

INTRODUCTION TO FREEMASONRY

The Fellowcraft Degree

By Carl H. Claudy

Table of Contents

["God Is Always Geometrizing"](#)

[History – The Grand Lodge Period](#)

"God Is Always Geometrizing"

So said Plato twenty-three centuries ago. It is merely an accident of the English language that geometry and God begin with the same letter; no matter what the language or the ritual, the initial of the Ineffable Name and that of the first and noblest of sciences are Masonically the same.

"But that is secret!" cries some newly-initiated brother who has examined his printed monitor and finds that the ritual concerning the further significance of the letter "G" is represented only by stars. Aye, the ritual is secret, but the fact is the most gloriously public that Freemasonry may herald to the world. One can no more keep secret the idea that God is the very warp and woof of Freemasonry than that He is the essence of all life. Take God out of Freemasonry and there is, literally, nothing left; it is a pricked balloon, an empty vessel, a bubble which has burst.

The petitioner knows it before he signs his application. He must answer "Do you believe in God?" before his petition can be accepted. He must declare his faith in a Supreme Being before he may be initiated. But note that he is not required to say, then or ever, what God. He may name Him as he will, think of Him as he pleases; make Him impersonal law or personal and anthropomorphic; Freemasonry cares not.

Freemasonry's own especial name for Deity is Great Architect of the Universe. She speaks of God rarely as if she felt the sacredness of the simple Jewish symbol – the Yod – which stood for JHVH, that unpronounceable name we think may have been Jehovah. But God, Great Architect of the Universe, Grand Artificer, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge Above, Jehovah, Allah, Buddha, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, or Great Geometer, a symbol of the conception shines in the East of every American Masonic lodge, as in the center of the canopy of every English lodge.

Secret? Aye, secret as those matters of the heart which may not be told are secret. Let him who loves his wife or his child more than he loves aught else upon the earth try to explain in words just how he loves, and he will understand just what sort of a secret this is. All the world may know that he loves; how he loves, how much he loves, there are no words to tell.

All the world may know that the symbol of Deity shines in the East of a Masonic lodge; only the true Freemason, who is actually a Mason in his heart, as well as in his mind, may know just how and in what way the Great Architect is the very essence and substance of the Ancient Craft.

The symbol of Deity has always been a part of all houses of initiation. In the Egyptian mysteries it was the Sun God's symbol, Ra. The Greeks considered the number five to be the symbol of man's dependence upon the Unseen; from five also came the Pentalfa or five-pointed star. The imaginative will easily see here a connection with the Fellowcraft's Degree in which five is especially the symbolic number. Plutarch tells us that in the Greek mysteries the symbol of God was made of wood in the first, of bronze in the second, and of gold in the third degree, or step, to symbolize the refinement of man's conception of Deity as he progressed from the darkness of ignorance to the light of faith in some one of many forms of belief in God.

Freemasonry uses a much more tender and beautiful symbolism. In modern and costly temples the letter "G" may be of crystal, lighted behind with electric light. In some country lodge it may be cut from cardboard and painted blue, illuminated if at all with a tallow dip. A Western lodge meets yearly on the top of a hill in a forest, and nails to a tree cut branches in the form of a rough letter "G." Freemasonry's symbolism is not of the material substance of the letter, but its connection with geometry, the science by which the universe exists and moves and by which the proportions which connect this vast machine are measured.

Aye, God is always geometrizing. Geometry is particularly His science. Freemasonry makes it especially the science of the Fellowcraft's Degree and couples it with the symbol of the Great Architect of the Universe. No teaching of Freemasonry is greater; none is simpler than this. The Fellowcraft who sees it as the very crux and climax of the degree, the reality behind the form, has learned as no words may teach him for what he climbed the Winding Stairs, and the true wages of a Fellowcraft which he found within the Middle Chamber.

History – The Grand Lodge Period

The formation of the Mother Grand Lodge in London, in 1717, which profoundly affected Freemasonry, is shrouded in mystery, clouded in the mists of time, and as extraordinary as it was important.

The Freemasons of those far-off days could have had no idea of the tremendous issues which hung upon their actions nor dreamed of the effect of their union. Had they even imagined it, doubtless they would have left us more records, and we would not now have to speculate on matters of history the very causes of which are – in all probability – never fully to be known to us.

One of the causes which led to the sudden coming to life of the old and diminishing Fraternity was the Reformation. During its operative period Freemasonry had been if not a child of the Church at least its servant, working hand in hand with it. Our oldest document – the Halliwell Manuscript or Regius Poem, dated 1390 – invokes the Virgin Mary, speaks of the Trinity and gives instructions for observing Mass! But the same influences which produced the Reformation worked in Freemasonry and by 1600, according to the Harleian Manuscript, [xiii] the Order had largely severed its dependence upon the Church and become a refuge for those who wished to be free in thought as well as for Freemasons. It was still Christian – almost aggressively Christian – in its teachings. Not for another hundred years or more and then only partially did it rid itself of any sectarian character whatever and become what it is to-day, a meeting ground for "men of every country, sect and opinion," united in a common belief in the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the hope of immortality.

Seventeen hundred and seventeen is the dividing line between before and after; between the old Freemasonry and the new; between a Craft which was slowly expiring and one which began to grow with a new vitality; between the last lingering remains of operative Masonry and a Craft wholly Speculative.

Just what were the causes of the events which led up to the formation of the first Grand Lodge we do not know. We can only guess. No minutes of the Mother Grand Lodge were kept during its first six years. The Constitutions and Old Charges, first published in 1723, were republished fifteen years after. In this second edition of 1738 is a meager record of the first meetings of the Grand Lodge, so brief and so skeletonized that there is space for it in such a link book as this. In the yellowed pages of this old and precious book of which a few copies still remain we read (letters modernized)

King George I entered London most magnificently on 20 Sept., 1714, and after the Rebellion was over 1716 A.D., the few Lodges at London finding themselves neglected by Sir Christopher Wren, thought fit to cement under a Grand Master as the Center of Union and Harmony, viz., the Lodges that met,

At the Goose and Gridiron Alchouse at St. Pauls Church-yard.

1. At the Crown Alehouse in Parker's-Lane, near Drury-Lane.
2. At the Apple-Tree Tavern in Charles-street Covent Garden.
3. At the Rummer and Grapes Tavern in Channel-Row, Westminster.

They and some old Brothers met at the said Apple-Tree, and having put in the chair the oldest Master Mason (now the Master of a Lodge) they constituted themselves a Grand Lodge pro Tempore in due form, and forthwith revived the Quarterly Communication of the Officers of Lodges (called the Grand lodge) resolved to hold the Annual Assembly and Feast and then to choose a Grand Master from among themselves, till they should have the Honor of a Noble Brother at their Head.

Accordingly, on St. John Baptist's Day, in the 3d year of King George I. A.D. 1717 the Assembly and Feast of the Free and accepted Masons was held at the foresaid Goose and Gridiron Ale-house.

Before Dinner, the oldest Master Mason (now the Master of a Lodge) in the Chair, proposed a List of proper Candidates; and the Brethren by a Majority of Hands elected Mr. Anthony Sayer Gentleman, Grand Master of Masons – Capt. Joseph Elliot, Mr. Jacob Lamball, Carpenter, Grand Wardens – who being forthwith invested with the Badges of Office and power by the said oldest Master, and installed, was duly congratulated by the Assembly who paid him the Homage.

Sayer Grand Master commanded the Masters and Wardens of Lodges to meet the Grand Officers every Quarter in Communication at the place he should appoint in his Summons sent by the Tyler.

N.B. It is called the Quarterly Communication, because it should meet Quarterly according to ancient Usage. And when the Grand Master is present it is a Lodge in Ample Form; otherwise, only in Due Form, yet having the same authority with Ample Form.

Probably other lodges existed in London at the time; whether they refused to join the historic four or were not invited we do not know. We know little about these original four lodges. The Engraved list of Lodges was published in 1729 in which the Goose and Gridiron Number 1 (afterwards the Lodge of Antiquity) is said to have dated from 1691. When William Preston became its Master the lodge was involved in a controversy with the Grand Lodge – but that is too special an event to consider in so broad a sketch as this.

Lodge number two of the original four lodges, which met at the Crown, Parker's-Lane, was struck from the roll in 1740. The first Grand Master of this Mother Grand Lodge, Anthony Sayer, Gentleman, came from lodge number three – the Apple-Tree Tavern Lodge; we know little more of it. These three lodges were small, and at least as much operative as Speculative. But the fourth lodge, which met at the Rummer and Grapes Tavern in Channel Row, Westminster, was not only the largest (seventy members) but the most Speculative and with the highest type of membership. It mothered not only men of high social rank, lords, counts and knights, but also Dr. Desaguliers [^{xiii}] and James Anderson, [^{xiv}] two brethren who had a great deal to do with the revival, especially Anderson, to whom we are indebted for much.

In our perspective a Grand Lodge is as much a necessary part of the existing order of things as a State or Federal Government. In 1717 it was a new idea, accompanied by many other new ideas. Some brother or brethren saw that if the ancient Order were not to die, it must be given new life through a new organization. Doubtless they were influenced by Mother Kilwinning Lodge [^{xv}] of Scotland which had assumed and exercised certain motherly functions in regard to her daughter lodges, all of which had Kilwinning as a part of their name and, apparently, of their obedience.

The newly formed Grand Lodge went the whole way. It proposed to, and did, take command of its lodges. It branched out beyond the jurisdiction originally proposed "within ten miles of London" and invaded the provinces. It gave enormous powers to the Grand Master. It prohibited the working of the "Master's Part" in private lodges, thus throwing back to the ancient annual assemblies. [^{xvi}] It divided the Craft into Entered Apprentices and Fellowcrafts. It resolved "against all politics as what never yet conduced to the welfare of the lodge nor ever will." This was a highly important declaration at a time when every organization in England was taking part in politics, especially in the Jacobite struggle against the House of Hanover. Indeed, a Grand Master, the Duke of Wharton (1722) turned against the Grand Lodge and the Fraternity when it refused to lend itself to his political aspirations and sponsored the Gormogons, a caricature organization which tried to destroy Freemasonry by ridicule. Luckily for us all, ridicule, powerful weapon though it is, never in the long run prevails against reality. The Gormogons, like other and later organizations, such as the Scald Miserable Masons, [^{xvii}] had its brief day and died – and Freemasonry thrived and grew.

Finally the Grand Lodge erased the ancient Charge "to be true to God and Holy Church" and substituted the Charge already quoted.

This was of unparalleled importance; it was one of the factors which led to the formation of other Grand Lodges and dissension in Freemasonry, but as it was distinctly right and founded modern speculative Freemasonry on the rock of non-sectarianism and the brotherhood of all men who believe in a common Father regardless of His name, His church, or the way in which He is worshiped, it won out in the end and became what it is today, a fundamental of the Craft.

Between 1717 and 1751 the Craft spread rapidly, not only in England, but on the Continent, and in the Colonies, especially Colonial America, where time and people, conditions and social life provided fallow ground for the seeds of Freemasonry. But in spite of a new life, and wise counsels of brethren who restricted the acts if not the power of the new Grand Lodge, all was not plain sailing. Dissensions appeared. Causes of friction, if not numerous, were important and went deep. The religious issue was vital; doubtless it seemed to the older Masons then as radical a step as it seemed to us when the Grand Orient of France [^{xviii}] took the V.S.L. from the altar. In the 1738 edition of the Constitutions we find the article "Concerning God and religion" altered to read, "In ancient times the Christian Masons were charged to comply with the Christian usages of each country where they traveled and worked."

Another cause for dissension was the Grand Lodge's strong hand regarding the making of Masons. Too many lodges were careless; too many private groups of Masons assumed the right to assemble as a lodge and make Masons of their friends; too much laxity existed as to fees and dues and the payment of charity to the Grand Lodge. To check these practices the Grand Lodge changed some words in the degrees – doubtless our "spurious Mason" clauses come from this – and this caused the same reaction then as an attempt by modern brethren to change or rearrange our present ritual would produce.

Probably the religious issue did not cause a major part of the trouble, but it provided a constant source of irritation. Then as now many clergymen were Speculative Masons. Today enlightened clergymen do not see in the absence of mention of the Carpenter of Nazareth in a lodge any denial of Him, any more than a Jewish Rabbi sees in the absence

of mention of Jehovah, or a Buddhist sees in the absence of mention of Buddha, a denial of those deities. Then, however, many clergymen insisted upon a Christian tinge to the Masonic ceremonies, and while the quarrel would hardly have come from this alone, it was a contributing cause.

In 1738 the Grand Lodge sanctioned the making of the "Master's Part" into what we know as the Third Degree. This had been going on for years – no one knows how many – but not by permission of Grand Lodge. Sanctioning it was to many brethren an "alteration of established usage" and the customs of "time immemorial." It proved another blow struck at unity.

All these and other matters fomented dissension which came to a head in 1751 when a rival Grand Lodge was formed. It came into being with a brilliant stroke, for it chose the name "The Most Antient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons."

Calling itself "Antient" and the older body "Modern" at once enlisted the support of hundreds of brethren who did not look beneath the surface to learn which was really which. So we have this peculiar and confusing terminology; the original, the older, the more ancient Grand Lodge was called the "Modern" Grand Lodge, and the newer and rebellious body was called "Antient." [xix]

The curious story of the rise of this Antient Grand Lodge should be read by every Freemason, for it has had a tremendous effect upon the Craft. We can afford to be charitable to those who believed they were engaged in a revolution, not a rebellion. This country was born out of what we call the Revolution, which to the Royalists of 1776 was the Rebellion.

The Antients were extremely fortunate in having one Laurence Dermott secede from the Moderns with them. Dermott was a fighting Irishman, a brother heart and soul in the Fraternity, and if some of his actions seem a little questionable to us, he has to his credit the success of the movement. In 1771 when the Duke of Atholl became Grand Master the Antients had almost two hundred lodges on the roll.

Dermott kept the religious issue alive; by implication he made the Moderns seem anti-religious. He kept the Antients a Christian body and wrote distinctively Christian sentiments and references into its Constitutions and its documents whenever he could get them adopted.

Meanwhile other Grand Lodges arose; they were not very important and never grew very large, but they belong in the story of Freemasonry; the "Grand Lodge of All England," "The Grand Lodge of England South of the River Trent," "The Supreme Grand Lodge" all made their bids for recognition, lived their little day and passed on, each leaving its trace, its influence, but unable to contend against the Antients and the Moderns.

The benefits which came from the clash seem to-day to be greater than the evils. Then Freemasons saw only harm in the rivalry which split the Fraternity. Now we can see that where one Grand lodge established lodges on war-ships, the other retaliated with Army lodges which carried Freemasonry to far places; where one body started a school for girls, the other retorted with a school for boys – both still in existence, by the way – where one Grand Lodge reached out to the provinces, the other cultivated Scotland and Ireland. Both worked indefatigably in the American Colonies.

The heart burnings, the jealousies, the sorrows and the contests between Antients and Moderns, if they exhibited less of brotherly love than the Fraternity taught, were actually spurs to action. Without some such urge Freemasonry could hardly have spread so fast or so far. As the United States became a much stronger and more closely welded union after the cleavage of 1361-65, so Freemasonry was to unite at last in a far greater, stronger and more harmonious body when the two rival Grand Lodges came together, composed their differences, forgot their rivalries, and clasped hands across the altar of the United Grand Lodge.

The reconciliation is as astonishing and mysterious as the discord. We can see that the death of Dermott, who was gathered to his fathers in 1791, fighting for the Antients to the last, removed one cause of difference between the two Grand Lodges; we can understand that as the Antients had grown in power and prestige not only in England but in the Colonies until they outnumbered the Moderns in both lodges and brethren, the Moderns might well have thought that union would be a life saver; we can comprehend that time heals all differences and that what had seemed important in 1751 in fifty years had dwindled in vitality.

But what is amazing to this day is that after the difficult period, when overtures were made, refusals recorded, committees appointed and differences finally composed, the Antient Grand Lodge, in accepting the idea of reconciliation, receded from almost all the positions for which it had fought so long! It was as if the spirit of combat, so alien to the gentle genius of Freemasonry, had worn itself out and brethren became as eager to forgive and forget and compromise as they had previously been strong to resist and to struggle.

Whatever the spirit which caused it, the final reconciliation took place in Freemasons' Hall in London, on St. John's Day, December 27, 1813. The two Grand Lodges filed together into the Hall; the Articles of Union were read; the Duke of Kent retired as Grand Master in favour of the Duke of Sussex, who was elected Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge.

Two matters must be stressed: the second of the, Articles of Union reads: "It is declared and pronounced that pure ancient Masonry consists of three degrees and no more; viz., those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellowcraft and the Master Mason (including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch)."

In 1815 a new Book of Constitutions proclaimed to all the world forever the non-sectarian character of Freemasonry in this Charge concerning God and religion:

"Let a man's religion or mode of worship be what it may, he is not excluded from the Order, provided he believes in the glorious Architect of heaven and earth, and practice the sacred duties of morality."

Newton says of this:

Surely that is broad enough, high enough; and we ought to join with it the famous proclamation issued by the Grand Master, the Duke of Sussex, from Kensington Palace, in 1842, declaring that Masonry is not identified with any one religion to the exclusion of others, and men in India who were otherwise eligible and could make a sincere profession of faith in one living God, be they Hindus or Mohammedans, might petition for membership in the Craft. Such in our own day is the spirit and practice of Masonic universality, and from that position, we may be very sure, the Craft will never recede.