

Proceedings of the  
Policy Studies Organization  
*New Series, No. 31*



1527 New Hampshire Ave, NW  
Washington DC, 20036  
Tel: (202) 483 2512  
Fax: (202) 483 2657  
[www.ipsonet.org](http://www.ipsonet.org)  
<http://bit.ly/proceedingsofpso>

*The Proceedings appear four times a year as an adjunct to all of the PSO journals and are among the most widely distributed sources in the policy world. All Proceedings are permanently available online at <http://bit.ly/proceedingsofpso>. Material for the Proceedings, including syllabi, meeting and professional announcements, scholarships and fellowships should be sent to the Proceedings editor, Daniel Gutierrez at [dgutierrez@ipsonet.org](mailto:dgutierrez@ipsonet.org)*

*Sponsored by American Public University System*



## Advisory Board

**Karen McCurdy**

*Southern Political Science  
Association*

**Mark Vail**

*Tulane University*

**Catherine E. Rudder**

*George Mason University*

**David Oppenheimer**

*Prime Oppenheimer*

**Charles Doran**

*School of Advanced International  
Studies, Johns Hopkins University*

**Kingsley Haynes**

*George Mason University*

**Wallace E. Boston**

*American Public University  
System*

**Fred Stielow**

*American Public University  
System*

**Carol Weissert**

*Florida State University*

**William Morgan**

*Midwest Political Science  
Association*

**Norman A. Bailey**

*Norman A. Bailey Inc.*

**Edward Khiwa**

*Langston University*

**Mark B. Ryan**

*Wisdom University*

**Guillermo Izabal**

*PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP*

**Frank McCluskey**

*American Public University  
System*

## John Cooper and Problems in Masonic Research

We are fortunate to have scholars like John Cooper who are also Freemasons. The history of secret and ritualistic organizations has never received the attention that the subject deserves. Although their influence has been and continues to be considerable, they are viewed as having members who are enjoined to be tight-lipped about the activities. Despite the manifest differences between the branches of this fascinating group, their culture has a commonality whose consideration has been neglected, and the research problems they present for scholars have similarities.

Secrecy and ritualism often go together, although for many societies the secrecy is no longer as strong as it once was. However, ritual remains one of their major characteristics, making them distinct from a large number of other groups that may have a few ceremonies such as passing along the chair's gavel or investing new members with lapel pins but which are chiefly issue-oriented. Sometimes it is hard to demarcate between a ritualistic and issue-oriented movement. While the Grange, for example, is certainly an agricultural lobby, it has always had a strong ritualistic side. Rotary or the Lions would seem to be more on the service side, but we have all met members who were as enraptured by the Rotary Wheel as anyone ever was by the Masonic square and compass. All of this presents special challenges to understanding.

As Dr. Cooper points out, there can be a change in emphasis over the years. But for all the changes, few public or university libraries take seriously the collecting of material on the Masons, so the serious researcher must get permission to use Masonic archives and libraries. A number date from the nineteenth century and have large holdings. An idea of what they might contain is indicated by the classifications of the Library of the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite in Washington, which dates back to 1888 and even then had more than eight thousand volumes. Categories include philosophy and symbolism, church and state, paraphernalia, glassware, benevolent and educational institutions, hospitals, cemeteries, architecture, poetry and drama, humor and satire, and women in Masonry. Paris is unique in having at least four major collections.

Another challenge is understanding the special language and usages that an organization such as the Masons invokes. The more ritualistic the society, the more arcane will be the terminology found in papers. As an example, a considerable problem for the researcher is the dating system used by different Masonic bodies. Ordinary Craft or blue lodge Masons who have taken the first three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Mason use the Anno Lucis system, adding 4000 years and giving the year as dated from the Creation. Thus a blue lodge Masonic document of 1995 would be 5995. Royal Arch Masons begin the calendar with the start of work on the Second Temple at Jerusalem in 530 B.C., so that this is the year 2525. Royal and Select Masters number the years from the completion of the original King Solomon's Temple in 1000 B.C., making this the year 2995. Masonic Knights Templar date documents from the founding of the Order in 1118 and hence this is 877. There are other pitfalls: On occasion the researcher will face documents that have been rendered into cipher or have had critical words removed. He or she will also encounter vast amounts of allegory and metaphor, so that without an advance immersion in the rituals the text will be unintelligible.

In sum, we need researchers who can tackle the special problems of what is a fascinating subject. We are lucky to have as many hard workers in the stacks as we do, and these papers are a notable contribution.

Paul Rich  
President, Policy Studies Organization

## **Into the Maelstrom: The Issue of Masonic Regularity, Past and Present**

**John L. Cooper III, Ph.D., President Institute for Masonic Studies**

The dictionary defines “maelstrom” as “a powerful whirlpool in a sea or a river,” and secondarily “a situation or state of confused movement or violent turmoil.” This definition seems appropriate when we look at the issue of Masonic “Regularity” in the present world of international Masonic relations. The term “regular” is a popular way for grand lodges to proclaim their adherence to certain standards that set them apart from other grand lodges. On June 15, 1979, nine lodges in Belgium withdrew from the Grand Lodge of Belgium after that grand lodge had lost recognition from the United Grand Lodge of England, and formed the Regular Grand Lodge of Belgium.<sup>1</sup> In 1991 lodges in Portugal formed the Regular Grand Lodge of Portugal, which changed its name to the Legal Grand Lodge of Portugal / Regular Grand Lodge of Portugal in 1996.<sup>2</sup> In 1993 a group of lodges that withdrew from the Grand Orient of Italy formed the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy.<sup>3</sup>

The term “regular” as a definition of a grand lodge in its title became popular in grand lodge circles, so it was with something of a wry sense of humor that on March 5, 2005, the Regular Grand Lodge of England was created in London – a grand lodge which is universally acknowledged to be neither “regular” nor “legitimate” by most grand lodges in the world.<sup>4</sup> This paper is an attempt to look at the issue of “masonic regularity” in Masonic international relations today, together with a brief look at the historical development of the idea.

In the world of international Masonic relations the term “regular” is often confused with “recognized.” But the two terms are not synonymous although they are related. Grand lodges “recognize” one another when they enter into some type of mutual relationship that allows members from their respective lodges to intervisit in one another’s lodges. This reciprocal arrangement may or may not include the right affiliate with a lodge in another jurisdiction, but the principle of intervisitation is the primary value of recognition of one grand lodge by another.

It must be acknowledged that intervisitation is not solely the prerogative of grand lodges, for in some jurisdictions this decision is reserved to the individual lodge itself. That appears to be the case in the Grand Lodge of France, and more certainly, in the Grand Orient of France. But in general grand lodges reserve to themselves the right to determine which masons from other Masonic grand lodges are allowed to visit their lodges, and which lodges in other jurisdictions their members are allowed to visit.

The basis for such recognition is an acknowledgement that the grand lodge recognized by another grand lodge practices the same kind of Freemasonry as the grand lodge granting the recognition, and the term “regular” is used in Freemasonry to describe the belief that the Masonic practices of the other grand lodge are sufficiently like those of the recognizing grand lodge so as to permit intervisitation. The practices do not have to be identical, and indeed are rarely so, because grand

---

<sup>1</sup> Regular Grand Lodge of Belgium website, <http://www.glr.net/en/>

<sup>2</sup> Grande Loja Legal de Portugal / GLRP website, <https://www.gllp.pt/>

<sup>3</sup> Regular Grand Lodge of Italy website, <http://www.glri.it/en/>

<sup>4</sup> Regular Grand Lodge of England website, <http://www.rgle.org.uk/RGLE.htm>

lodges in the world of Freemasonry are autonomous, and establish their own organizational structures and adopt, or permit, a wide variety of rituals to be used by their lodges. The minimal acceptable practices are sometimes listed by a grand lodge, either in their fundamental laws, or established through longstanding custom. Over time there have come to be some requirements held in common by groups of grand lodges, so that there has arisen the concept of “Regular Freemasonry” as opposed to “Irregular Freemasonry,” and recognition by grand lodges who deem themselves to be “regular” of other grand lodges has created an international community of “recognized” grand lodges.

There are two fundamental rules which all grand lodges which consider themselves “regular” which seem to be paramount, and which establish a distinguishing characteristic for these grand lodges. The first is the requirement that all members hold some kind of belief in a Supreme Being, and the second is the requirement that only men may be members. There is some acknowledgement by grand lodges belonging to this family that there may be other grand lodges which are “regular” in all respects except for the restriction to a male-only membership, as when the United Grand Lodge of England acknowledges that there are women Freemasons, and suggests (or has suggested from time to time on its website) that women interested in Freemasonry seek out one of two grand lodges in England which restrict their membership to women.<sup>5</sup> It would seem, at least for this grand lodge, that a belief in a Supreme Being is a more important principle for the issue of “regularity” than is the sex of a Mason.

A discussion of “regularity” in Freemasonry is thus a discussion of the nature of Freemasonry itself. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were several attempts to develop lists of characteristics that would define Freemasonry, the most famous of which was the list of “Landmarks” developed by the American Masonic scholar, Dr. Albert G. Mackey. His list of twenty-five Landmarks became the basis for a long and often fruitless discussion in Freemasonry as to the true nature of the organization, and which rules were indispensable for its existence.<sup>6</sup> An excellent summary of the debate over the Landmarks can be found in an address to the Conference of Grand Masters of Masons in North America by the noted Masonic scholar, Roscoe Pound, on February 20, 1952, and reprinted in *Masonic Writings and Addresses of Roscoe Pound*.<sup>7</sup> In his address to the conference, Pound set for the nature of Landmarks in this way:

I take it that by the term Landmark of Masonry we mean one of a body of fundamental precepts of universal Masonic validity, binding on Masons and Masonic organizations everywhere and at all times; precepts beyond the reach of Masonic legislation, adherence to which by Masons and by organizations of Masons is a prerequisite of recognition as Masons or as Masonic.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> United Grand Lodge of England, “Are There Women Freemasons?”, <http://www.ugle.org.uk/what-is-freemasonry/frequently-asked-questions>

<sup>6</sup> Mackey, Albert G., “The American Quarterly Review of Freemasonry,” Vol. II, 1859, pdf copy from University of Michigan, <https://www.scgrandlodgeafm.org/uploads/1/9/0/8/19088243/americanquarterlyreviewoffreemasonry-mackey-vol-2.pdf>, “The Foundations of Masonic Law,” p.230.

<sup>7</sup> Pound, Roscoe, *Masonic Addresses and Writings of Roscoe Pound*, (Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., Richmond, Virginia), 1953, p. 239.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

In 1993, Bro. Michel Brodsky presented a paper to Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, “The Regular Freemason: A Short History of Masonic Regularity.”<sup>9</sup> In that paper he said:

Whichever theory of origin of Freemasonry is preferred, one may assume that, prior to the establishment in 1717 of the first Grand Lodge, the operative modes of recognition were sufficient to establish the quality of a visiting brother and indeed his right to visit and to obtain assistance in case of need. Freemasons in a given locality would know each other well. Visiting brethren had to prove themselves before being admitted into a lodge or petitioning for help, though it is conceivable that, as more lodges were established, some form of written recommendation may have been carried by those travelling far from home. The caution exercised toward a visitor, aimed both at the protection of the secrets of Freemasonry and at the exclusion of cowans and imposters from the benefit of charity, is evidenced in the first ritual texts.<sup>10</sup>

Brodsky further points out that the first legislative enactment of the premier grand lodge, the General Regulations of 1720, established the rule that new lodges must receive permission to organize from grand lodge, and that lodges are to take care that they do not extend charity to those who are not genuine Masons.<sup>11</sup> Regulation VIII refers to “regular Lodges,” when it states that

If any Set or Number of Masons shall take upon themselves to form a Lodge without the *Grand-Master's* Warrant, the *regular Lodges* are not to countenance them, nor own them as *fair Brethren* and duly form'd, nor approve of the Acts and Deeds; but must treat them as *Rebels*, until they humble themselves, as the *Grand-Master* shall in his Prudence direct. ....<sup>12</sup>

Brodsky further points out that the premier grand lodge had to deal with foreign visitors beginning in the 1740s, as evidenced by the minutes of the Grand Lodge, and in 1755 adopted a program of issuing certificates to members of its lodges to confirm that the bearer was a legitimate Mason in good standing, which could be used for purposes of visitation both domestically and abroad.<sup>13</sup>

He further points out something that was presumably widespread in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but which today would be considered questionable, if not completely unacceptable:

In Europe, each Grand Lodge established its own criteria. In general, a candidate – or even a visitor – had to be a Christian, and even the denomination could be specified. The primary consideration was social status; artisans, shopkeepers, farmers and the like were regarded as undesirables, as were Jews, who in most countries had no legal status. Muslims and those of inferior rank such as servants – and often actors – were not even considered.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Brodsky, Michel, “The Regular Freemason: A Short History of Masonic Regularity,” AQC Vol. 106, 1993, p. 103 ff.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>12</sup> Constitutions of 1723, General Regulations of 1720.

<sup>13</sup> Brodsky, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

A major contributor to the discussion of regularity and recognition of grand lodges was Bro. Christopher Haffner. His book, *Regularity of Origin: A Study of Masonic Precedents* (1986), was an expansion of a paper presented on 23 June 1983 at Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, London, and printed in AQC.<sup>15</sup> In his paper, Bro. Haffner addresses the issue of “regularity of origin,” a condition of “regularity” and “recognition” which appears on many lists of conditions for recognition. He states:

“There is thus inherent in every freemason’s education the idea that regularity itself is a virtue, necessary for its own sake. This can be applied to regularity of origin. There is a sort of apostolic succession in the Craft, viz:

1. Lodges working under immemorial constitution form a Grand Lodge;
2. The Grand Lodge constitutes new lodges nearby and afar;
3. The new lodges in a specific and distinct geographical area form a new Grand Lodge;
4. The new Grand Lodge constitutes new lodges in its own and any open territory.

This is the complete series of four steps and nothing need be added. But they raise a whole series of questions. What is open territory? Can a lodge be founded by immemorial constitution?”<sup>16</sup>

This raises the question about the “rule of three,” i.e., whether three lodges can form a new grand lodge. In the American context, grand lodges were formed on the Eastern seaboard soon after the American Revolution. These grand lodges chartered lodges on the frontier, which eventually became a part of new grand lodges organized in the territories which eventually became states of the American Union. It is a settled point of Masonic law in the United States that there is an inherent right of three lodges in a territory/state to form its own grand lodge, and the parent grand lodge or grand lodge could not object to one of its lodges leaving the parent jurisdiction and forming a new grand lodge. But the application of this principle in the current Masonic world raises serious questions. In recent years grand lodges that are otherwise acknowledged to be “regular” by most other grand lodges considering themselves as such, have experienced lodges seceding from them and forming new grand lodges. These secessions are often the result of bitter quarrels within the original grand lodge, and the resultant creation of a new grand lodge by three or more lodges is generally considered to be “illegitimate,” and the resultant grand lodge “irregular.” However, that has not uniformly been the case.

Two recent examples of this problem involve the Grand Lodge of Baja California and the French National Grand Lodge. In 2005, some lodges in the Grand Lodge of Baja California seceded and formed their own grand lodge. They claimed to be the successor of the original grand lodge, which they then declared as “irregular.” This declaration had nothing to do with any of the usual conditions of regularity. The charges against the original grand lodge were that a grand master

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vol. 96, 1983, p. 111ff.

<sup>16</sup> Haffner, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

had exceeded his authority and was guilty of inappropriate conduct toward some of the lodges. Instead of fighting a battle within the grand lodge, several of the lodges withdrew and formed their own grand lodge – a grand lodge that was a mirror of the original one to all intents and purposes.

This splinter grand lodge subsequently obtained recognition as the legitimate grand lodge of Baja California from the Confederation of Regular Grand Lodges of Mexico, the Interamerican Masonic Conference, and the World Conference of Regular Grand Lodges. The Grand Lodge of California continued to recognize and support the original grand lodge, and the situation in Baja California has still not been resolved, even after ten years. Despite support for the splinter grand lodge by some outside agencies, its regularity is still in dispute because of the manner in which it was formed. Most lists of conditions for the formation of a new grand lodge do not address the issue of the withdrawal of lodges *within* a given territory from the original grand lodge, and the issue of “regularity” is not really addressed by such rules.

A similar situation prevails in France. After several years of turmoil within the French National Grand Lodge, some lodges withdrew from the GLNF and formed the Grand Lodge of the French Alliance. As with the situation in the Grand Lodge of Baja California, rules pertaining to the formation of new grand lodges are not completely clear when it comes to the formation of a new grand lodge out of an existing grand lodge due to internal quarrels in the original grand lodge. Rules pertaining to regularity and recognition were formulated in a different era, and applying them with consistency in the contemporary world raises questions which are not easily answered. Nothing in the usual rules on the formation of a new grand lodge address the situation in occupied territory, except the suggestion that if the original grand lodge agrees, a new grand lodge can come into existence. If the new grand lodge is a result of a schism, such an agreement is extremely unlikely, and therefore begs the question as to whether three or more lodges can form a new grand lodge if they cannot get the permission of the original grand lodge to do so.

We now turn to issues of regularity, and consequent recognition itself. One way of doing this is to compare three sets of “rules” pertaining to “regularity” and consequent recognition of another grand lodge. The issue of Masonic Regularity, and consequent recognition of a lodge or a grand lodge as “regular” should, on the surface, seem to be an easy thing to establish. All one should have to do is to start with the rules and regulations of one’s own grand lodge (which, by definition, must always be right), and then apply those rules and regulations to other grand lodges. If another grand lodge fits the template, it must, by definition, be considered as “regular.” As I am a member of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of California, here are the provisions in the *California Masonic Code* pertaining to the “regularity” of another Grand Lodge:

**§409.010. RECOGNITION.**

Recognition is the grant of authority for Masons of this Jurisdiction to have Masonic Communication with Masons of a Lodge chartered by or holding allegiance to the recognized Grand Lodge. Grand Lodge may recognize only Grand Lodges that:

- A. Are regularly formed by subordinate Lodges which trace their origin to regular and legitimate Ancient Craft Masonry;



- B. Hold undisputed sway as the acknowledged sole or concurrent supreme power in Ancient Craft Masonry in the territory in which they claim jurisdiction, must not render allegiance or obedience, in any sense whatsoever, to any other Masonic power or Supreme Council, must recognize the jurisdiction of all other recognized Grand Lodges to the extent asserted by them in their respective territories, and must not presume to project their authority or sovereignty into the territory of another recognized Grand Lodge without its consent;
- C. Confine their authority and the exercise thereof to the three degrees of Craft or Symbolic Masonry; and
- D. Subscribe to the General Regulations of Masonry.

The foregoing notwithstanding, this Grand Lodge shall recognize only one Grand Lodge in any state or territory of the United States unless the Grand Lodge which this Grand Lodge recognizes with exclusive jurisdiction over that state or territory chooses to waive its right to maintain exclusive jurisdiction and permit concurrent jurisdiction. In the event of such a waiver, this Grand Lodge may also recognize such additional Grand Lodges in that state or territory as have been granted such concurrent jurisdiction.<sup>17</sup>

The United Grand Lodge of England sets forth provisions for recognition of other grand lodges in its *Book of Constitutions* as follows:

#### BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR GRAND LODGE RECOGNITION

*Accepted by the Grand Lodge, September 4, 1929*

1. Regularity of origin; i.e., each Grand Lodge shall have been established lawfully by a duly recognized Grand Lodge or by three or more regularity constituted Lodges.
2. That a belief in the G.A.O.T.U. and His revealed will shall be an essential qualification for membership.
3. That all Initiates shall take their Obligation on or in full view of the open Volume of the Sacred Law, by which is meant the revelation from above which is binding on the conscience of the particular individual who is being initiated.
4. That the membership of the Grand Lodge and individual Lodges shall be composed exclusively of men; and that each Grand Lodge shall have no Masonic intercourse of any kind with mixed Lodges or bodies which admit women to membership.

---

<sup>17</sup> *California Masonic Code*, 2014 Edition.

5. That the Grand Lodge shall have sovereign jurisdiction over the Lodges under its control; i.e. that shall be a responsible, independent, self-governing organization, with sole and undisputed authority over the Craft or Symbolic Degrees (Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason) within its Jurisdiction; and shall not in any way to subject to, or divide such authority with, a Supreme Council or other Power claiming any control or supervision over those degrees.
6. That the three Great Lights of Freemasonry (namely, the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square and Compasses) shall always be exhibited when the Grand Lodge or its subordinate Lodges are at work, the chief of these being the Volume of the Sacred Law.
7. That the discussion of religion and politics within the Lodge shall be strictly prohibited.
8. That the principles of the Antient Landmarks, customs, and usages of the Craft shall be strictly observed.<sup>18</sup>

The Commission on Information for Recognition [of Foreign Grand Lodges] of the Conference of Grand Masters of Masons in North America, upon which grand lodges in North America rely for information leading to recognition of other grand lodges has the following statement of principles for recognition:

The standards for recognition are summarized as follows:

1. Legitimacy of origin.
2. Exclusive territorial jurisdiction except by mutual consent and/or treaty.
3. Adherence to the Ancient Landmarks – Specifically, a Belief in God, the Volume of the Sacred Law as an indispensable part of the Furniture of the Lodge, and the prohibition of the discussion of politics and religion.<sup>19</sup>

A comparison of these three documents shows that there are some similarities amongst them, with some common provisions. The comparison also reveals differences, some of which are significant. In addition there is ambiguity in these documents which the Commission document, published on its website, covers by stating that the principles it enunciates are only “summarized.” A comprehensive review of all the provisions of grand lodges throughout the world was not possible for this paper, but it is likely that some version of these provisions listed above would be similar in some respects, dissimilar in others, and ambiguous in many. A careful analysis of the principles of “regularity,” and the resultant “recognition” of one grand lodge by another may not seem to be of great importance, but it goes to the very heart of the nature of Freemasonry itself. Although there are political aspects to the reasons why one grand lodge will recognize another, the implications of such recognition go far beyond the temporary nature of

---

<sup>18</sup> United Grand Lodge of England, Book of Constitutions, 2014. <http://www.ugle.org.uk/about/book-of-constitutions>

<sup>19</sup> Commission on Information for Recognition, Conference of Grand Masters of Masons in North America, <http://www.recognitioncommission.org/>

political considerations. This paper will attempt to explain why “regularity” and concomitant “recognition” by one grand lodge of another is one of the most important questions facing Freemasonry today.

One way of looking at this issue is to use a different term. Rather than using the term “regular,” I would suggest that we use the term “authentic.” The term “regular” comes from the Latin word for “rule,” “regula,” and the use of the term “regular” seems to imply that an organization that can make rules can change the rules. But Freemasonry has a different concept of this idea. There are some rules (or regulations) that can be changed, and have been changed over time. But there is also an acknowledgement that there are some rules that *cannot* be changed because they are so fundamental to the nature of the organization that if they were to be changed the organization would not be recognizable. These fundamental rules are referred to by Freemasons as the *Ancient Landmarks*, and they are referred to in two of the three documents quoted above. The United Grand Lodge of England states that “recognition” of another grand lodge is consequent upon a determination “That the principles of the Antient Landmarks, customs, and usages of the Craft shall be strictly observed.....” by another Grand Lodge. The Commission summary has a similar statement. The section of the *California Masonic Code* incorporates that statement by reference, for the term “General Regulations of Masonry” is defined in Section 100.035 as:

“The Ancient Landmarks, or unwritten law of Masonry, and the craft’s ancient constitutions, regulations and charges, as the same may be and have been modified by specific action of this Grand Lodge.”

If there were some agreement as to what these “Ancient Landmarks” of Freemasonry are it would be simpler to determine which grand lodges are regular, and thus eligible for recognition by another grand lodge. Unfortunately such is not the case. Some grand lodges have adopted lists of “Landmarks” for their jurisdictions, but others have avoided doing so. A useful list of American grand lodges that have adopted some sort of a list of Landmarks can be found on the Internet.<sup>20</sup> But the reference to the “Ancient Landmarks” as a source for regularity and recognition is not particularly helpful unless they are defined. The result is even more confusion as to what is “authentic” in Freemasonry and what is not.

This confusion has been with us for a long time. In the Constitutions of 1723, James Anderson included the General Regulations “compiled first by Mr. George Payne, *Anno* 1720, when he was GRAND-MASTER, and approv’d by the GRAND-LODGE on *St. John Baptist’s Day, Anno* 1721, at *Stationer’s-Hall, LONDON;*”<sup>21</sup> Regulation XXXIX stated “Every *Annual* GRAND-LODGE has an inherent Power and Authority to make *new Regulations*, or to alter these, for the real Benefit of this *ancient Fraternity*: Provided always that *the old LAND-MARKS be carefully preser’d* .....” That was no more helpful then than it is now.

Grand lodges have been altering the structure and thus the nature of Freemasonry ever since. Sometime in the 1730s the premier Grand Lodge at London reversed the passwords for the First and Second degrees, troubling many lodges, and which was ultimately listed as one of the causes for the formation of the *Antient* Grand Lodge in 1751. Since grand lodges are autonomous, the

---

<sup>20</sup> Bessel, Paul, “Landmarks of Freemasonry,” at <http://bessel.org/landmark.htm>

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, James, *Constitutions of 1723*, “General Regulations.”

only restraint on their legislative enactments is the opinion of other grand lodges as to whether such enactments are consistent with the “Ancient Landmarks,” and since these are not defined, arguments have arisen through the years as to whether certain enactments of grand lodges are legitimate. The issue of legitimacy, or as I would term it, “authenticity” of Freemasonry is what the arguments over regularity and recognition are all about.

If Freemasonry were not an initiatic society, most of these arguments would be of an antiquarian interest only. If no one can define what the Landmarks are, why argue over something that no one can prove? Why not just ignore the issue and move on. The answer lies in the nature of Freemasonry as an initiatic society, and it is to this issue that we must next turn.

One of the fundamental principles common to all Masonic organizations is the initiatic tradition. Admission into a Masonic lodge is by initiation, and these initiations are secret. Initiations are not public ceremonies but are private ceremonies through which a candidate passes to become a member. The issue of the function of secrecy in Freemasonry was explored in a paper by Dr. Michael Pearce, published in the Spring, 2010, issue of the *Philalethes* journal.<sup>22</sup> Dr. Pearce notes that “Secrecy is a fundamental necessity in the transformation of an initiate from an ordinary member of society to a member of a select group.” He further explains the paradox that the rituals of Freemasonry are widely known in published form, and yet are “secret”:

“Masonry is not unusual in its determined preservation of ritual in the face of centuries of repeated exposure; to all initiatory orders an emphasis upon the secrecy of the initiatory process is the mainstay of their survival. Secrecy is essential for effective rites of passage: initiates will be transformed by passing through the ritual, so they must be unaware of what to expect.”<sup>23</sup>

Over the years there have been attempts by anti-masonic groups to lampoon Freemasonry by enacting the rituals for the public to see, and in more recent years, filming them and making them widely available. No one would claim that he or she had been made a Mason by viewing these films, regardless of the accuracy of them. The initiatic process is fundamental to Freemasonry and is one of the marks of authenticity. Although not often listed as a condition of “regularity,” it seems obvious that the preservation of the initiatic function is essential to any definition of Freemasonry. And yet none of the rules pertaining to “regularity” quoted above mention this important fact. It may be implied but is nowhere stated.

Rituals of Freemasonry almost universally required the candidate to promise not to divulge what has been experienced in the initiatic ceremonies, and that has been present in our rituals for a very long time. One example will suffice. In the Edinburgh Register House MS. (1696):

---

<sup>22</sup> Pearce, Michael, “The Function of Secrecy in the Work of Freemasonry,” *Philalethes: The Journal of Masonic Research and Letters*, Vol. 63, No. 2.p. 16ff.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

By god himself and you shall answer to god when you shall stand nakd before him, at the great day, you shall not reveal any pairt of what you shall hear or see at this time whither by word nor write nor put it in wryte at any time nor draw it with the point of a sword, or any other instrument upon the snow or sand, nor shall you speak of it but with an entered mason, so help you god.<sup>24</sup>

When a candidate enters a Masonic lodge he has to assume that all those present belong there. He then promises not to divulge what he has experienced to anyone not present, “except to him or them to whom they of right belong.” An excerpt from *Duncan’s Monitor* will illustrate this:

I, Peter Gabe, of my own free will and accord, in the presence of Almighty God, and this Worshipful Lodge, erected to Him, and dedicated to the holy Sts. John, do hereby and hereon (Master presses his gavel on candidate's knuckles) most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear, that I will always hail, ever conceal, and never reveal, any of the arts, parts, or points of the hidden mysteries of Ancient Free Masonry, which may have been, or hereafter shall be, at this time, or any future period, communicated to me, as such, to any person or persons whomsoever, except it be to a true and lawful brother Mason, or in a regularly constituted Lodge of Masons; nor unto him or them until, by strict trial, due examination, or lawful information, I shall have found him, or them, as lawfully entitled to the same as I am myself.<sup>25</sup>

The candidate does not know to whom he may reveal the information that he has received in his degree, and thus the lodge – or its grand lodge – must define it for him. That is the meaning of doing so “to a true and lawful brother...” or “in a regularly constituted Lodge....” The term “regularly constituted Lodge” must be defined by someone else, and this is the foundation upon which “regularity” of a lodge and a grand lodge rests. Lists of “basic rules” for recognition between grand lodges, in turn, rest upon this foundation. Unless this is acknowledged, the whole idea of “regularity” and “recognition” has no meaning. A Mason is not entitled, by the very nature of the initiatic process, and the obligation that he takes, to share the information with someone, or in the presence of others, who are not entitled to have it.

All this sounds rather simple, but it is not simple. As indicated in the General Regulations of 1720, grand lodges consider themselves entitled to change things in Freemasonry *as long as what they are changing are not a part of the fundamental nature of Freemasonry, which Masons refer to as the Ancient Landmarks*. But where do we turn for a definition of those Landmarks? I would suggest that there is a source that has not been acknowledged – the rituals themselves.

In the early fifth century, a disciple of St. Augustine of Hippo, St. Prosper of Aquitaine, wrote a book in which, in part, he set forth his understanding of the authority of the Apostolic See at Rome. His work is apparently the source of the maxim, “Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi” – the law of prayer is the law of belief. It is an affirmation that the liturgy of the Church, its “Law of Prayer,” is a source of belief rather than a result of belief. In other words, the beliefs of the Church were

---

<sup>24</sup> Knoop, Douglas, G. P. Jones, and Douglas Hamer, *The Early Masonic Catechisms*, p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> Duncan, Malcolm C. (2010-03-01). *Duncan's Masonic Ritual and Monitor* (p. 19). Kindle Edition.

enshrined in its liturgy at a formative stage of theological development before more elaborate theological beliefs emerged. There is a parallel situation in Freemasonry which has received too little attention. The early rituals of Freemasonry are an important source of for our knowledge of the nature of Freemasonry. In most discussions about the “Landmarks” of Freemasonry this is an overlooked source. What do the early rituals tell us about the nature of Freemasonry? And how can they help us determine the “Landmarks”?

In keeping with the principle that Freemasonry is an initiatic society, it should be no surprise that we are not completely sure as to the validity of the fragments of ritual that survive from our earliest days as an organization. Many of them are in “Question and Answer” format, what is termed a “catechism,” that is, they were ways of delivering information about the Masonic degrees of those days to the candidate – what we would today call “lectures.” Often embedded in these catechisms are “catch questions” – questions, the answers to which only a Mason would know through participation in the Masonic ceremonies, or which were purposely created to “catch out” an imposter. But also embedded in these rituals is important information as to the nature of Freemasonry itself. An example is offered, from *A Mason’s Confession*, c. 1727:

*Q.* Who made you a mason? *A.* God almighty’s holy will made me a mason; the square, under God, made me a mason; nineteen fellow-crafts and thirteen entered prentices made me a mason .....<sup>26</sup>

The early rituals assume a belief in God, and thus it is not inappropriate for a grand lodge to make such a belief a condition of “regularity” in its legislative enactments. However, that does not necessarily mean that everything in the old rituals is of “Landmark” standing. One might note that even the author of the above excerpt from the ritual went on to state that “N.B.” They do not restrict themselves to this number [nineteen fellow-crafts and thirteen entered prentices], though they mention it in their form of questions, but will do the thing with fewer.”<sup>27</sup> The rituals are a *source* of information, but are not a *comprehensive source* of information. Care must be exercised when making claims that are illogical or unsupported.

There is a further problem with quoting texts from our history, whether they are from rituals, or even from constitutional documents such as the *Constitutions of 1723*. In an address to the National Workshop on Christian Unity, held in Charlotte, North Carolina, Professor Amy-Jill Levine noted an abuse of history as a the basis for prescribing for the present. She said, “A text, without a context, is a pretext to say anything you want.”<sup>28</sup> We need to guard against making pronouncements about the nature of Freemasonry by quoting texts out of context, and then proclaiming that these are fundamental and unalterable precepts.

A clear example is the First Charge of 1723, with its statement that “A Mason is oblig’d by his Tenure, to obey the moral Law; and if he rightly understand the Art, he will never be a stupid *Atheist*, nor an irreligious *Libertine*.” Arguments over the meaning of this text often ignore the

---

<sup>26</sup> Douglas Knoop, *op.cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Amy-Jill Levine, Lecture, “Hearing the Parables Anew,” delivered at the National Workshop on Christian Unity, April 20 – 23, 2015, at Charlotte, North Carolina. Dr. Levin is the University Professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University.

context in which it was written, whereby the text becomes, in the words of Dr. Levine, a “pretext” for whatever argument we wish to make. One could argue endlessly as to whether an *intelligent* Atheist is eligible to become a Mason, or whether a devout Libertine was actually “under the tongue of good report” if he went to church every Sunday! A much more fruitful discussion would be whether this condition for membership in Freemasonry made sense in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but makes less sense in the 21<sup>st</sup>. And it would be more useful to discuss whether this text requires a belief in a personal god, or whether it can allow for a belief in a Supreme Being who may have created the universe millions of years ago, but who has no significance at all for people today.

That the latter question is not just academic is clear by comparing the conditions for considering a grand lodge “regular” by the Grand Lodge of California, and the United Grand Lodge of England. The *California Masonic Code* states that “Masonry is a fraternity composed exclusively of men ages 18 years and older who believe in a Supreme Being and a future existence.”<sup>29</sup> The Basic Principles for Grand Lodge Recognition of the United Grand Lodge of England state that “...a belief in the G.A.O.T.U. and His revealed will shall be an essential qualification for membership.” Which definition is a fundamental principle of Freemasonry? Which one is a “Landmark”? And how would we know?

All this is to indicate that while there may be substantial agreement in general on the nature of Freemasonry, and even some consistency amongst grand lodges as to what they consider “regular” Freemasonry to consist of, the discussion is not closed. It is obvious that some things that may have been considered fundamental at one time may no longer be considered so. An illustration of this is the “Doctrine of the Whole Youth.”

The 1723 Constitutions had the following statement: “The Persons admitted Member of a *Lodge* must be good and true Men, free-born, and of mature and discreet Age, no Bondmen, no Women, no immoral or scandalous Men, but of good Report.” In addition, these same Constitutions stated that:

Only *Candidates* may know, that no *Master* should take an *Apprentice*, unless he has sufficient Employment for him, and unless he be a perfect Youth, having no Main or Defect in his Body, that may render him incapable of learning the *Art*, or serving his *Master's LORD*, and of being made a *Brother*.<sup>30</sup>

This section of the Constitutions of 1723 has been used by grand lodges to exclude candidates who have physical disabilities, although this has significantly changed in recent times. It should be noted in passing that the Constitutions of 1723 are a curious mixture of rules pertaining to operative stonemasons as well as rules that are more appropriate for a society which had emerged from its operative roots into its modern, not operative status. This raises the question as to the validity of the Constitutions of 1723 as a source for constitutional law in Freemasonry. As Dr. Levine said, the lack of *context* in a text often becomes a *pretext* for what we want to do.

Is the first part of this statement from 1723 binding upon all future generations of Masons, while the second is not? If so, why? Why were we able to change the “discreet Age” provision (the age

---

<sup>29</sup> *California Masonic Code*, §200.010.

<sup>30</sup> Constitutions of 1723, Charge IV.

for admission was twenty-five years when this was written; now it is twenty-one in many grand lodges, and eighteen in some). Slavery has generally been abolished, so why are we concerned with “no Bondmen”? The prohibition against any “immoral or scandalous Men” still makes sense, but “no Women”? Why not? Can a man with no arms be made a Mason today? Doesn’t that “render him incapable of learning the *Art*.... and of being made a *Brother*?” If it does not, then why not?

There has been no real discussion of all this at the global level in Freemasonry for a very long time. I believe that it is time to remedy that fact. Freemasonry is divided into different camps. Each camp believes that it has all truth, and declares the other camps as either reactionary or as “irregular” and even “clandestine.” It is time to stop doing that and to engage in honest and fruitful dialogue. In order to make that happen each camp may need to take some risks that it might not be right in all that it presently does or believes. There are some serious questions that need to be laid bare and studied by some of the best minds that we can muster. The end result might not resolve all our differences, but it surely would reduce some of them.

In this paper I have tried to point out that our differences of opinion on what constitutes “regular” Freemasonry is not as simple as many would have us believe. I have further suggested that there are ambiguities that need to be discussed, if not resolved. What is the fundamental nature of Freemasonry? What are those things that, if changed, would alter it so that it is unrecognizable? What things that may be accidents of history have we enshrined as “fundamental” precepts, when they are nothing of the kind? How often do we treat our foundational texts as if they were a pretext to do what we want to do anyway, with no thought to the *context* of the time when they were written? Is there a better way than simply ignoring one another as Masons, or worse, attacking one another? If so, then the old questions are more important for us today than ever: “If not now, when? If not us, who?”



References Consulted

- Bauer, Alain, "The Great Divide: The Grand Orient of France and Dogmatic Freemasonry," Address to the 2002 California Masonic Symposium.  
[http://phoenixmasonry.org/the\\_great\\_divide.htm](http://phoenixmasonry.org/the_great_divide.htm)
- Brodsky, Michel, "The Regular Freemason: A Short History of Masonic Regularity," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vol. 106, 1993.
- Buta, Jack, "The God Conspiracy: The Politics of Grand Lodge Foreign Relations," Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry, n.d., [http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/masonic\\_foreign\\_recognitions.html](http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/masonic_foreign_recognitions.html)
- Draffen, George Draffen of Newington, "Some Aspects of International Masonic Law and Customs," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vol. 87, 1975.
- Hamill, John, "What Unites Us," *Freemasonry Today*, 5 December 2014.
- Knoop, Douglas, G. P. Jones, and Douglas Hamer, *The Early Masonic Catechisms*, Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, London, ©1963.
- Haffner, Christopher, "Regularity of Origin," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vol. 96, 1983.
- Haffner, Christopher, *Regularity of Origin: A Study of Masonic Precedents*, The Paul Chater Lodge of Installed Masters No. 5391 EC and Lodge Cosmopolitan No. 428 SC, ©1986.
- Pearce, Michael, "The Function of Secrecy in the Work of Freemasonry," *Philaethes: The Journal of Masonic Research and Letters*, Vol. 63, No. 2, Spring 2010.
- Pound, Roscoe, *Masonic Addresses and Writings*, Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, Richmond, Virginia, ©1953.