


Definition of Freemasonry



 American Square & Compasses

Freemasonry is a worldwide fraternal organization. Its members are joined together by shared ideals, of both a moral and metaphysical nature (and, in the majority of branches, by a common belief in a Supreme Being). Freemasonry is an "esoteric art," in that certain aspects of its internal work are not generally revealed to the public. Masons give numerous reasons for this, one of which is that Freemasonry uses an initiatory system of degrees to explore ethical and philosophical issues, and this system is less effective if the observer knows beforehand what will happen. It often calls itself "a peculiar system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols."

Membership

Freemasons are expected to exhibit the utmost tolerance both in "Lodge" (the meeting place of a group of Freemasons) and in their daily lives. Freemasonry will thus accept members from almost any religion, including all denominations of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and so forth. Exactly how far this goes depends on the particular branch or "jurisdiction" of Freemasonry one is dealing with. Deists have traditionally been accepted. In Lodges derived from the Grand Orient of France and in certain other groups of Lodges, atheists and agnostics are also accepted, without qualification. Most other branches currently require a belief in a Supreme Being. But even there, one finds a high degree of non-dogmatism, and the phrase "Supreme Being" is often given a very broad interpretation, usually allowing Deism and often even allowing naturalistic views of "God/Nature" in the tradition of Spinoza and Goethe (himself a Freemason), or non-theistic views of Ultimate Reality or Cosmic Oneness, such as found in some Eastern religions and in Western idealism (or for that matter, in modern cosmology). In some other (mostly English-speaking) jurisdictions, Freemasonry is not as tolerant of naturalism as it was in the 18th century, and specific religious requirements with more theistic and orthodox overtones have been added since the early 19th century, including (mostly in North America) belief in the immortality of the soul. The Freemasonry that predominates in Scandinavia, known as the Swedish Rite, accepts only Christians.

Generally, to be a Freemason, one must:

1. be a man, if joining the majority of Masonic jurisdictions, or a woman, if joining a jurisdiction with women's Lodges (unless joining a co-Masonic jurisdiction with no gender requirement),
2. believe in a "Supreme Being", or, in some jurisdictions, a "Creative Principle" (unless joining a jurisdiction with no religious requirement),
3. be at least the minimum age (18–25 years depending on the jurisdiction),
4. be of sound mind, body and of good morals, and
5. be free (or "born free", *i.e.* not born a slave or bondsman).

Traditionally membership was limited to men only, and the inclusion of women is still a matter of controversy in many jurisdictions. The "free born" requirement does not come up in modern Lodges, and there is no indication that it would ever be enforced, but remains there for historical reasons. The "sound body" requirement is today generally taken to

mean physically capable of taking part in Lodge rituals, and most Lodges today are quite flexible in accommodating disabled candidates.

Freemasonry upholds the principles of "Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth" (or in France: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"). It teaches moral lessons through rituals. Members working through the rituals are taught by "degrees". Freemasons are also commonly involved in public service and charity work, as well as providing a social outlet for their members. There is considerable variance in the emphasis on these different aspects of Masonry around the world. In Continental Europe, the philosophical side of Freemasonry is more emphasized, while in Britain, North America, and the English-speaking parts of the world, the charity, service and social club aspects are more emphasized.

While Freemasonry as an organization does not directly involve itself in politics, its members have tended over the years to support certain kinds of political causes with which they have become associated in the public eye: the separation of Church and State, the establishment of secular public schools, and democratic revolutions (in the United States and France on a smaller scale, but on a larger scale in other places such as Mexico, Brazil, and repeatedly in Italy).

Many organizations with various religious and political purposes have been inspired by Freemasonry, and are sometimes confused with it, such as the Protestant Loyal Orange Association and the 19th century Italian Carbonari, which pursued Liberalism and Italian Unity. Many other purely fraternal organizations, too numerous to mention, have also been inspired by Masonry to a greater or lesser extent.

Freemasonry is often called a "secret society", and in fact is considered by many to be the very prototype for such societies. Many Masons say that it is more accurately described as a "society with secrets". The degree of secrecy varies widely around the world. In English-speaking countries, most Masons are completely public with their affiliation, Masonic buildings are clearly marked, and meeting times are generally a matter of public record. In other countries, where Freemasonry has been more recently, or is even currently, suppressed by the government, secrecy may be practiced more in earnest (again, depending greatly on the particular country). Even in the English-speaking world, the precise details of the rituals are not made public, and Freemasons have a system of secret modes of recognition, such as the Masonic secret grip, by which Masons can recognize each other "in the dark as well as in the light," and which are universally kept strictly secret. (Although these "secrets" have been available in printed exposes and anti-Masonic literature for many years.)

Criticism and repression

Freemasonry has been a long-time favorite target of conspiracy theorists, who see it as an occult and evil power, often associated with Judaism, and usually either bent on world domination, or already secretly in control of world politics.

Freemasonry is almost universally banned in totalitarian states. In 1925, it was outlawed in Fascist Italy. Allegedly in Nazi Germany, Freemasons were sent to concentration camps and all Masonic Lodges were ordered shut down. German Masons used the blue forget-me-not as a secret means of recognition and as a substitute for the traditional (and too-easily-recognized) square and compasses. According to some interpretations of canon law, Roman Catholics are forbidden to become Freemasons by their church, though Freemasons do not bar Roman Catholics from becoming members. Freemasonry is also discouraged by some denominations of Protestantism.

In modern democracies, Freemasonry is occasionally accused of being a sort of club, or network, where a lot of influence peddling, and perhaps illegal dealings, take place. In the early 1800s, William Morgan disappeared after threatening to expose Freemasonry's secrets, causing some to claim that he had been murdered by Masons. In Italy, in the 1970s, the P2 lodge was investigated in the wake of a financial scandal and a suspicious death. As a result, the lodge was expelled from Italian Masonry (although it continued to function independently). In Nice, France, the head

prosecutor accused some judges and other judicial personnel of deliberately stalling or refusing to elucidate cases involving Masons. In the 1990s in Britain, the Labour Party government tried unsuccessfully to pass a law requiring all public officials who were Masons to make their affiliation public.

See also: Anti-Masonry, United States Anti-Masonic Party.

Ritual and symbols

The Freemasons rely heavily on the architectural symbolism of the Medieval "operative" Masons who actually worked in stone. One of their principal symbols is the "square and compasses", tools of the trade, so arranged as to form a quadrilateral. The square is sometimes said to represent matter, and the compasses spirit or mind. Alternatively, the square might be said to represent the world of the concrete, or the measure of objective reality, while the compasses represent abstraction, or subjective judgment, and so forth (Freemasonry being non-dogmatic, there is no written-in-stone interpretation for any of these symbols). The compasses straddle the square, representing the interdependence between the two. In the space between the two, there is optionally placed a symbol of metaphysical significance. Sometimes, this is a blazing star or other symbol of Light, representing Truth or knowledge. Alternatively, there is often a letter "G" placed there, usually said to represent "God and/or Geometry".

The square and compasses are displayed at all Masonic meetings, along with the open "Volume of the Sacred Law (or Lore)" (VSL). In English-speaking countries, this is usually a Holy Bible, but it can be whatever book of inspiration or scripture that the members of a particular Lodge or jurisdiction feel they draw on—whether the Bible, the Koran, or other Volumes. In many French Lodges, the Masonic Constitutions are used. In a few cases, a blank book has been used, where the religious makeup of a Lodge was too diverse to permit an easy choice of VSL. In addition to its role as a symbol of written wisdom, inspiration, and sometimes as the revealed will of the Deity, the VSL is what Masonic obligations are taken upon.

Much of Masonic symbolism is mathematical in nature, and in particular geometrical, which is probably a reason Freemasonry has attracted so many rationalists (such as Voltaire, Fichte, Goethe, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Mark Twain and many others). No particular metaphysical theory is advanced by Freemasonry, however, although there seems to be some influence from the Pythagoreans, from Neo-Platonism, and from early modern Rationalism.

In keeping with the geometrical and architectural theme of Freemasonry, the Supreme Being (or God, or Creative Principle) is sometimes also referred to in Masonic ritual as "the Grand Geometrician", or the "Great Architect of the Universe". Freemasons use a variety of labels for this concept, often abbreviated "G.A.O.T.U.", in order to avoid the idea that they are talking about any one religion's particular God or God-like concept.

There are three initial "degrees" of Freemasonry: (1) Entered Apprentice, (2) Fellow Craft and (3) Master Mason. One works through each degree by taking part in a ritual, essentially a medieval mortality Play, in which one plays a role, along with members of the Lodge that one is joining. The setting is Biblical—the building of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem—although the stories themselves are not directly from the Bible, and not intended to be necessarily Jewish or Christian in nature. Nothing supernatural happens in these stories. The Temple can be taken to represent the "temple" of the individual human being, that of the human community, or of the entire universe.

As one works through the degrees, one studies the lessons and interprets them for oneself. There are as many ways to interpret the rituals as there are Masons, and no Mason may dictate to any other Mason how he is to interpret them. No particular truths are espoused, but a common structure—speaking symbolically to universal human archetypes—provides for each Mason a means to come to his own answers to life's important questions. Freemasons working through the degrees are often (especially in Continental Europe) asked to prepare papers on related philosophical

topics, and present lectures.

Mozart was a Freemason, and his opera, *The Magic Flute*, makes extensive use of Masonic symbolism. Two books that give a general feel for the symbolism and its interpretation are:

1. "Freemasonry: A Journey Through Ritual and Symbol" by W.K. MacNulty, Thames & Hudson, London, 1991.
2. "Symbols of Freemasonry" by D. Beresniak and L. Hamani, Assouline, Paris, 2000.

The British author Rudyard Kipling also made use of Masonic symbolism and myth in his story, *The Man Who Would Be King*.

Lodges

Contrary to popular belief, Freemasons meet *as* a *Lodge*, and not *in* a lodge. (This is similar to the distinction made by Christians who meet *as* a *church*, with the church *building* associated with the meeting of the faithful.)

The *operative* lodges constructed a lodge building adjacent to the work site where the masons could meet for instruction and social contact. Normally, this was on the southern side of the site (in Europe, the side with the sun warming the stones during the day.) The social part of the building was on the southern side, hence the social gathering of the lodge is still called *the South*.

Early *speculative* lodges met in taverns and other convenient public meeting places, and employed a Tyler to guard the door from both malicious and simply curious people.

Lodge buildings have for many years been known as a *temple*. In many countries this term has now been replaced by *Masonic Centre*. (See also reference to the Shriners and their Temples. Until 2003–4, the Oscars were held at the Shriners temple/auditorium in Hollywood / Los Angeles.)

Freemasonry in the language

An expression often used in Masonic circles is "to be on the square", meaning to be a reliable sort of person, and this has entered common usage. Other phrases from Freemasonry in common use include "meeting on the level" (without regard to social, economic, religious or cultural differences). The practice of Freemasonry is referred to amongst its members as "The Craft."

Organizational structure

There are a great many different "jurisdictions" of Freemasonry, each sovereign and independent of the others, and usually defined according to a geographic territory. There is thus no central Masonic authority, although each jurisdiction maintains a list of other jurisdictions that it formally "recognizes". If the other jurisdiction reciprocates the recognition, the two jurisdictions are said to be "in amity", which permits the members of the one jurisdiction to attend closed meetings of the other jurisdiction's Lodges, and vice-versa. Generally speaking, to be recognized by another jurisdiction, one must (at least) meet that jurisdiction's requirements for "regularity". This generally means that one must have in place, at least, the "ancient landmarks" of Freemasonry... the essential characteristics considered to be universal to Freemasonry in any culture. In keeping with the decentralized and non-dogmatic nature of Freemasonry, however, there is no universally accepted list of landmarks, and even jurisdictions in amity with each other often have completely different ideas as to what those landmarks are. Many jurisdictions take no official position at all as to what the landmarks are.

There is no tidy way to split jurisdictions into separate camps. For instance, jurisdiction A might recognize B, which recognizes C, which does not recognize A. In addition, the geographical territory of one jurisdiction may overlap with another's, which may affect their relations, for purely territorial reasons. In other cases, one jurisdiction may overlook irregularities in another due simply to a desire to maintain friendly relations. Also, a jurisdiction may be formally affiliated with one tradition, while maintaining informal ties with the other. For all these reasons, labels like "Anglo" and "Continental" must be taken only as rough indicators, not as any kind of clear designation.

The ruling authority of a Masonic jurisdiction is usually called a "Grand Lodge", or sometimes a "Grand Orient". These normally correspond to a single country, although their territory can be broader or narrower than that (in North America, each state and province has its own Grand Lodge). The oldest jurisdiction in the Anglo branch of Freemasonry is the United Grand Lodge of England (<http://www.grand-lodge.org/>) (UGLE), founded in 1717. Its headquarters are at Freemasons Hall, Great Queen Street, London. The oldest in the Continental branch is the Grand Orient de France (<http://www.godf.org/>) (GOdF), founded in 1728. At one time, these branches recognized each other, but most jurisdictions cut off formal relations with the GOdF sometime after it started accepting atheists in 1877. In most Latin countries, as well as in Belgium, the French style of Freemasonry predominates. The rest of the world, accounting for the bulk of Freemasonry, tends to follow the English lead.

Freemasonry's "appendant bodies"

Freemasonry is associated with several "appendant bodies", such as the Scottish Rite, the York Rite, the Swedish Rite, the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (Shriners), the Mystic Order of Veiled Prophets of the Enchanted Realm (Grotto), the Tall Cedars of Lebanon, and the Ancient and Heroic Order of the Gordian Knot (<http://mill-valley.freemasonry.biz/gordian-knot-order.htm>), among numerous others, all of which tend to expand on the teachings of Freemasonry—often with additional higher degrees—while improving their members and society as a whole. Different jurisdictions vary in how they define their relationship with such bodies. Some of these organizations may have additional religious requirements, compared to Freemasonry proper (or "Craft Masonry"), since they elaborate on Masonic teachings from a particular perspective.

There are also certain youth organizations (mainly North American) which are associated with Freemasonry, but are not necessarily Masonic in their content, such as the Order of DeMolay (for boys aged 12–21), the Job's Daughters and the International Order of the Rainbow for Girls (for girls 11–20).

Scottish Rite of Freemasonry

The following is the structure of Freemasonic degrees for the Scottish Rite:

Note. group titles apply to degrees *above*.

33° Inspector General

- **Supreme Council**

32° Master of the Royal Secret

31° Inspector Inquisitor

- **Consistory**

30° Knight Kadosh

29° Scottish Knight of Saint Andrew

28° Knight of the Sun (Prince Adept)

27° Knight Commander of the Temple

26° Prince of Mercy
25° Knight of the Brazen Serpent
24° Prince of the Tabernacle
23° Chief of the Tabernacle
22° Knight of the Royal Axe (Prince of Libanus)
21° Noachite, or Prussian Knight
20° Master of the Symbolic Lodge
19° Grand Pontiff

- **Council of Kadosh**

18° Knight of the Rose Croix
17° Knight of the East and West
16° Prince of Jerusalem
15° Knight of the East, of the Sword or the Eagle

- **Rose Croix**

14° Perfect Elu (Grand Elect, Perfect and Sublime Mason)
13° Royal Arch of Solomon (Knight of the Ninth Arch)
12° Grand Master Architect
11° Elu of the Twelve
10° Elu of the Fifteen
9° Elu of the Nine
8° Intendant of the Building
7° Provost and Judge
6° Intimate Secretary
5° Perfect Master
4° Secret Master

- **Lodge of Perfection**

3° Master Mason
2° FellowCraft
1° Entered Apprentice

- **Blue Lodge or Craft Lodge**

History of Freemasonry

Main article: History of Freemasonry

Freemasonry has been said to be an institutional outgrowth of the medieval guilds of stonemasons (1), a direct descendant of the "Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem" (the Knights Templar)(2), an offshoot of the ancient Mystery schools(1), an administrative arm of the Priory of Sion(3), the Roman Collegia(1), the Comacine masters(1), intellectual descendants of Noah(1), and to have many other various and sundry origins. Others will claim that it dates back only to the late 17th century, and has no real connections at all to earlier organizations. These theories are noted in numerous different texts, and the following are but examples pulled from a

sea of books:

1. In "A History of Freemasonry" by H.L. Haywood and James E. Craig, pub. *circa* 1927
2. In "The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail" by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln, pub. 1982
3. In "Born in Blood" By John Robinson, pub. 1989

Much of this is highly speculative, and the precise origins of Freemasonry may be lost in history. It is likely that Freemasonry is not a straightforward outgrowth of medieval guilds of stonemasons, for numerous reasons well documented in "Born in Blood" by John Robinson. Amongst the reasons for this conclusion are the fact that Stonemason's guilds do not appear to predate reasonable estimates for the time of Freemasonry's origin, that stonemasons lived near their worksite and thus had no need for secret signs to identify themselves, and that the "Ancient Charges" of Freemasonry are nonsensical when thought of as being rules for a Stonemason's guild.

Freemasonry is said by some, especially amongst Masons practising the York Rite, to have existed even at the time of King Athelstan of England, in the 10th century C.E. Athelstan is said by some to have been converted to Christianity in York, and to have issued the first Charter to the Masonic Lodges there. This story is not currently substantiated (the dynasty had already been Christian for centuries).

Some critics and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) consider the ordinances performed in LDS temples (believed by adherents to be revelation from God to Joseph Smith) similar to elements in the masonic rituals. Mormon apologists say this similarity may be because the Masonic rituals are descended from those given by God at the Temple of Solomon, and still contain many of the original truths.

A more historically reliable (although still not unassailable) source asserting the antiquity of Freemasonry is the Halliwell Manuscript or Regius Poem, which is believed to date from *ca.* 1390, and which makes reference to several concepts and phrases similar to those found in Freemasonry. The manuscript itself refers to an earlier document, of which it seems to be an elaboration.

It seems reasonable to suppose that, whatever its precise origins, Freemasonry provided a haven for the unorthodox and their sympathizers during a time when such activity could result in one's death, and that this has something to do with the tradition of secret meetings and handshakes. As the Middle Ages gave way to the Modern Age, the need for secrecy subsided, and Freemasons began to openly declare their association with the fraternity, which began to organize itself more formally. In 1717, four Lodges which met at the "Apple-Tree Tavern, the Crown Ale-House near Drury Lane, the Goose and Gridiron in St. Paul's Churchyard, and the Rummer and Grapes Tavern in Westminster" in London, England (as recounted in (2)) combined together and formed the first public Grand Lodge, the Premier Grand Lodge of England (PGLE). The years following saw Grand Lodges open throughout Europe, as the new Freemasonry spread rapidly. How much of this was the spreading of Freemasonry itself, and how much was the public organization of pre-existing secret lodges, is not possible to say with certainty. The PGLE in the beginning did not have the current three degrees, but only the first two. The third degree appeared, so far as we know, around 1725.

Opinions about the origins, objectives and future of Freemasonry remain controversial from the times of its inception to our times. For example, Shoko Asahara, founder of the controversial Japanese religious group Aum Shinrikyo, has prophesized in some of his sermons that "in the future, Freemasonry will merge into united stream" with Aum Shinrikyo.

According to Sir Richard Burton, "Sufi-ism [was] the Eastern parent of Freemasonry." (See, F. Hitchman, *Burton*, Volume 1, p. 286) The possibility that Burton was correct is examined in detail by Idries Shah in his book entitled *The Sufis*, beginning on page 205.

Women in Freemasonry

The position of women within Freemasonry is complex. Traditionally, only men could be made Freemasons. International Co-masonry began in France in 1882 with the initiation of Maria Deraismes into the "Loge Libre Penseurs" (the FreeThinkers Lodge), a mens lodge under the "Grande Loge Symbolique de France. " Along with activist Georges Martin, in 1893 Maria Deraismes oversaw the initiation of sixteen women into the first lodge in the world to have both men and women as members, creating "Le Droit Humain."

In Britain and France, and most other countries, women still generally join "co-Masonic" Lodges, such as those under the international jurisdiction Le Droit Humain (LDH), which admit both men and women, or they join Lodges under local jurisdictions that admit only women. In North America, it is more common for women not to become Freemasons *per se*, but to join an associated body with its own, separate traditions, the Order of the Eastern Star (OES), which admits only male Freemasons and their female relatives. In the Netherlands, there is a completely separate, although allied, sorority for women, the Order of Weavers (OOW), which uses symbols from weaving rather than stonemasonry.

The GOdF and other Continental jurisdictions give full formal recognition to co-Freemasonry and women's Freemasonry. The UGLE and other Anglo jurisdictions do not formally recognize any Masonic body that accepts women, although in many countries they have an understanding and a kind of informal acceptance that such bodies are part of Freemasonry in a larger sense. The UGLE, for instance, has "recognized" (since 1998) two local women's jurisdictions as regular in practice, *except* for their inclusion of women, and has indicated that, while not formally recognized, these bodies may be regarded as part of Freemasonry. Thus, the position of women in Freemasonry is rapidly changing in the English-speaking world. While in many cases, North America is following England's lead on the issue of women, the remaining resistance to women in Freemasonry is mostly concentrated there.

Prince Hall Masonry

In 1775, an African American named Prince Hall was initiated into an Irish Constitution Military Lodge, along with fourteen other African Americans, all of whom were free by birth. When the Military Lodge left the area, the African Americans were given the authority to meet as a Lodge, form Processions on the days of the Saints John, and conduct Masonic funerals, but not to confer degrees nor to do other Masonic Work. These individuals applied for, and obtained, a Warrant for Charter from the Grand Lodge of England in 1784 and formed African Lodge #459. Despite being stricken from the rolls for non-payment of dues after 1813, the Lodge restyled itself as the African Grand Lodge #1 (not to be confused with the various Grand Lodges on the Continent of Africa) and separated from UGLE-recognised Masonry. This led to a tradition of separate, predominantly African American jurisdictions in North America, known collectively as "Prince Hall Freemasonry", which flourished due to widespread racism in North America, which prevented African Americans from joining many mainstream lodges (for instance, the traditional "born free" entrance requirement may have been used in some lodges to exclude Americans of African descent). Presently, Prince Hall Masonry is recognised by some UGLE-recognized Grand Lodges and not by others, and appears to be working its way toward full recognition (see [1] (<http://www.mindspring.com/~johnsonx/whoisph.htm>)).

John Marrant the Huntingdonian minister preached to the Prince Hall Lodge on 24th June 1789. His Nova Scotia congregation was significant in the successful agitation for repatriation by Black Loyalists as well as the subsequent revolt which occurred in Sierra Leone in 1800.

The two great schisms of Freemasonry (1753 and 1877)

The PGLE (Premier Grand Lodge of England), along with those jurisdictions with which it was in amity, later came to be known colloquially as the "Moderns", to distinguish them from a newer, rival group of Freemasonry, known as the

"Antients." The Antients broke away and formed their own Grand Lodge in 1753, prompted by the PGLE's making changes to the secret modes of recognition. Tensions between the two groups were very high at times. Benjamin Franklin was a "Modern" and a deist, for instance, but by the time he died, his Lodge had gone "Antient," and would no longer recognize him as one of their own, declining even to give him a Masonic funeral (see "Revolutionary Brotherhood", by Steven C. Bullock, Univ. N. Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1996).

The schism was healed in the years following 1813, when the competing Grand Lodges were amalgamated, by virtue of a delicately worded compromise which left English Masonry clearly not Christian, returned the modes of recognition to their pre-1753 form, kept Freemasonry *per se* as consisting of three degrees only, but which was ambiguously worded so as to allow the Moderns to think of the Antient Royal Arch degree as an optional higher degree, while still allowing the Antients to view it as the completion of the third degree (see [2] (<http://freemasonry.org/psoc/pragmatic.htm>)).

Because both the Antients and the Moderns had "daughter" Lodges throughout the world, and because many of those Lodges still exist, there is a great deal of variability in the Ritual used today, even between UGLE-recognized jurisdictions. Most Lodges conduct their Work in accordance with an agreed-upon single "Rite," such as the "York Rite" (which is popular in the United States), or the "Canadian Rite" (which is, in some ways, a concordance between the Rites used by the "Antients" and "Moderns").

The second great schism in Freemasonry occurred in the years following 1877, when the GOdF started accepting atheists unreservedly. While the issue of atheism is probably the greatest single factor in the split with the GOdF, the English also point to the French recognition of women's Masonry and co-Masonry, as well as the tendency of French Masons to be more willing to discuss religion and politics in Lodge. While the French curtail such discussion, they do not ban it as outright as do the English (see [3] (<http://bessel.org/masrec/france.htm>)). The schism between the two branches has occasionally been breached for short periods of time, especially during the First World War when American Masons overseas wanted to be able to visit French Lodges (see [4] (<http://www.bessel.org/recfranc.htm>)).

Concerning religious requirements, the oldest constitution of Freemasonry (that of Anderson, 1723) says only that a Mason "will never be a stupid Atheist nor an irreligious Libertine" if he "rightly understands the Art". The only religion required was "that Religion in which all Men agree, leaving their particular Opinions to themselves" ([5] (<http://www.2be1ask1.com/library/anderson.html>)). Masons disagree as to whether "stupid" and "irreligious" are meant as necessary or as accidental modifiers of "atheist" and "libertine". It is possible the ambiguity is intentional. In 1815, the newly amalgamated UGLE changed Anderson's constitutions to include more orthodox overtones: "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 practices the sacred duties of morality." The English enforce this with a requirement for belief in a Supreme Being, and in his revealed will. While these requirements can still be interpreted in a non-theistic manner, they made it more difficult for unorthodox believers to enter the fraternity.

In 1849, the GOdF followed the English lead by adopting the "Supreme Being" requirement, but there was increasing pressure in Latin countries to openly admit atheists. There was an attempt at a compromise in 1875, by allowing the alternative phrase "Creative Principle" (which was less theistic-sounding than "Supreme Being"), but this was ultimately not enough for the GOdF, and in 1877 they went back to having no religious entrance requirements, adopting the original Anderson document of 1723 as their official Constitutions. They also created a modified ritual that made no direct verbal reference to the G.A.O.T.U. (although, as a symbol, it was arguably still present). This new Rite did not replace the older ones, but was added as an alternative (European jurisdictions in general tend not to restrict themselves to a single Rite, like most North American jurisdictions, but offer a menu of Rites, from which their Lodges can choose.)

Cultural references

- The Freemasons are spoofed in a Simpsons sketch as *The Stonecutters*, a secret organization that controls everything from NASA to the Academy Awards.
- The Freemasons play an important part in the 2001 movie *From Hell* in which William Withey Gull, the royal household's personal physician and member of the Freemasons, covers up the love child of a peasant woman and the young Prince Edward, another Mason, by killing all the women who know about the baby, thus becoming Jack The Ripper. There has long been speculation linking Jack the Ripper to Freemasonry.
- George Washington and Harry S. Truman are the best-known U.S. presidents who were Masons.