



PAPER

Beyond the Craft and Royal Arch

Summary: After the Craft and Royal, is there a need to join 'Other Orders'?

While supporting the Lodge bar and musing over my beverage options, my reverie was interrupted by two young Provincial Officers studiously studying diaries. One had four meetings the next week, the other five. Over the weeks following, their respective diaries again remained obstinately full. Their acceptance of each other's kindly Lodge invitations must regrettably await the following month. I sipped my Gin and Tonic in silent admiration. Their lives were overflowing with Freemasonry. Clearly, they had employers who tolerated their absence, owned properties with palatial drawer space, knew kindly and generous bank managers, enjoyed Falstaffian digestion, and were blessed with wives of unparalleled patience and generosity, given their enforced nightly isolation; though possibly they both knew divorce lawyers at the 'top of their game'.

Most Freemasons are able to choose from a wealth of Orders 'beyond the Craft', worked in chapels, chapters, colleges, conclaves, councils, courts, lodges, preceptories, or tabernacles within a multitude of Masonic locations. Whilst the two subjects of my 'silent admiration' were certainly remarkably busy, and appeared happy one question arose in my mind. Did they really get more out of their Masonry than the man who had joined just one Craft Lodge and Chapter, but attended all events it had to offer with loyalty and enthusiasm? Does quantity trump quality within Speculative Freemasonry?

The 108 Orders and Degrees known in England are engulfed by the many hundreds that have originated in the United States,¹ in France, in Germany and not least in Scotland. Members confirm that each Order tells an often-beautiful story drawn from the pages of history and reflecting on the moral lessons of its theme or personalities. Taken in the round these stories present a loose chronological order of events centred on the pages of the Old Testament and with many relating to the building and rebuilding of Solomon's Temple. Other themes contemplate early Christian culture and a few are drawn towards a wider and more esoteric global wisdom.² If there is just one 'great Masonic Secret' out there does each of these orders provide, as in a moral jigsaw, one interlocking piece with all creating the whole? Sadly, with stories flowing from different authors, different cultures and different nations, any connection between the orders becomes purely accidental. Our 108 Masonic orders and degrees do not and perhaps could never be expected to inter-relate.³

So, after the 'Craft' and 'Royal arch', then why join anymore? If we are seeking a far-flung social club offering great warmth, good fellowship, an amiable dinner after being told a colourful story within a structured moral setting then the more Lodges and orders and degrees we join the more we can achieve an ever-expanding range of friendships and interests. This is an aspect in which many elderly widowers find welcome solace. Some might consider there is a valuable social dimension. For many men, frustrated or working well below their potential in their day job, the broad Masonic structure offers rank and responsibility, colourful regalia, splendid titles and, most importantly, respect from others all within a sound moral environment. Possibly the more orders one joins so the prospects of actually achieving one's level of personal contentment become all the greater?

If, however our aim has been to seek that great moral secret or truth offered by our Masonic Founders then do we really need to look any further than the basic Craft Degrees and the Royal Arch? In them we are instructed how to live in harmony with each other, in harmony with our own nature, and in harmony with our chosen 'Supreme Being'. If we have been able to achieve all three of these within one lifetime, is there really anything else to seek or say? Has our solitary Mason within his one Craft Lodge, or chapter really any need to look further? Reflecting upon the matter, is a diverse Masonic 'career' an end-in-itself or a merely the means-to-an-end, that of achieving a morally purposeful, rounded and contented life? Is it the width and range of our Masonic experience that matters, or is it the depth to which one is able to draw out the lessons of each degree and so apply them to one's own life? Might the time spent exploring those 'Additional Orders, possibly be better invested outside Freemasonry, offering 'Brotherly Love', and the fruits of our rich Masonic heritage to benefit the nearby social community beyond our Lodge buildings? Fortunately, has not Speculative Freemasonry equipped us to draw our own conclusions?

Endnotes

1. Few in this country may be familiar with American degrees: *The Tall Cedars of Lebanon*, *The Order of the Eastern Star*, *The Order of the Grotto*, *Jacob's Daughters*, *The Order of De Morley*, *The Daughters of the Nile* or the *Shriners*. All form part of a vibrant United States Freemasonry, and were proudly depicted as such on the front cover of the prestigious *Life* magazine in 1956.
2. An interested (and qualified) Mason has the opportunity to participate in stories relating to the Flood (Royal Ark Mariners), the Blessing of Abraham (Allied Degrees), the kingship of David (Order of the Secret Monitor) and the Egyptian mathematician Pythagoras (Knights Beneficent). If the Temple at Jerusalem is his 'bag' our Mason can learn about the skills and rewards of its operative masons (The Mark Degree and The Operatives). Probing more deeply, he can share in secrets relating to its construction, dedication and completion (Royal and Select Masters, Knights Beneficent and The Grand Tilers of Solomon). Finally, its re-building after destruction by Nebuchadnezzar forms the story line of the Holy Royal Arch and the Red Cross of Babylon. Our Christian culture has inspired many themes. They include the influence of the Roman Emperor Constantine (Knight of Constantinople & Red Cross of Constantine), the characters of St Lawrence the Martyr (Allied Degrees) and St Mark (Knights Beneficent) and the Book of Revelations (HRA Knight Templar Priests). The masonic contribution of King Athelstan ('Athelstan') contrasts with a study into knighthood and honour (Knights Templar). Christian philosophy, theology and moral nature are explored within the 'Ancient and Accepted Rite' and lightly touched on, in verse, by the 'Royal Order of Scotland'. This theme also runs through the seven inter-related degrees of the Camp of Baldwin. Some Orders are devoted to exploring ancient truths: Hermetic (Rosicrucian's); Irish (Order of Eri); and Oriental (August Order of Light).
3. Two sources have even inadvertently used the very same theme, e.g. Select Master and Grand Tilers of Solomon. Membership of them all would not apparently lead our 'keen as mustard Brethren' any closer to a great Masonic Secret or Truth than the Mason in his solitary Lodge.



Recommended use of Papers

Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
 - Followed by 'any questions'
 - As a precursor to a discussion (in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself)
 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand).

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version unless otherwise specified.

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*. Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

For further papers and other learning materials visit *Solomon* at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>

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