

The Masonic Balance—Faith and Reason

Masonic historians believe, at the formation of the first Grand Lodge in 1717, there existed but two degrees, that of Apprentice and Master or fellow of the Craft. However, we have evidence that by 1731—only 14 years later—there existed three separate and distinct degrees. Since that time, our Fraternity has existed as a symbolic representation of the Medieval Guilds.

The Guilds consisted of three separate degrees. The youth entered into the Craft as Apprentices. After years of hard work for which they received no wages, Apprentices, who proved proficient, were passed to the degree of Journeymen. It was as a Journeyman that one was first allowed to study the secrets of the craft and to receive wages. After years of additional hard work and much study, culminating in the completion of a Masterpiece, a Journeyman might be chosen by the Guild to be raised to the level of Master craftsman. This raising entitled him not only to receive Master's wages and thereby being better able to support a family, but also to establish his own shop and enter Apprentices and employ Journeymen. The Master ruled over his shop in much the same manner that our Worshipful Master rules over the Lodge. The Guild consisted of many Masters and was the ruling body of the Craft, just as our own Grand Lodge governs the fraternity.

For speculative Masons, passing from Entered Apprentice to Fellow Craft symbolizes the progression from youth to manhood. The Entered Apprentice degree focuses on the heart and alludes to its virtue, which is faith. Accordingly, you were asked: "in whom do you put your trust?" The answer to which was, of course, in God. As a Fellow Craft, you are taught the virtue of the mind, which is reason. Faith tempers reason and enables us to seek sublime light, which is true wisdom, always recognizing that it emanates not from ourselves but from God.

Always remember that a true child of God will never allow the power of his reason to put out the flames of faith. Neither will he allow faith to put his reason asunder. Rather if the two should ever conflict, he shall place them, as if upon an altar, before the Lord, trusting that in due time the Lord shall reveal unto him how the two fit together as part of his Divine Plan, like two pieces of a long lost puzzle.

Masonic tradition informs us that our operative Brethren used the orders of architecture to build shelter for their families and to pay tribute to the glory of God. The five senses enable us to recognize the manifestations of this glory in the world around us. Though our operative Brethren, as builders, wrought mainly in the science of Geometry, we as speculative Masons are charged to familiarize ourselves with all the liberal arts. Herein lies the importance of the Fellow Craft degree, for it is through education that we are able to fight ignorance which always threatens to pull society apart and to set man against man, brother against brother, to destroy that Masonic balance of Faith and reason.