Alfred Lord Tennyson in 1870, some centuries later, quaintly described Sir Galahad and his cause:

*My good blade carves the casques of men  
My tough lance thrusteth sure,  
My strength is as the strength of ten  
Because my heart is pure.*

It is interesting to note that the search for the Holy Grail by members of the original British Church began a full century before the arrival of St. Augustine in 597 from Rome. St. Augustine and his followers converted the Saxon invaders of England, whom the Welsh merely wanted to drive into the sea. While not the first Bishop of England, he became the Archbishop of Canterbury, a post held by Anglican bishops since the days of Henry VIII.



During the Middle Ages knights banded themselves together in groups called *orders*, vowing loyalty to their king or prince. During the Crusades, the orders of knighthood fought the Saracens in the Holy Land.

King Louis IX of France (1214-1270) belonged to this period. He led two crusades, in 1248 and again in 1270. He died of the plague two months after landing at Tunis, North Africa, in his second and last expedition.

The noble virtues of knighthood were embodied in the person of King Louis IX, and most striking were his faith, his absolute courage and honesty and justice. Another Frenchman of another era, Voltaire, said of the good king, "It is seldom given to any man to go further in virtue than he went." The memory and deeds of this great king led to his canonization as a Saint in 1297, less than thirty years after his death.

Although the good King failed to redeem the Holy Land for Christendom, he did succeed in bringing the Crown of Thorns to France, a story cherished by all good Frenchmen.

The story of the crowning with thorns, recorded in the Gospels, has an undeniably historical character, and similar scenes are known from ancient profane sources. The type of thorn used was the *jujube*, now known as the *zizphus spini Christi*, abundant in the Jerusalem area, which produced both straight and curved spines, similar to the existing relic.

The relic of the Crown of Thorns was venerated at Jerusalem for many centuries, although some individual thorns were dispersed as relics elsewhere. About the year 603 the Crown of Thorns was conveyed to Constantinople. In 1238 Balwin II pawned it to the Venetians from whom King Louis IX redeemed it in 1239.

In August of 1239 King Louis, along with most of the members of his court, went to Sens to accept delivery of the Crown of Thorns from the Venetians. King Louis carried the holy relic himself, walking barefooted in humility, all the way to Paris. He built the magnificent Sainte-Chapelle in Paris to enshrine the relic, and since 1806 it has been preserved in the Cathedral of Notre Dame.

The Crusades drew to a close after the time of King Louis, as European Christendom abandoned this cause. Chivalry, the word coming from the Old French word *chevalerie*, meaning horse soldiery, also waned as military tactics demanding personal combat changed with the introduction of gunpowder. Knighthood became honorary orders, holding high the ideals of a former age.



In France, thus, no immediate establishment of an order representing the Crown of Thorns was evident, although records show attempts in this direction which were thwarted. Also, the French Popes left a tradition of lingering animosity toward the Popes of Rome, and the excesses of the French Revolution presented later evidence. Indeed, in 1793, the remains of the Holy King Saint Louis IX, enshrined at St. Denis in Paris, were destroyed by the revolutionists.

Nevertheless, the ideals and virtues of a prior age lived on in the legends of the Holy Grail of the English-speaking world, and of King Louis IX and the Crown of Thorns for the French-speaking world. In the latter tradition was laid the cornerstone of the first of the several San Luigi Orders, the Order of the Crown of Thorns, called *l'ordre de la Couronne d'Epines* in the French language.

The Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius Peter III (often called Peter the Humble by historians), was an intrepid traveler. In 1875 he traveled extensively in India, taking a direct hand in the affairs of the Church when he personally consecrated Mar Athanasios and Mar Gregorius. These latter two joined Mar Julius, the Bishop of Ceylon, who in May of 1892, at the command of the Patriarch, consecrated the Frenchman by birth but American citizen by naturalization, Archbishop Joseph Rene Vilatte.

Prior to his election as Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius Peter III had traveled extensively on the Continent as well as in England, where he was received in honor by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Thus it was that he was acquainted with the history and legends of knighthood.

The Patriarch sanctioned the organization of the Order of the Crown of Thorns, and in 1892, in light of the heavy migration to the United States by people of European stock, he conveyed to Archbishop Vilatte, the Grand Mastership of the order. The intent of the establishment of this order in the New World by the Orthodox Patriarch was much the same as that of the fraternal order of Roman Catholic men known as the Knights of Columbus, which was established in 1882. Archbishop Vilatte held office until his death on July 1, 1929.