

THE SEPARATION OF THE MASONIC DEGREES
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During my Masonic career, I have frequently been asked, "Now that I have been Raised to the Third Degree, what step should I take next?" Some are advised to take the Mark Degree, which is an advancement of the Second Degree, and others advise the completion of the Third Degree by seeking to be Exalted into the Royal Arch. (Now a separate degree)

I am also frequently asked, "Where do you get to know about these, and other degrees, so that I know what will suit me?"

These questions have prompted me to put together a few notes and try to give an answer to them, to help those who wish to know.

When we look into Masonry before the Union of the two Grand Lodges, the Premier Grand Lodge dating from 1717, and the Athol Grand Lodge dating from 1751, Masonry was growing to maturity as we know it today, but it was not yet stabilized. It had emerged from the days of Operative Lodges of stonemasons, usually engaged in Cathedral buildings, through the misty period of the 1600's, of which we know so little, into the 1700's when many non-craft degrees of all sorts grew up, many in France, among them, the non-Operative or Speculative Masons. These degrees were often conferred quite casually in ordinary Craft Lodges, some very Masonic, but others, in character were quite spurious.

The second of the Articles of the Union of the two Grand Lodges in 1813 stated "Pure Masonry consists of three degrees and no more, viz: E.A., F.C., and M.M., including the Supreme Order of The Holy Royal Arch" - the statement did not finish there, it continued - "This Article is not intended to prevent any Lodge or Chapter from holding a meeting in any of the Degrees of Order of Chivalry, according to the Constitutions of the said Orders." Following this statement, the spurious degrees and some others died out, but the remainder formed their own organizations with their own headquarters and grew up strongly and happily alongside the Craft, from which their membership was, and is still drawn.

Having given a brief outline of the early beginnings of Masonry, as we know it today, it is the Degrees in the English Constitution which now flourish, to which this paper refers. I particularly refer to the English Constitution as they do differ in some respects to the Scottish and Irish Constitution.

These degrees comprise of some six Old Testament and seven New Testament Orders, each with its own group of degrees, and are variously known as the "Further or Higher" degrees.

The plan (appended to this paper) shows these Orders, the routes and qualifications necessary to reach them. The first separation of the degrees came when the Grand Lodge in order to develop Masonry Universal, de-Christianized their ceremonies by removing all references of the New Testament from the Craft and Royal Arch, although attempts had begun a century earlier. The Christian element was retained by several other degrees. It will be remembered that all Masonic degrees use Biblical narratives to illustrate their teachings, and presented as allegories.

The Craft is shown in the dominant position at the top of the chart, and rightly so, as this is the source, and all other degrees stem from that, whether of the Old or New

Testament, and each of the Orders are shown separately, with the degrees conferred, with the titles of Masters, and members. An important point to realize is that these Orders collectively have no seniority, except within the Order itself, and the rank of its members is only within that Order. What must be recognized is that in some, it is necessary to be a member of a 'Parent' Order, i.e. if you refer to the graph it shows the qualification to become a member of Knights Templar, one must first have been Exalted into Royal Arch Masonry, then into the Knight Templar Degree.

And now I will endeavor to explain some of the degrees, giving some of their history.

The Craft, we are all conversant with, having its origin in the Old Testament, with King Solomon's Temple from which its teachings are drawn. King Solomon built and dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem some 1000 years B.C. about 500 years after the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, when the first Tabernacle was erected and dedicated in the desert of Sinai. The Temple at Jerusalem was used for some 400 years during which time Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon captured it. Again the Children of Israel were taken captive, and the Temple destroyed. About a century later, the King of Persia, having conquered Babylon, released the Israelites who were then allowed to return to their native country, and re-build the temple, and it is this period of time to which the Royal Arch refers. Entry to the Royal Arch is direct from the Craft, after being raised to the Third Degree.

Chronologically, the Mark Degree refers to the time of the building of the first Temple by King Solomon, when the timbers were brought by boat from the forests of Lebanon, and the stone was quarried and shaped before being transported to the site for the erection of the Temple. Entry to the Mark Degree is direct from the Craft, and is often considered to be the completion of the Second Degree.

The Cryptic Degree, and the Allied Degrees bridge the long historical gap between the Third Degree of the Craft and the Royal Arch and its teachings give a much better appreciation of the Royal Arch Degree. You will observe to reach the Cryptic and Allied Degrees; the qualification is to be a member of both the Royal Arch and the Mark Degrees.

From the Mark Degree can also be reached the Royal Ark Mariners Degree, which uses the story of Noah for its teachings.

Separately, and reached direct from the Craft Third Degree, is the order of Secret Monitor, which tells the story of the deep friendship of David and Jonathan, and the essence of this degree is caring for friends.

From the Mark and Royal Arch Degree can be reached the Operatives Degree, the full title being, The Worshipful Society of Free Masons, Rough Masons, Slaters, Paviers, Plasterers and Bricklayers. Their ceremonies are based on Operative Masonry, before the advent of Speculative Masonry.

A pre-requisite for all members being admitted to the Christian degrees is a belief in the Holy Trinity.

Of the New Testament Degrees, or degrees of Chivalry, perhaps the most popular is the Ancient and Accepted Rite, otherwise referred to as Rose Croix, which is attainable direct from the Craft. This Order was developed in France in the 1700's from the French Rite of Perfection. This Order has 33 degrees, corresponding with the years of the life of Christ. The degrees are mainly conferred by name only, but the 18th degree is essentially Christian in character and is the degree into which its members are Perfected into the Order. The candidate is invited to become a member and he must be a Master Mason of at least one year standing.

The Knights Templar and Knights of Malta teach the Christian life in action and carry on the traditions of the Medieval order, with which they have however, no other connection. From the Knights Templar may be attained, St Thomas of Acon founded by William dean of St Paul's who buried the dead after the fall of Acre in 1191AD and formed the Order at Acre with the express purpose of burying the dead and raising monies to redeem ransomed captives captured by the Saracens. The Order was so successful that William was able to build a church and churchyard that he dedicated to St Thomas a Becket. Scottish Masters of St Andrew, Perfect Master of St Andrew, Squire Novice and Knight Beneficent of the Holy City forms the order referred to as CBCS is seldom spoken of in Masonic circles in England but is active in Europe. Those who are Installed or Past Masters in the Craft can also enter the order of Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests. Access to the Knights Templar is via the Royal Arch, as also is the Order of Red Cross of Constantine, he being the first Christian Roman Emperor, it gives a Christian interpretation of the Craft and the Royal Arch.

The Royal Order of Scotland, the Grand Lodge of which is in Scotland, begins in the Old Testament, and continues through to the second Temple, and into the New Testament of the life and death of Christ. The qualification for this varies considerably throughout the country. In Scotland it requires that the candidate must be a Master Mason of at least 5 years standing, in this area he must be an Installed Master or Past Master in the Craft. In other parts of the country the qualification is that he must have attained the 30th degree in the Ancient and Accepted Rite.

The Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia is open only to Freemasons, but it is of a very different nature. It is a philosophical society and discussions are both Masonic and non-Masonic, and covers many aspects such as Nature and the Elements.

The Order of Eri is an order whose members are drawn from the fifth or higher grades of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia.

In addition to the last two, is the Baldwin Rite, consisting of seven degrees (Old and New Testament), a very old Order and still exists in Bristol, it is closely connected with the Knights Templar and the Ancient and Accepted Rite. Qualification for this Order is strictly by invitation and the candidate must have been previously exalted in a Bristol Chapter of the Royal Arch, and to have been in possession of the Templar grade in the Rose Croix (Bristol working).

Lastly there is the August Order of Light, founded as late as 1902 by members of the Rosicrucian Society in Bradford, and now meet in Wakefield and London. Its ritual is Oriental and teaches a spiritual outlook on life.

In conclusion I trust this talk has given sufficient interest to stimulate a 'daily advancement in Masonic knowledge'. Thank you for your kind attention.