

## **Trinity in Unity: a speculative interpretation of Royal Arch symbolism**

by

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There is, I am sure, no need for me to explain what the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch is, nor to set out its structure and traditional history, so that when I refer to specific elements of the ritual, ceremony and symbolism you will be able to place them in context. I must, however, stress that I am personally convinced that the Royal Arch (which, for convenience, I shall term it) is an integral part of the masonic continuum: a separate but necessary completion of the Third Degree, to an understanding of which it supplies the key.

And I must also make it clear that I am concerned with the traditional Royal Arch degree, not with what it has become. Within UGLE it yet retains its identity as an integral part of 'pure Antient Masonry', and new Master Masons are still encouraged to be exalted in the Order, even while our seemingly un-spiritual rulers, who have, over the last twenty-five years emasculated the Royal Arch, strive to effectively uncouple it from the Craft. But whatever I may feel about the drastic changes that have been made to the ritual and the ceremonial, I am not here to engage in polemic, for I come, as it were, not to bury Caesar but to praise him.

Let us go back to the beginning, in so far as we can discover just what were the origins of the Royal Arch Degree. These remain largely unknown, not least because we know all too little about masonic origins in general. There is much speculation but very little certainty as to when, where, how and why Freemasonry itself came into being and the same uncertainty applies to its constituent parts.

It is currently fashionable to look for some deep, underlying spiritual motive behind the origins of speculative Freemasonry, but although there is much animated debate about this there is no significant, unequivocal documentary or other historical evidence. What we do know is that the fragmented independent lodges of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the first two decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century coalesced gradually into a loose institution that was only one among many social clubs of the time, designed, for the most part, for mutual aid and social enjoyment. What might be termed masonic philosophy – the moral instruction by way of catechetical lectures and simple ceremonial forms – developed gradually and somewhat erratically, and what was the original intended purpose and final goal of all this we do not know with any certainty.

But as Freemasonry developed, its evolution became more purposeful and we can begin to see not only how its growth was designed but also what was its purpose: the *why* of Freemasonry. At least, so I believe, and although from this point on you may well dispute my speculative interpretation and begin to part company with my suggestions, you may, perhaps, have enough patience to follow my line of reasoning.

We do know that both the third degree with its Hiram legend and the Royal Arch were early additions to the original Craft structure – the third degree was in place in its essentials by 1730 and the Royal Arch appeared in the early 1740s - but what we don't know is precisely why these two degrees were created, nor what their true relationship to

one another was intended to be. That is as unclear today as it was 250 years ago, although we do now perceive them to be closely linked

My suggested explanation is that the third degree was modified, and the Royal Arch created, by and for those who wished to incorporate the symbolic presence of their faith – in pictorial and verbal form – into a masonic ceremonial environment, in which their interaction with like-minded fellow believers could thus enrich the spiritual experience stimulated by this specific masonic working. If this was the case, then we should perceive the Royal Arch as having been designed, created and developed by Christian freemasons who fully understood how the emblematic and symbolic representation of their faith could be utilised within a non-ecclesiastical ritual setting to enhance their spiritual lives.

But who might these pious freemasons have been ? If they did exist, and if I am correct as to their aims, then they would have been men who were influenced by Christian Esotericism of the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, particularly the ideas and practices of the Pietists and by contemporary spiritual alchemists (*i.e.* students and practitioners of alchemy for whom it was a symbolic or allegorical path to personal spiritual regeneration, rather than physical chemistry) – especially those who had been inspired by the work of the German mystic and theologian, Jacob Boehme.

In their approach to Christian spirituality such men<sup>1</sup> rejected alike the dry formalism of the established church, the narrow and rigid doctrines of the dissenters, the prevailing Deism of the social and intellectual establishment, and the unbelieving rationalism of the anti-religious Enlightenment. I would style these men ‘Christian esotericists’, for what they sought was a heightened religious experience, consonant with their Christocentric faith, that could find real, practical expression within an appropriate and sympathetic ceremonial environment. Just such an environment as could be developed within nascent speculative Freemasonry.<sup>2</sup>

A scenario can then be proposed that they consciously attempted to develop a spiritualised form of Christian Freemasonry, in addition to the established Craft degrees, in the form of the Royal Arch, which can be treated, not unreasonably, as an organic development of the Third Degree. If, that is, we choose to perceive Hiram as having been resurrected: a transmutation of the Hiram legend from a moral lesson of the master craftsman – faithful unto death and given honourable burial and memory – into a spiritual allegory, in which a different kind of Master, the biblical Suffering Servant, who is Christ, dies to rise again and to bring about the establishment not of a replacement for Solomon’s Temple, but of a wholly new temple of another kind. All of this runs, of course, counter to what we know of the early Royal Arch. Or does it ?

There was a very real division as to the nature of Freemasonry between those who wished to retain or create a truly Christian Freemasonry (the Antients), and those who wished to remove all denominational or sectarian religious content from Freemasonry (the

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<sup>1</sup> Although it is research that has yet to be done, it should be possible to identify appropriate individuals among known freemasons of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. It will require analysis of lodge membership (especially among the Antients) and book subscription lists and the comparison of these with denominational affiliation and association with known Pietists.

<sup>2</sup> Their aims could also be met within appropriate religious communities, such as those established in colonial Pennsylvania at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. See, *e.g.*, Julius F. Sachse, *The German Pietists of Provincial Pennsylvania. 1694-1708*. Philadelphia, 1895; and E.G. Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune: An Early American Counterculture*, Pittsburgh, 1985

Moderns and their successors), seeking instead to establish and maintain Freemasonry as a secular institution dedicated to promoting personal and public moral improvement, for which no overtly spiritual element was necessary. Faced with the overwhelming success of the latter group, the spiritually minded could either take their form of Freemasonry out of the existing institution – much as the Antients had done – or they could bury it discreetly within the second, secular form so that it remained hidden and visible only to those with eyes to see.

This, of course, sounds like special pleading to justify my argument – only the spiritually elite may see what is hidden – but this is not so. If we look carefully at the words, the images and the actions within the Royal Arch we can strip away the secular wrapping without doing violence to reason or common sense. Let us see how this may be done, but first, if my interpretation is to gain any credence, we must look at the broad picture before considering any of the specific elements.

Throughout its pre-Grand Lodge period, and for much of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Freemasonry was essentially grounded in the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition. That is, although it was overwhelmingly Christian in its ethos, it drew upon biblical texts from both the Old and the New Testaments for the basis of the legendary histories presented in its rituals. Then, as indeed now, the Christian culture of the west treated the Holy Bible as a continuous and complete set of sacred scriptures. It was thus perfectly proper to draw upon the history of the Jewish people to construct the allegorical mystery plays that are used within Freemasonry as the ground upon which its teaching of moral precepts is built. Further, the Christian revelation could not be complete without its Jewish foundation, and for the Christian the incidents, characters and prophecies of the Old Testament all have a direct relevance to Christ. Accordingly, the early Christian freemasons were happy to draw masonic symbolism, verbal and visual alike, from every part of the Bible at need and as seemed appropriate.

Next we must examine briefly the historical development of the Royal Arch. It first appears as a masonic degree under that name in 1743, at Stirling in Scotland, with other references to Royal Arch working at various places in the British Isles throughout the 1740s. From 1752 onwards there is documentary evidence of its being a significant, separate degree in the masonic working of the Antients. The Moderns disapproved of it, and yet in 1766 they were complicit in establishing the Royal Arch as a distinct Order when the Charter of Compact brought a governing body, the Grand Chapter, into being. After this there was a grudging acceptance of the Royal Arch by the Moderns until the Union of 1813, when it was written into the new Constitutions as an integral part of Freemasonry. But then came the Supreme Grand Chapter of 1817 with the subsequent drastic rewriting of the Royal Arch rituals and the reconstruction of its ceremonies. Whether that was for good or ill is a matter of personal taste and opinion, but it unquestionably had the effect of removing most of the Christian references from the ritual of Exaltation.

All of this took place, of course, within the context of English-speaking Freemasonry. In continental Europe the development of the Royal Arch took a very different course. It is even possible that the degree was born in France, as a part of the invention and rapid expansion of the masonic *Hauts Grades* (High Degrees) in the wake of the Chevalier Ramsay's *Discourse* of 1737. What Ramsay did was to claim that Freemasonry had been brought to Europe from the Holy Land by returning crusaders, thus ensuring that new masonic degrees could be based upon chivalric legends in addition to, or

in place of, legendary histories based upon biblical texts. And such degrees soon flourished, becoming ever more exotic and growing into complex, multi-grade systems that coalesced into the various forms of the ‘Scottish Rite’ and other, more esoteric inventions.

This chaos of rites was finally brought into rational order at the Convent of Wilhelmsbad in 1782, when J.B. Willermoz was instrumental in transforming the major existing chivalric Orders of Masonry into the *Rite Écossais Rectifié* (Scottish Rectified Rite).<sup>3</sup> Unlike English Freemasonry, the Rectified Rite provides the masonic pilgrim with a system of eight successive degrees through which he can progress from initiation as an Entered Apprentice to the highest level of masonic chivalry. What is significant in the present context is that the fourth degree, the Scottish Master of Saint Andrew, is not only a precise equivalent of the Royal Arch but is also organically linked to the third degree and the death of Hiram Abiff. And it is unquestionably a Christian degree, as indeed is the entire Rectified Rite.

But now we must return for the moment to this country and to *our* Royal Arch. We know that even before the Union of 1813 Freemasonry in Britain was supposedly universalist in nature, so how can it be claimed that the Royal Arch, at least until 1817, was an explicitly Christian degree ? The answer to that question is that the evidence is abundant, from both pre- and post-Union sources. So, let us consider it.

In some Royal Arch ritual texts that we still use there is a lengthy description (admittedly it is a discretionary addition) of ‘The Jewel of the Order’, including a careful analysis of the Triple Tau that forms part of the jewel. This analysis, by E. Comp. G.S. Shepherd-Jones, discounts the argument that it is ‘not a union of 3 Taus, but a “T” over “H” referring to Templum Hierosolyema, King Solomon’s Temple’, and points out that on a water clock in the Provincial Museum at Durham ‘the central design on the tank is a Triple Tau. When this clock was made in 1701 Operative Masons predominated and among the Operative Masons the Triple Tau was called the “Builders’ Trinity” or the “Holy Jesus” ’.<sup>4</sup> A further Christian connection is made by relating the Triple Tau to the three knocks given by the Tyler before our initiation: ‘Those 3 knocks indicated “Ask, and it shall be given you”; “Seek and ye shall find”; ... “Knock, and it shall be opened unto you”; ... which is a quotation from St. Matthew’s Gospel (Ch. 7, v. 7).

More certain evidence is found in significant quotations from the New Testament and references to Christ that occur in early Royal Arch ritual texts. For example, George Oliver cites a manuscript of Thomas Dunckerley’s ritual, of the 1750s, which includes this description:

The foundation stone was a block of pure white marble, without speck or stain, and it alluded to the chief comer-stone on which the Christian Church is built, and which, though rejected by the builders, afterwards became the head of the corner. And when Jesus Christ, the grand and living representative of this stone, came in the flesh to conquer sin, death and hell,

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the evolution of the High Degrees was extremely complex and took place slowly over many decades. My description of the process is, of necessity, drastically simplified.

<sup>4</sup> *Aldersgate Royal Arch Ritual*. 1993 13<sup>th</sup> ed. pp. 153-154.

he proved himself the sublime and immaculate corner-stone of man's immortality.<sup>5</sup>

In Richard Carlile's *Manual of Freemasonry* (1836 but using pre-1820 texts). the Opening Prayer of the Royal Arch ceremony is given as:

Z. In the beginning was the *word*.

H. And the *word* was with God.

J. And the *word* was God.

These opening words of St. John's Gospel were regularly used in early Royal Arch Chapters both here and in the United States of America. And American usage of this period (1820) also requires the High Priest to read from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians, beginning at Chapter 3, verse 6: 'Now we command you brethren, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly ...', albeit omitting the words 'in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'. The Charge after Closing of more recent years also includes a truncated New Testament quotation, from Galatians 6:10, by which the Principals 'enjoin you to do good unto all, but more especially to the household of the faithful'. More familiar than any of these is the prayer by the First Principal during the Opening Ceremony:

Omnipresent God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee and worthily magnify Thy Holy Name.

It should be noted that this prayer is, in the words of Walton Hannah, 'a bowdlerized form of the Collect for Purity from the Book of Common Prayer, with the Christian ending omitted.'<sup>6</sup>

Nor are these textual quotations the only evidence from Royal Arch rituals; there are also those symbolic elements of the ceremony that can be clearly construed as Christian, even if they are basically geometric or drawn from the Old Testament and thus not solely or specifically Christian, although some *are* just that. One example is the white robe placed upon the candidate, which is an evident parallel of the account in Revelation of the righteous being clothed in white raiment. And the Book of Revelation had another influence upon the Royal Arch ritual.

In the Symbolic Lecture the candidate is told that,

The stroke of the Pick reminds us of the sound of the last trumpet, when the ground shall be shaken, loosened, and the graves deliver up their dead; the Crow, being an emblem of uprightness, points to the erect manner in which the body shall rise on that awful day, to meet its tremendous though merciful Judge (etc.)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Bernard E. Jones, *Freemasons' Book of the Royal Arch*. 1969 Corrected reprint, p. 29. This is longer than the text in Oliver's *The Origin of the Royal Arch Order of Masonry* (1867, p. 117) so Jones was presumably quoting from another of Oliver's works that I have not so far identified.

<sup>6</sup> Walton Hannah, *Darkness Visible. A Revelation and Interpretation of Freemasonry*. 1952 4<sup>th</sup> ed. p. 155. The BCP version begins, 'Almighty God' and ends 'through Christ our Lord'.

<sup>7</sup> *Aldersgate Royal Arch Ritual*. 1993 9<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 85.

This concept of a final day of judgement, when the sheep and the goats will be separated, is Christian, and this may explain the anomaly in the Mystical Lecture when the candidate is informed that ‘the mysterious triple tau’ on the block of white marble is important in Royal Arch Masonry and that ‘The tau is derived from the Hebrew, and is that mark or sign spoken of by the angel, whom Ezekiel saw in the spirit’ and which was set on the foreheads of the righteous so that they would not be slain for idolatry. This suggests that it represents the Divine Name, but the biblical text, Ezekiel 9:3-4, does not identify the mark, and it would seem likely that this was intended as a hedging of bets: an extra-biblical counter-balance to the Mark of the Beast which will be found on the heads of the wicked on the Day of Judgement (Rev. 14:11).

Numerical symbolism in the Royal Arch is largely biblical, but less equivocal, and it can be drawn from either the Old or the New Testament. Thus, the twelve ensigns represent the twelve tribes of Israel, but can also refer to the twelve apostles, or to the eleven faithful apostles with Christ at their head. Given this interpretation the candidate receives the banner of Judah as his staff of office because Christ is in the line of David, and is identified in Christian symbolism with the Lion of Judah. Further, the standards of the four divisions of the tribes by cardinal points – Judah (E), Reuben (S), Ephraim (W), and Dan (N) – which stand in the East of the Royal Arch chapter, can also be taken as representing the four evangelists: Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. The emblems for both series of four, the lion, the man, the ox and the eagle are identical. The fifth and central banner in the East bears the Triple Tau, representing the triune nature of God.

The other obvious tripartite symbols are the three Principals and their sceptres; the three companions who seek out the Plate of Gold, the Triple Tau on the block of marble, and the golden plate itself. It would be improper to suggest that the Principals or the companions *represent* the persons of the Trinity, but not so to say that they can call to mind the triune nature of God. Consider also that the Tau is the earliest form of Christian cross and was traditionally the form of the pole upon which Moses fastened the brazen serpent, to which Christ explicitly compared himself (John 3:14).

Other symbols that lend themselves to a Christian, and Trinitarian, interpretation are the triangle formed by the Principals when the candidate reads the words from the scroll (which were traditionally the opening words of St. John’s Gospel)<sup>8</sup>, the arrangement of the lights around the pedestal, and the form of the plate of gold: a triangle containing the Name of God, enclosed within a circle, which is within a square. This ubiquitous symbol – usually with the name as the Tetragrammaton – is often found within engravings in alchemical and emblem books of the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a symbolic representation of the Trinity. These sources, all of which are designed to present Christian spiritual and doctrinal concepts in symbolic form,<sup>9</sup> also illustrate symbols associated with, or analogous to, those

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<sup>8</sup> Although not directly related to the interpretation of Royal Arch symbolism, it may be pointed out that in the tarot pack of 1910 designed by A.E. Waite, and executed by Pamela Colman Smith, the figure of the Hanged Man (No. XII of the Major Trumps) is placed inverted upon a Tau cross, with his bound hands forming a triangle. For Waite, who was exalted into the Holy Royal Arch in 1902, the Hanged Man represented Christ.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* (1617), Emblem XXI, and the various texts included in *The Hermetic Museum Restored* (1678) in the English translation, edited by A.E. Waite (1893, but available in a current reprint).

of the Royal Arch. Thus, in Freher's *Paradoxical Emblems* (c 1700)<sup>10</sup> we can see a triangle of three conjoined spheres within an Orouboros (No. 24); the Tau cross (No. 92); and a concentric triangle, sphere and larger triangle and sphere, dedicated to 'the One Triune' (Nos. 152 and 153). There is also a noteworthy engraving in 'The Book of Lambspring' that shows three seated figures with sceptres; the final lines of the accompanying text are certainly Trinitarian and refer also to the robe of the central figure:

By the grace of God they abide forever,  
The Father and the Son, triumphing gloriously  
In the splendour of their new Kingdom.  
Upon one throne they sit,  
And the face of the Ancient Master  
Is straightway seen between them:  
He is arrayed in a crimson robe.<sup>11</sup>

One further point that may be raised here is the apparent parallel between the Royal Arch legend and that of the Rosicrucian *Fama Fraternitatis*, but although both legends involve a vault and an inscribed plate the motifs are different and direct parallels between masonic and Rosicrucian symbolism are difficult to draw – even though it is tempting to see Rosicrucian texts as one possible source of Royal Arch symbolism. In terms of explicit Christian elements in that symbolism, I feel that I have given illustration enough, although it may not be sufficient to convince you of my thesis. So let us look at another factor: the specific wording of masonic rituals.

Most masonic rituals follow a similar pattern. They involve a symbolic journey for the candidate, a legendary history relevant to the ethos of the degree concerned, and a methodical instruction of the candidate, often by way of a catechism. If we think about the specifics of the degree we tend to concentrate on the acting out of the ceremony, on the tools, regalia, furnishings and other material objects. Apart from the secrets, the choice of particular words and phrases – the specific literary composition of the ritual text – is often not greatly considered. It should be, for the words used can be pregnant with meaning, which we can recognise if we take account of what is actually there: the words themselves with their immediate and underlying meanings.

Let us consider some of the phrasing of the Master Mason's Degree. When the Master raises the candidate after his symbolic death, he asks him 'to observe that the light of a Master Mason is darkness visible, serving only to express that gloom which rests on the prospect of futurity'. It is an odd phrase, and given its origin – it is drawn from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, (Book 1: 1.61), where the line 'No light, but rather Darkness Visible' refers to the light of Hell, the home of Satan – it would appear to be singularly inappropriate. Educated freemasons of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries would certainly have realised this, so

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<sup>10</sup> *The Paradoxical Emblems* of Dionysius Andreas Freher. Edited from Ms. Add. 5789 in the British Library with an Introduction by Adam McLean. Edinburgh, 1983. The Latin title is *Paradoxa, Emblemata, Aenigmata, Hieroglyphica, de Uno, Toto, Puncto, Centro. i.e. of the One, the All, the Point and the Centre.*

<sup>11</sup> *Hermetic Museum Restored*, Vol. II, pp. 304-305.

why did such a strange expression, which is not found in the earliest ritual texts,<sup>12</sup> make its appearance ?

We usually interpret the legend of the Third Degree as illustrating the death of Hiram Abiff, the discovery of his corpse and its honourable reburial, with the candidate representing the unflinching integrity of the Master Mason and being given the substituted secrets of the degree. We are also taught that the purpose of the degree is ‘To seek for that which was lost’, namely, ‘The genuine secrets of a Master Mason’. But perhaps what was lost was the self, for we ourselves lost our home in Paradise with the primal Fall of Man, and humanity has ever since continually struggled to regain it. Our sinful nature tends, however, to send us in the other direction towards Hell, the home of lost souls, the light of which is darkness visible. What better for us to seek than to raise, in a manner analogous to salvation, those who are lost in Hades, and to restore them to their companions – for which task we have the example of Christ: ‘By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison’, and offered them the means of salvation (1 Peter 3:19-21).

Is this, however, the way in which freemasons who were Christian esotericists perceived the Third Degree and, by extension, the Royal Arch ? I believe that it may well have been so, especially among those within the Scottish Rectified Rite. Let us return to Hiram Abiff and the manner of his death, which is recreated in what happens to the candidate who represents him. He is struck down on the right and left temples; he falls and is finally slain by the blow to his forehead. He could just as easily have been killed in another manner, but it is carefully specified for us.<sup>13</sup> The word ‘temple’ in its anatomical usage is derived from the Latin *tempus*, which applies spatially to the temple of the head: the dwelling place of the self. It is directly related to *templum* – a sacred enclosed space or edifice – and both derive from the Greek *Τεμενωσ* (*Temenos*).

Thus it is not beyond reason that these temples may represent the First and Second Temples of Jerusalem, both of them destroyed and in need of restoration – which process is the basis of the Royal Arch ritual. English Freemasonry has tended to be uneasy with the Royal Arch, presenting it variously as the completion of the Third Degree or as a degree in its own right. It is perhaps better to see it, as is done in the Scottish Rectified Rite, as the immediate and recognisable sequel to the Third Degree.

In the fourth degree of that Rite, the Scottish Master of St. Andrew, the end of Masonry is said to be the perfection of Man, and Hiram Abiff is revealed as representing Christ – his very name, Hiram, being equivalent to ‘Homo Jesus Rex Altissimus Mundi’ (*i.e.* The man Jesus is the highest king of the world). The resurrection of Hiram, and thus of Christ, is illustrated in one of the diagrams of the degree (more or less equivalent to our Tracing Boards), which shows Hiram rising to new life.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This wording appears in Carlile’s *Manual of Masonry*, the rituals in which date from 1820 or earlier. I have not checked other rituals of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>13</sup> The most complete early English printed exposures of masonic ritual – *Three Distinct Knocks*, 1760, and *Jachin and Boaz*, 1762 – describe the first two blows struck by the ruffians as being across the throat and to the left breast, but in William Finch’s *Masonic Treatise* of 1802 – the first English ritual text to be printed after the creation of the Rectified Rite in 1782 – the blows are struck on Hiram’s right and left temples.

<sup>14</sup> In the ritual the diagram is described thus: ‘It represents our venerable master Hiram issuing gloriously from the tomb, surrounded by those virtues which have procured for him the crown of immortality. It recalls the just one triumphing over persecutions and that state to which all who imitate his courage and virtue may also aspire.’

And there is more. As in our Royal Arch, the degree is concerned with the rebuilding of the Temple, but it becomes clear that this is not a material temple. The new temple is the New Jerusalem, which is also Christ himself, as he states in the Gospels of Matthew and of John.<sup>15</sup> The fourth and final diagram displayed in this degree shows the ‘New heavenly Jerusalem’<sup>16</sup>, replete with the symbolism that is wholly appropriate to the Royal Arch: it is a perfect cube (Rev. 21:16), with twelve gates, three on each wall, representing the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. 21.10-21). Within the walls is the mountain of Sion, surmounted by the Cross and the Lamb and with the Tetragrammaton inside a triangle that represents the Trinity.

This is the end product of a specifically Christian interpretation of the legend of Hiram Abiff: the development of a degree equivalent to the Holy Royal Arch of English-speaking Freemasonry, but one that can be worked honestly and correctly only in an overtly Christian form of Freemasonry. It is thus appropriate for the Scottish Rectified Rite, which makes no pretence of being anything other than Christian, but is it feasible that such an interpretation of the Royal Arch was intended by those who developed it here? I believe that it was, but because the freemasons concerned recognised that after the Union of 1813 English Freemasonry had become irreversibly universalist, they chose to be pragmatic and followed the second of my two suggested paths – that of burying their vision of spiritual Masonry within the working of the secular Craft. And so it remains: a quest to achieve by way of masonic rite and ceremony the goal of returning to our unfallen spiritual state, but a quest that can be pursued in this particular fashion only by the Christian esotericist.

Perhaps it is just as well that this path remains hidden, for if English-speaking Freemasonry eschewed its universalism then it would become a house divided that could not stand. I firmly believe that there is a Christian message in the symbolism of the Holy Royal Arch, but the right working and understanding of the degree can enrich the spiritual life of all who take it up, whatever their faith. And it seems appropriate to conclude with quotations from the work of two freemasons of the past who followed this particular quest in different ways.

One is A.E. Waite, who penetrated to the spiritual heart of Freemasonry and perceived it as one strand of what he termed ‘The Secret Tradition’. He saw that at its heart, Freemasonry contains ‘the memorials of a loss which has befallen humanity; and ... the records of a restitution in respect of that which was lost’. And for those with eyes to see, that lost secret maintains its ‘substantial presence under veils close to the hands of all’.<sup>17</sup> Whether or not that presence is within the Royal Arch is for each of us to discover, which brings me to the second quotation, the response of Martines de Pasqually to Saint-Martin’s question as to what was needed in order to find God: ‘We must make do even with what we have’.

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<sup>15</sup> *Matt.* 26:61, ‘This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.’

*John* 2:19-22, 19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

<sup>20</sup> Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?

<sup>21</sup> But he spake of the temple of his body.

<sup>16</sup> The descriptive text reads: ‘It represents the precincts of the new heavenly Jerusalem, as described by St. John the Evangelist, the second patron of the Order of Freemasons, and it shews also the immolated and victorious Lamb raising the standard of victory over the new Zion.’

<sup>17</sup> A.E. Waite, *The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry*. 1911, 2 vols. See, Vol. 1, p. xi; Vol. 2, p. 379.