

MODERN ORGANISATION OF THE ORDER

The Roman Catholic order continued to exist in Austria, out of Napoleon's reach. Beginning in 1804 and until 1923 (in which year Archduke Eugen of Austria resigned the grandmastership), it was headed by members of the Habsburg dynasty. All the subsequent Grand Masters were priests.

In 1929, that branch of the Teutonic knights was converted to a purely spiritual Roman Catholic religious order and renamed the Deutscher Orden ("German Order").^[citation needed] After Austria's annexation by Nazi Germany in 1938, the Teutonic Order was suppressed throughout the Großdeutsches Reich until defeat of that regime, although the Nazis used imagery of the medieval Teutonic knights for propagandistic purposes.^[31] The Roman Catholic order survived in Italy, however, and was reconstituted in Germany and Austria in 1945. By the end of the 20th century, this part of the Order had developed into a charitable organization and incorporated numerous clinics, as well as sponsoring excavation and tourism projects in Israel. In 2000, the German chapter of the Teutonic Order declared bankruptcy and its upper management was dismissed; an investigation by a special committee of the Bavarian parliament in 2002 and 2003 to determine the cause was inconclusive.

The Catholic branch now consists of approximately 1,000 members, including 100 Roman Catholic priests, 200 nuns, and 700 associates. While the priests are organized into six provinces (Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Slovakia, and Slovenia) and predominantly provide spiritual guidance, the nuns primarily care for the ill and the aged. Associates are active in Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Italy. Many of the priests care for German-speaking communities outside of Germany and Austria, especially in Italy and Slovenia; in this sense the Teutonic Order has returned to its 12th-century roots: the spiritual and physical care of Germans in foreign lands.^[32] The current General Abbot of the Order, who also holds the title of Grand Master, is Bruno Platter. The current seat of the Grand Master is the Deutschordenskirche^[33] (Church of the German Order) in Vienna. Near the Stephansdom in the Austrian capital is the Treasury of the Teutonic Order, which is open to the public, and the order's Central Archive. Since 1996, there has also been a museum dedicated to the Teutonic Knights at their former castle in Bad Mergentheim in Germany, which was the seat of the Grand Master from 1525–1809.

Honorary Knights of the Teutonic Order include Otto von Habsburg, Konrad Adenauer and others.

31. Saintry, Guy Stair. "The Teutonic Order of Holy Mary in Jerusalem". Almanach de la Cour. www.chivalricorders.org. Retrieved 2011-01-30. [T]he nazis...after the occupation of Austria suppressed [the Order] by an act of 6 September 1938 because they suspected it of being a bastion of pro-Habsburg legitimism. On occupying Czechoslovakia the following year, it was also suppressed in Moravia although the hospitals and houses in Yugoslavia and south Tyrol were able to continue a tenuous existence. The Nazis, motivated by Himmler's fantasies of reviving a German military elite then attempted to establish their own "Teutonic Order" as the highest award of the Third Reich. The ten recipients of this included Reinhard Heydrich and several of the most notorious Nazi criminals. Needless to say, although its badge was modeled on that of the genuine Order, it had absolutely nothing in common with it.

32. Jump up ^ Urban, p. 277

33. Jump up ^ Deutschordenskirche, Wien 1 – an explanatory pamphlet (in German) of the Order available in the Deutschordenskirche, by Franz R. Vorderwinkler, 1996, published by Kirche & Kultur Verlag mediapress, A-4400, Steyr.