



UGLE Oration

The Pillar of Beauty

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The Corinthian Order represents Beauty.

Summary

Three pillars, of the Ionic, Doric and Corinthian Orders of classical architecture, are central to our Masonic symbolism and represent Wisdom, Strength and Beauty and this oration focuses upon that of the Corinthian Order.

Keywords

Pillar, Ionic, Doric, Corinthian, Beauty

The Pillar of Beauty

Three pillars of the Ionic, Doric and Corinthian Orders of classical architecture, are central to our Masonic symbolism and represent Wisdom, Strength and Beauty. Not only are they situated at the pedestals of the Principal Officers of the Lodge, they feature on the First-Degree Tracing Board and prominently, on the Certificate that the Master Mason receives from the United Grand Lodge of England.

Let us on this occasion reflect on the third of these pillars which is of the Corinthian Order and represents Beauty. It is placed at the Junior Warden's pedestal and represents the masterly workmanship of Hiram Abif, King Solomon's principal architect, in beautifying and adorning the Temple at Jerusalem. In one sense we all know what the word beauty implies in everyday terms yet in another sense it defies definition. Classically, beauty has always been associated with Wisdom and Strength and with both the symmetry and order of creation, as is well expressed in the Apocryphal text, *The Wisdom of Solomon*:

*Against wisdom evil does not prevail.
She reaches mightily from one end of the Earth to the other
And she orders all things well.'
I loved her and sought her from my youth,
And I desired to take her for my bride
And I became enamoured of her beauty.*

The first mention of beauty in our ritual is in the prayer in the ceremony of Initiation:

'Endue him with a competency of Thy Divine Wisdom, that, assisted by the secrets of our Masonic Art, he may the better be enabled to unfold the beauties of true godliness to the honour and glory of Thy Holy Name'.

What do we mean by 'the beauties of true godliness'? Perhaps no human being has ever developed a clearer concept of the true nature of beauty than Plato, who lived between 428 and 348 BC. A recurring theme in Plato's philosophy is that all the things that we see and experience in this created universe are imperfect and transient reflections of perfect, eternal and abstract celestial and divine forms, referred to as universals or archetypes. One of these is the archetype of beauty.

The archetypal beauty revealed in our Masonic art underpins our whole system. The Explanation of the First-Degree Tracing Board, a wonderful address that, sadly, is rarely presented in our Lodges these days – reminds us that '*Beauty shines through the whole of creation as symmetry and order*'. In his book '*Art and the Beauty of God*', a former Bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries, explores the Platonic concept that our sense of beauty reflects our sense of the transcendental reality of God, and he relates this idea to the concept of archetypal forms. The Bishop quotes from Plato's dialogue *Symposium* which describes the revelation of a beauty, '*... whose nature is marvellous indeed. This beauty is first of all eternal; it neither comes into being nor passes away; it is absolute, existing alone with itself, unique, eternal, and all other beautiful things as partaking of it, yet in such a manner that, while they come into being and pass away, it neither undergoes any increase or diminution or suffers any change*'.

But what can the mystery of beauty tell us about our nature and our relation to the Great Architect? Can it point to a particular place for Masonic symbolism in our inner spiritual life? Many mystics and philosophers have reiterated the Platonic view that our sense of beauty is due to the fact that our life did not begin at our physical birth but that, although separated from our memories by a spiritual blindness or a cloud of unknowing, we are really eternal beings whose true home is Heaven. In his essay *The Weight of Glory*, C. S. Lewis states his belief that our love of beauty is really a haunting desire for ‘our own far off country, a longing for our true eternal home’. He adds that, ‘this inconsolable, and sometimes painful, secret is within us all and that it is one that we can neither express nor hide. It makes us feel awkward even when we admit it to ourselves’.

But Lewis emphasises that we do not merely long to see beauty, we long to be totally caught up in it. He states that we are summoned to pass in through the beauties of Nature into a splendour which Nature only fitfully reflects. He adds that we experience beauty and joy a thousand removes from their Source and asks ‘What would it be to taste at the fountain-head that stream of which even these lower reaches prove so intoxicating?’

In this context, it is appropriate to end with part of a poem from a book entitled *What I am is Stillness* by William Anderson and Clive Hicks which so elegantly portrays the ache for ‘our own far off country’:

*Constantly we are offered the Kingdom
And we lose it in the wars of the soul.
Even in childhood it seemed
There was somewhere more wonderful we had known,
When the voices called us at sunset
And the tall cliffs glowed red,
When the voices cried ‘Come home, come home’,
And we stood on the sand, not knowing
Which home, the house up on the hill
Or the place known only from the ache
Aroused by the horizon,
The ship’s funnels,
Or the cloud suspended and waiting.*

##END##

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*).

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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