"The Essential Secrets of Masonry"

Insight from an American Masonic Oration of 1734[1]

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Freemasonry is driven by heritage. Our Craft looks to various pasts to determine its identity in the present: to sacred history through the Volume of Sacred Law, to the mythopoetic past of the so-called Traditional History, and to our organizational history as traced through regular Masonic institutions and their leaders. Added to all this is the special attention that modern Masonic historians direct toward authentic fragments of the fraternity's history, for such evidence often sheds much-needed light upon the actions and motivations of early participants. However, there are times when, despite all of these deep concerns with the past, some key evidence is simply overlooked.

This article is the story of one such treasure: a short speech

1 An abbreviated version of this paper appeared in *The Plumbline: The Quarterly Journal of the Scottish Rite Research Society*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 2016): 1–7.

preserved only in a single manuscript, titled *A Dissertation Upon Masonry, Deliver'd to a Lodge in America*. A fresh transcription of the text was recently published, with critical annotations by the present writer, in the journal of the Philalethes Society.[2] The *Dissertation* is an approximately eighteen-minute lodge oration or sermon, and is one of dozens of Masonic orations that survive from the eighteenth century. However, what makes this one so special is its early date. It was, according to the manuscript, given on June 24 (the Feast of Saint John the Baptist), 1734. This makes it the third oldest surviving Masonic speech, the earlier two being the oration of Francis Drake at the York Grand Lodge on December 27, 1726,[3] and the talk delivered by Edward Oakley in London at the Lodge at the Carpenters' Arms tavern on December 31, 1728.[4] Although the early orations of Drake and Oakley and later ones by Martin Clare (1735) and Chevalier Ramsay (1737) have received moderate to extensive degrees of recognition and anal-

2 Shawn Eyer, "A *Dissertation Upon Masonry*, 1734, with Commentary and Notes," in *Philalethes: The Journal of Masonic Research and Letters* 68(2015): 62–75. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Walter H. Hunt, MPS, Librarian of the Samuel Crocker Lawrence Library at the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts; Georgia Hershfeld, Library Cataloguer, Livingston Masonic Library; Bill Kreuger, Assistant Librarian at the Iowa Masonic Library; Larissa Watkins, Assistant Librarian at the House of the Temple in Washington, D.C.; Christopher B. Murphy, MPS; Arturo de Hoyos, FPS, Grand Archivist and Grand Historian at the Supreme Council, 33°, AASR, S.J.; and S. Brent Morris, FPS, Managing Editor of *The Scottish Rite Journal.*

3 Reprinted with a critical introduction in Douglas Knoop, G.P. Jones, & Douglas Hamer, *Early Masonic Pamphlets* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1945), 196–207. Retranscribed with full textual commentary in Shawn Eyer, "Drake's Oration of 1726, with Commentary and Notes," *Philalethes: The Journal of Masonic Research and Letters* 67(2014): 14–25.

4 Reprinted in Knoop, Jones & Hamer, *Early Masonic Pamphlets*, 210–14.

ysis within Masonic scholarship, the *Dissertation Upon Masonry* is comparatively unknown, and thus, unexamined.

1849: A Discovery in the Library

A Dissertation Upon Masonry was discovered in manuscript form in 1849 within the archives of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts by Charles Whitlock Moore (1801–1873). Moore was a native Bostonian who apprenticed in newspaper publishing, and later established himself as a leading Masonic journalist of his era.[5] For purposes of scholarly reference, the manuscript is properly named the C.W. Moore MS, after its discoverer. According to Moore, the manuscript contained two documents: the previously-unknown 1734 *Dissertation* followed by a transcript of the so-called Leland MS.

Moore transcribed the *Dissertation* and published it in the August 1, 1849, edition of his *Freemasons' Monthly Magazine* under the headline, "The First Masonic Discourse Delivered in America."[6] Introducing the item, he offered a number of questionable opinions:

> The following is probably the first address ever delivered before a Masonic Lodge in America. The first Lodge chartered in this country was in July, 1733. This address was delivered in Boston, the 24th of June, 1734. Earlier addresses may have been delivered on some particular occasions; but if so, we have no record of them. Nor is such a supposition hardly probable, in view of the condition of the Fraternity

5 William W. Wheildon, "Charles W. Moore." *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 30 (1876): 399–405.

6 Charles Whitlock Moore, "The First Masonic Discourse Delivered in America." *The Freemasons' Monthly Magazine* 8 (1849): 289–93.

> prior to 1733. We think, therefore, that it is safe to assume, that this is the first public Masonic discourse ever delivered in America. We discovered it in the archives of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. The name of the author is not attached to it. We give the spelling, punctuation, and capital letters, as they appear in the original. The Bodlean [sic] Manuscript, with Mr. Locke's notes, appended to the address by the author, we omit. The address has never before been published; and we give it to the readers of this Magazine, as one of the most interesting papers with which we have recently been enabled to enrich our pages.[7]

This preface makes some presumptions about which we ought to be cautious. Moore matter-of-factly states that the *Dissertation* was given in the Lodge at Boston, although there is no indication of that in the manuscript itself. He also opines that "in view of the condition of the Fraternity prior to 1733," it seemed unlikely to him that there could have been any earlier oration given either in the lodge at Boston or any other lodge, and that therefore the *Dissertation* was "the first public Masonic discourse ever delivered in America." These interpretations are overeager—but not by much.

Moore's idea that the oration must have been given in Boston is likely based upon the fact that the manuscript was found in the library of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, and reinforced by the fact that there were few lodges operating in America on the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, 1734. But, while it is true that there were few documented lodges operating in America at the time, even the fact that there *were* several means that we cannot automatically assume the oration was given in the Lodge at the Bunch of Grapes Tavern in Boston.[8] It is highly possible that the

7 Moore, "The First Masonic Discourse," 289.

8 For convenience, this lodge is often referred to as The First Lodge

oration is from that lodge, but it cannot be known for certain at this time.

More unlikely is Moore's finding that the oration is "the first public Masonic discourse ever delivered in America." First, a careful review of the language of the oration shows that it was not addressed to the public in any way, but to Freemasons alone. The title of the *Dissertation* says that it was "Deliver'd to a *Lodge* in America," and the text frequently relies upon internal Masonic rhetoric. It is possible that by "public," Moore simply intended to imply that the address was spoken to the assembled brethren. Even so, it is doubtful that it was the first Masonic oration ever given on the American continent. Orations were a typical feature of many lodges, and lodges that did not have speeches by the brethren elucidating Masonic topics were seen as lacking an important aspect of Freemasonry.[9]

That said, the status of the *Dissertation* is impressive, despite the document's obscurity. It is surely one of the earliest American Masonic orations. It is the third oldest Masonic oration that survives in the world. It is the oldest American Masonic speech that is preserved. We must not overlook the fact that we have the orations of Drake and Oakley in published form alone, both of which, while originally given in private lodge settings, were also intended for, and possibly redacted for, public distribution. The 1734 *Dissertation* was never intended to be published, and its content makes it clear it could only have been delivered within a lodge of Master Masons, which makes it *the oldest surviving*

in subsequent Massachusetts Masonic history. In 1736, it was known as Lodge Nº 126 on the register of the Grand Lodge of England (later characterized as the Moderns).

9 See the earlier orations of Francis Drake (1726) and Edward Oakley (1728) in which it is clear that discussions on topics relevant to Masonry were recommended. Drake openly criticizes the York lodge for neglecting such lectures, but emphasizes that the London lodges were regularly engaging in them.

example of private Masonic instruction in the world.[10]

Thus, Moore's enthusiasm for the document he discovered is fully justified. Unfortunately, his publication of the oration did not have the impact that he had hoped. Not only has the *Dissertation* escaped the thorough scholarly analysis that it deserves, but it has even failed to accrue a general awareness of its existence within the corpus of early Masonic literature.

The Masonic and Academic Reception

An extensive literature review reveals that as few as four Masonic writers (excluding the present author) ever wrote anything about the *Dissertation* after Moore's initial publication: Rob Morris, Albert G. Mackey, Lawrence Greenleaf, and Henry W. Coil.

Rob Morris mentioned the *Dissertation* in two of his works, but offered no interpretations of it in either.[11]

In 1865, Albert G. Mackey wrote a short article, "The Eloquence of Masonry," in which he accepted Moore's assignment for the *Dissertation* to Boston, and offered a short assessment: "This address is well written, and of a symbolic character, as the author represents the Lodge as a type of heaven."[12] This article became the basis for Mackey's entry, "Addresses, Masonic," in his classic *Encyclopædia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences*.[13]

In 1896, Lawrence N. Greenleaf cited the *Dissertation* as evidence of the antiquity of Freemasonry in general and of the

10 This statement applies to the Grand Lodge era.

11 Rob Morris, *The History of Freemasonry in Kentucky*, 5; Rob Morris, *William Morgan*, 49.

12 Albert G. Mackey, "The Eloquence of Masonry," 147. For a discussion on the special meaning of "type" here, see the section of this paper on the subject of typological interpretation, below.

13 Albert G. Mackey, *Encyclopædia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences*, 14–15.

trigradal system in particular.[14]

Henry W. Coil is apparently the only twentieth century Masonic author to refer to the *Dissertation*, although his reference is derivative of Mackey's.[15] In his 1961 *Encyclopedia*, Coil acknowledged the oration, but was careful not to adopt the assumptions made by prior authors, stating: "On June 24, 1734, an unknown speaker delivered to an unknown American lodge 'A *Dissertation* Upon Masonry,' which was reprinted in *Moore's Masonic Magazine* [sic], Vol. 8, p. 289 (1849)."[16]

A review of the cumulative indices of *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* from 1886 to 2014 reveals no reference to the 1734 oration.[17] It appears that the only Freemasons ever to write about the *Dissertation* between Moore's discovery in 1849 and the 2015 critical edition in *Philalethes* are the four mentioned above.

Luckily, the *Dissertation Upon Masonry* was not quite as neglected within the academic world. The first academic study performed was within a 1968 M.A. thesis by Ross Frank Cooke.[18] Cooke's thesis attempted to analyze the structure of the address, but was limited by a rather superficial knowledge of Freemasonry.

Steven C. Bullock's *Revolutionary Brotherhood* cited the *Dis-*

14 *Grand Lodge of Colorado Proceedings* (1896), 294–95.

15 A comparison of the entries on "Addresses, Masonic" in the encyclopedias of each author demonstrates the relationship.

16 Henry W. Coil, *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia* (New York: Macoy, 1961), 6.

17 This index is not exhaustive, so it may be that the *Dissertation* has been mentioned in AQC without being featured in the index—although if so, it is likely that such references would be slight.

18 Ross Frank Cooke, "An Analysis of Four Speeches Delivered by Masons in Colonial America" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1968). Images of the C.W. Moore MS are available currently only because photographic reproductions of the original manuscript were included by Cooke in his thesis. The original MS is not catalogued, and it is not currently available for inspection.

sertation repeatedly as evidence of the ideals of Colonial Freemasonry, and illustrations of the social challenges and transformations of which the Fraternity was a part. Bullock found that lodge sermons "often provide the most accessible means of understanding Masonic self-perceptions."[19]

David G. Hackett's survey of early American Freemasonry from a religious perspective, *That Religion in Which All Men Agree*, noted the *Dissertation* as evidence of a degree of heterodoxy within Colonial Freemasonry: "Most Saint John's sermons stressed polite Christianity, yet [the 1734] oration suggests a divergence between it and Freemasonry."[20]

These examples apparently describe the entire response to the discovery of this important early Masonic speech.

The Critical Summer of 1734

The date of the address confirms that it was an oration for the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, perhaps the most essential holiday of the Masonic Order. The title indicates that the oration was given to "a Lodge in America." There is no information available to identify the specific lodge.[21]

19 Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730–1840*, 321. Bullock's discussion of the 1734 *Dissertation* is found on pp. 63, 65, 66, 73, & 80.

20 David G. Hackett, *That Religion in Which All Men Agree: Freemasonry in American Culture*, 51.

21 Several commentators have assumed that the location of the address was Boston (Moore, Morris, Mackey, Cooke, Bullock, and Hackett). Although the *Dissertation* could have been delivered in any of the American lodges—the locations of most of which in 1734 are unknown—it seems likely that it originated either in Boston or Philadelphia. However, when the content of the *Dissertation* is taken into account, it is possible to develop

The summer of 1734 was a pivotal period for American Freemasonry. Two June 24 lodge meetings are documented. *The Pennsylvania Gazette* of June 27 recorded that:

> Monday last, a Grand Lodge of the Ancient Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons in this Province, was held at the Tun Tavern in Water-Street, when BENJAMIN FRANKLIN being elected Grand-Master for the Year ensuing.... After which a very elegant entertainment was provided, and the Proprietor, the Governor, and several other persons of distinction, honored the Society with their presence.[22]

The same day's events in Boston are recorded as follows:

> 5734 June 24. Being the anniversary of S^{t} John the Baptist the Brethren Celebrated the Feast in due manner and Form, and chose Our R^{t} Worsh^{l} Bro: M^{r} Frederick Hamilton Master of the Lodge.[23]

Both of these are potential locations of the *Dissertation*'s original delivery—the question will be taken up in more detail below.

That summer, Franklin released his edition of Anderson's *Constitutions*, which was first advertised on May 16. Franklin shipped 70 copies to Boston in August.[24] A few months later,

a theory that Boston was the most likely provenance (see the section "The Question of Authorship," below.)

22 Reprinted in *Proceedings of the Right Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania, and Masonic Jurisdiction Thereunto Belonging* (1906), 82.

23 *Proceedings in Masonry, St. John's Grand Lodge, 1733–1792, Massachusetts Grand Lodge, 1769–1792* (1895), 4.

24 Paul Royster (Ed.), *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons (1734). An*

Franklin applied for a charter from Henry Price in Boston, ultimately bringing the Pennsylvania Masons under the Grand Lodge of England. Thus, this particular Feast of Saint John the Baptist took place during an important time of growth.

A Dissertation Upon Masonry, composed and delivered at the center of all this activity, provides valuable insight into the internal activities and self-conceptualizations of the Masons of that crucial period.

The Question of Authorship

The C.W. Moore MS betrays no overt indication as to the author of the 1734 *Dissertation*. David G. Hackett suggested that the *Dissertation* was given by Rev. Charles Brockwell (d. 1755).[25] However, there are indications that Brockwell could not have been the author. He did deliver a Masonic sermon that has come down to us, but that was in 1749 (fifteen and a half years after the *Dissertation* was given).[26] While Brockwell might at first seem to be a possible author of the *Dissertation*, a comparison of the 1734 document to Brockwell's 1749 sermon reveals no significant stylistic or thematic similarities. Furthermore, Brockwell was English by birth, and was apparently studying at Cambridge at the time the *Dissertation* was given. Church histories show that Brockwell was not in America in 1734, but crossed the Atlantic in May of 1737 to lead a church at Scituate, Massachusetts. Brockwell went to Salem in 1738, serving there until he was moved to

Online Electronic Edition (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska, 2006), 94.

25 Hackett, *That Religion*, 51.

26 Charles Brockwell, *Brotherly Love Recommended: In a Sermon Preached . . . in Christ-Church, Boston, on Wednesday the 27th of December, 1749.*

King's Chapel, Boston, in 1746. He died in Boston in 1755.[27]

An unpublished theory by John M. Sherman, a former Librarian of the Samuel Crocker Lawrence Library at the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, holds merit. A photocopy of Moore's original publication of the *Dissertation* located in the Livingston Masonic Library of the Grand Lodge of New York exists with a typewritten note attached, inscribed that it is from the "Boston Mass Masonic Library Sept. 11, 1971." The note reads:

> We have an original ms. of this with our rare books but it is not in the handwriting of the speaker, in my opinion. I think it was copied, maybe by the Lodge Secretary. I think it may have been delivered by Thomas Harward, Who was King's Lecturer (asst. minister) at King's Chapel, 1731–1736, when he died. Whoever it was, he must have been a Mason. But I have no record of Harward as a Mason. Probably was made in England before he came over. JMS
>
> It may not be possible to prove who did write it.[28]

An examination of published sermons by Thomas Harward reveals good reason for Sherman's suggestion. A particularly strong structural, stylistic, and thematic resemblance to the *Dissertation* may be found in Harward's 1732 sermon, *The Fulness*

27 For these and other details of Brockwell's life, see "History of St. Peter's Church, Salem, Mass." *The Gospel Advocate*, 2 (1822): 341–52; also W.M. Willis, *Journals of the Rev. Thomas Smith, and the Rev. Samuel Deane, Pastors of the First Church in Portland* (Portland: Joseph S. Bailey, 1849), 155.

28 Private correspondence with Georgia Hershfeld, Library Cataloguer, Livingston Masonic Library. This note from John M. Sherman provides important documentation for the fact that the C.W. Moore MS was extant in the Samuel Crocker Lawrence library as late as 1971—three years after Cooke's M.A. thesis included photographic reproductions of it.

of Joy in the Presence of God.[29] As such, while objective proof of authorship will remain elusive, Sherman's suggestion that the orator was Thomas Harward should be given due consideration. Moreover, if Harward is the likely author of the 1734 Masonic address, then it follows that the Lodge at the Bunch of Grapes in Boston appears the most likely setting for its original delivery.

A Summary of the 1734 Dissertation

SAINT PAUL'S INITIATIC VISION

The *Dissertation* begins by invoking aspects of the Traditional History of Freemasonry, including the legend that a "Vast number of Emperors & Princes, Inventors of usefull arts, Divines and Philosophers . . . have in all ages voluntarily taken upon themselfs, the Badge of our profession."[30] The speaker then singles out Saint Paul, who he calls "the powerfull propagator of the Gospel, the profound Scholar, the skilfull architect, the Irresistable orator,"[31] as a notable example as such great men who were legendarily part of the Craft. While it seems novel to think of Saint Paul as a Masonic brother, it was in fact a fairly common theme in eighteenth century Masonic literature and sermons, and is obliquely referenced in Anderson's *Constitutions*.[32]

29 See Thomas Harward, *The Fulness of Joy in the Presence of God, Being the Substance of a Discourse Preach'd Lately in the Royal Chappel at Boston in New-England. By the Reverend Mr. Harward, Lecturer at the Royal Chappel.* Boston: B. Green, 1732.

30 C.W. Moore MS, lines 6–8.

31 Ibid., lines 13–15.

32 The identification of Saint Paul as an initiate of the Craft is a primitive feature not unique to the *Dissertation*. Robert Samber (1682–1745), writing under the pseudonym Eugenius Philalethes,

While Paul was in darkness prior to his initiation, "he was an Enemy to the Lodge, like some of us before admission, he despis'd the Sacred Institution, and Ridicul'd it with all his witt and Elo-

Jr., wrote a dedication to the Grand Master, Wardens, and Brethren of England and Ireland dated March 1, 1721, in which he refers to "Brother St. *Paul*" (*The Long Livers*, xii *&* xlvi) and "holy Brother Saint *Paul*" (xlviii *&* liii). He emphasized the early Masonic theme of false brethren: "Our holy Brother St. *Paul*, though he suffered infinite Perils, as he recounts himself, yet the Perils among False Brethren were what seemed most to touch his righteous Soul; for most dangerous are a Man's Enemies, when they are of his own House." (xlviii)

The Bodleian Library contains a manuscript in Samber's hand, likely from the same time period, which carries another reference in similar terms: "Hear what is promised to the Brotherhood from the words of our Holy Brother St. Paul: *Brethren, says he, be of good Comfort, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*" (MSS Rawlinson Poetry 11, folio 74 verso; see Edward Armitage, "Robert Samber," 108) This is echoed in the 1728 Masonic oration of Edward Oakley: "Finally, Brethren, (I speak now to you in holy Brother St. *Paul's* Words,) 'Farewel: Be perfect, be of good Comfort, be of one Mind, live in Peace, and the God of Love and Peace shall be with you.'" (Oakley, *A Speech Deliver'd to the Worshipful Society of Free and Accepted Masons,* 34.)

Other references to Paul as a Freemason occur in a 1737 sermon of John Henley (1692–1756), the Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of England for many years. (*On Scripture Masonry*, 4, 8, 15) References to Paul adhering to this formula are found in some later Masonic rhetoric as well. Isaac Head, who was the first Provincial Grand Master of the Scilly Isles, invokes "our holy Brother the Apostle Paul" in a charge given in Cornwall on April 21, 1752. (Scott, *Pocket Companion*, 301) In another charge, given January 21, 1766, Head lauds Paul as "our excellent Brother, and great Orator, the holy and great Apostle Paul," and encourages the assembled brethren to seek to "be made Partakers of the Beatifick Vision" that Paul experienced. (*A Confutation of the Observations on Free Masonry,* 88 *&* 90) This is far from an exhaustive inventory for such references. For a short survey of Masonic traditions about St. Paul, see Carl Hermann Tendler, "The Apostle St. Paul, a Mason," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 1(1886–1888):74–75.

quence, but he afterward became its Glory & Support."[33] The *Dissertation* considers Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 13:11: "When I was a child, says he, I understood as a Child . . . but when I became a man (an Expression Emphatically Significant among us) when I became a man then . . . I put away Childish things."[34] The speaker finds a special inference in this transformation from a childish to a manly mental state, connecting it to Masonic initiation.

This pattern continues as he considers another text, paraphrased from 2 Corinthians 12:2–5. Before going into it in detail, the *Dissertation* makes an assertion that might be startling to a modern reader, but was probably not that unusual within the early Masonic context. The 1734 speaker holds that Freemasons have the advantage of a special insight by means of sharing in an ancient fraternal bond:

> . . . the whole passage is well worth Repeating & I propose therefrom to Continue my present Discourse; only observing by the way, that the learned annotators & Interpreters of Scriptures, however penetrating & clear they have been in other dark places, yet none of them been of ye lodge, they Could not possibly Conceive the apostle's true meaning in this mysterious part of his Epistle & I have therefore given the World an uninteligible Explication.[35]

The *Dissertation* then continues into the hidden interpretation of 2 Corinthians 12:2–5, which is the central theme for the remainder of the oration.

> I knew a man, Say's he, meaning himself, above 14 years ago whither in the body, or out of the Body I cannot tell,

33 C.W. Moore MS, lines 17–20.
34 Ibid., lines 22–26.
35 Ibid., lines 32–39.

but I knew such a one taken up into the third heaven into paradice where he heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for any Man to utter, of such a one will I Glory. Freemasons know very well why the apostle calls himself a Man, they know why he could not tell whether, when he was made a mason he was in the Body or out of the Body, and what is meant by the body,[36] they know also that by the third heaven or paradice is figur'd out the third & Chief degree of Masonry, & they are very well acquainted with those unspeakable words, which is not lawful for a man to utter, as a particular Explication of these things to the well Instructed Mason would be needless, so to the World it is needless and Improper.[37]

A HEAVENLY STANDARD OF BEHAVIOR

Now, the *Dissertation* turns to elucidating the comparison of the tiled Masonic lodge to Paul's vision of paradise or heaven. Many reasons are given for this celestial identification:

1) The lodge is like heaven in that "it is an absolute Monarchy, in which the Will of the Sovereign is a law, but so wisely

36 It is intriguing to note that the subtle inference drawn here by the author of the *Dissertation* is understandable by Freemasons today because of the preservation of the same phraseology of being within or without "the body"—that is, the assembled lodge. In his article, "The Sociology of the Construct of Tradition and Import of Legitimacy in Freemasonry," scholar Henrik Bogdan notes that "Freemasonry, in its various forms, is a highly conservative form of organization in the sense that it has changed very little from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first century. The basic organizational structure, the initiatory system, central symbols and even the language (choice of words, phraseology, etc.) have remained more or less intact." (236)

37 C.W. Moore MS, lines 40–53.

Contrived & Established, that the Sovereign can never will nor Command any thing which is not exactly agreable to the nature & reason of things, & by the Subjects Received and Submitted to with Pleasure; the pecul[i]ar light of Masonry Enabling to discern what is best with Regard to the Lodge…."[38]

2) The lodge is like heaven "on account of the universal understanding which subsistes therein betwixt brethren of vastly different Languages and Countrys…."[39]

3) The lodge is like heaven "on account of that human[,] Kind & fraternal treatment of each other which is therein used among the Brethren." "In Heaven and in the lodge only are to be Seen humility without contempt, and dignity without Envy."[40]

4)The lodge is like heaven because "it is been Composed of good people of all Religions, Sects[,] perswasions & Denominations, of all nations and countrys, & I might add of all Generations of men in all ages since the Beginning of mankind."[41]

38 Ibid., lines 59–65.

39 Ibid., lines 83–85. The ability of Freemasons to communicate ideas despite language barriers was a common theme of early Masonic literature, tied to the story of the Masons who labored on the Tower of Babel. See the discussion of The Masons' Faculty elsewhere in this paper.

40 Ibid., lines 105–101 & 113–115.

41 Ibid., lines 118–121. Masonic scholars have often interpreted Masonic texts that mention Biblical themes (other than the Temple of Solomon, King Solomon, Hiram of Tyre, the Holy Saints John, and the various Biblical passages found in the degree work) as an indication of the exclusion of non-Christians. The *Dissertation*'s language here may provide some corrective insight. If the oration did not contain this line about accepting "all Religions, Sects[,] perswasions & Denominations," many would have tended to interpret the document as exclusively Christian. The specific language used here makes it clear that "all Religions" means far more than all Christian denominations, because it extends to the religions of "all nations and countrys," and "all Generations of men in all ages since the Beginning of

The 1734 speaker then shifts his discourse to the "Instruction to younger Bretheren,"[42] and delineates some ways in which Masons ought to strive to make their lodge resemble paradise:

1) The lodge ought to be like paradise because "you that are members thereof should[,] like the Inhabitants of that happy place, as far as possible, Endevour to preserve a pure and unblemish'd life and Conversation . . . ."[43]

2) The lodge "ought to resemble Heaven in the most Cheerfull good humour, and the most perfect love and Charity among the Brethren: let there be no heart burning among us, let evry brother who happens to think himself disobliged by another, open his Soul to the lodge & he shall be made Easy . . . ."[44]

3) The lodge ought to be like heaven "in absolutely refusing admission to improper persons: people of selfish ungenerous illnatur'd dispositions are utterly unfit to be made Masons, tis the Human Benevolent mind only, that deserves & is Capable of this Felicity: Such will naturally desire to join with us, as being pleased with evry thing, that tend to make mankind more happy; and such will apply with a suitable earnestness, of their own Freewill & voluntary motion[,] for by no means should we Invite or Endevour to entice any-man . . . ."[45]

4) The lodge "ought to Resemble Heaven in the most perfect secrecy of all their Transactions."[46]

As the speaker articulates this last point, he distinguishes between two kinds of Masonic secrecy. His advice for the "younger" brethren is not to share the lodge's business with friends and

mankind." Thus, while thoroughly Christian in character, the 1734 *Dissertation* is almost certainly expressing that men of all religions were properly welcome in the Masonic lodge.

42 Ibid., lines 138–139.

43 Ibid., lines 142–145.

44 Ibid., lines 167–172.

45 Ibid., lines 189–198.

46 Ibid., lines 204–205.

family, echoing Anderson's *Constitutions* and many other early sources. But his reference to another class of Masonic secrecy is one of the *Dissertation*'s most salient statements. He says that "The Essential Secrets of masonry indeed are Everlastingly Safe, *&* never can be Revealed abroad, because they can never be understood by such as are unenlightened."[47]

The *Dissertation* culminates in some beautiful language based upon the Wisdom of Solomon 11:20:

> Reverenc'd be the memory of the Widow's Son, and Blessed be the name of the all Mighty architecte, son of the virgin: Infinitly honnour'd be the name of the great Geometrican, who made all things, by weight and measure, and let love, peace, and unanimity Continue forever among Masons. Be it So.[48]

Some Notable Features

The 1734 *Dissertation* displays several features that inform our knowledge of American Freemasonry in the Colonial period, particularly in terms of its intellectual culture.

ESOTERIC WISDOM

One of the most striking traits of the *Dissertation* is its emphasis on esoteric concepts. Secret transactions, secret interpretations, and secret wisdom are expressed at different points within the oration. On one level, this is not surprising, as Freemasonry has stressed secrecy in one form or another since well before the

47 Ibid., lines 210–212.
48 Ibid., lines 238–244.

founding of the first Grand Lodge. Moreover, the 1734 *Dissertation* comes at a moment in which exposures of the Masonic catechisms and modes of recognition were becoming more widely distributed, more accurate, and more complete.[49] Despite this, Freemasons did not back away from the position that the Craft represented a mystery that outsiders could not penetrate: in addition to the esoteric working of the rituals, which might easily be published and spread verbally outside of bounds, Masons referred to another level of secrecy—an interpretive layer that represented special knowledge.

In order to avoid the vagueries that can result from the unqualified use of the term esotericism to refer to these different kinds of secret knowledge, the author has proposed a practical classification of the forms of esotericism in Freemasonry.[50] Each of these taxons is defined by its function. The first order is the *social-exclusionary* function—referring both to a binary concept of access (i.e., whether the subject is an initiate and thus entitled to a group's esoteric culture, or is not initiated and blocked from any lawful exposure to the esoteric culture of the group), as well as to a scalar concept of progressive access (i.e., through a series

49 These exposures largely emanated from London, which experienced rapid growth in the number of lodges during the decade following 1717. Scholars consider that Samuel Prichard's 1730 pamphlet, *Masonry Dissected*, which was the first exposure to reveal catechetical details of the three degrees, was especially concerning to the Grand Lodge due to its accuracy. The appearance and popularity of *Masonry Dissected* (apparently among opponents and initiates alike) generated Masonic responses such as the erudite essay, *A Defence of Masonry.* It is highly possible, even probable, that American Masons were aware of catechism exposures. It is notable that no contemporary Masonic testimony regarded the Craft's secrets as actually having been revealed by these documents.

50 Eyer, "Esoteric and Mystical Themes." For a popular article about this taxonomy, see Eyer, "Defining Esotericism from a Masonic Perspective."

of degrees). This first taxon is proximal and status-based. The second order is the *textual-interpretive* taxon—referring both to the belief that a "text" (broadly defined) has an esoteric layer of meaning, and to the intellectual endeavor of attempting to elucidate and understand that latent meaning. This is distinct from the first taxon in that merely social entitlement by virtue of belonging to a group, or of initiation to a certain degree, is independent of both the perception that there is esoteric meaning in the private culture of the group, as well as distinct from the pursuit of intellectual activity directed toward the understanding of that meaning. The perception of the presence of such meanings is indicated in a wide range of eighteenth-century Masonic literature, from private sources such as the 1734 *Dissertation* to the classical expressions of Masonic thought in the 1770s, such as William Preston's *Illustrations*, which encouraged the "investigation" of Masonry's "latent doctrines."[51]

The third taxon is *systematic*, referring to esoteric*ism* as a system, discussible in the abstract rather than in terms of a particular unit of content or a particular esoteric insight. This wider taxon could denote the macroscopic perspective of Freemasonry in which it is taken as an intentional philosophical program in which the sum of social-exclusionary knowledge and textual-interpretive arcana are understood as a deliberate system of esoteric meaning—as Preston put it in the 1770s, "a regular system of morality conceived in a strain of interesting allegory, which readily unfolds its beauties to the candid and industrious enquirer."[52] The third taxon is also applicable to the phenomenon of so-called Western Esotericism, an "artificial category"[53] of thought that includes a range of ideas, such as Hermeticism, kabbalism,

51 William Preston, *Illustrations of Masonry* (1775), 75; Colin Dyer, *William Preston and His Work*, 212.

52 Dyer, *William Preston*, 207.

53 Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 3.

neoplatonism, etc., which has been delineated extensively in academic literature.[54]

54 The most influential academic definition of Western Esotericism is that given by Antoine Faivre; see his *Western Esotericism: A Concise History*, 1–7. Similar definitions, with salient nuances and distinctions, are offered by Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (*The Western Esoteric Traditions*, 3–14), Wouter J. Hanegraaff (*Western Esotericism*, 1–11), and Arthur Versluis (*Magic and Mysticism*, 1–2). Kocku von Stuckrad argues for a discursive approach in contrast to an essentialist definition (*Western Esotericism*, 5–11).

In *Esotericism and the Academy*, Wouter Hanegraaff critiques various approaches to conceptualizing esotericism as a phenomenon (352–67). Arguing against an intellectual "eclecticism" which encourages researchers to filter and exclude historical information and phenomena according to their post-Enlightenment biases, Hanegraaff states that "The point is . . . to provide an antidote against the view that historians should select their materials on the basis of normative, doctrinal, or philosophical judgments. More specifically, the point is to be aware of how the hegemonic discourses of modernity are themselves built upon earlier mnemohistorical narratives . . . rather than on critical and evenhanded attention to all the available evidence." (378) This point is highly applicable in the field of Masonic studies as well, in which the studies of myth, symbolism, and esotericism have been regarded as nearly immaterial to the formal study of the subject, despite the central role they occupy in Masonic culture. Arguably, such "eclectic" filtering is one reason why the contents of much of the early Masonic literature—such as the 1734 *Dissertation* and other items from the 1720s and 1730s—have left so little trace in the academic scholarship of early Freemasonry. This largely subconscious process may also account for the perception, recently expressed by academic historian Róbert Péter, that certain texts "seem to have been deliberately ignored by masonic historians." (See Péter, "General Introduction," xii.) Perhaps it is not that the texts are ignored deliberately; rather, they may be automatically regarded as irrelevant because they express ideas that are understood as incompatible with normative post-Enlightenment scholarly narratives. This topic is deserving of further exploration as historiographical approaches to Masonic studies continue to develop.

It is possible for a particular object of study characterized as "esoteric" to refer to any combination of these three distinct categories. This taxonomy is introduced here because it allows for a more precise discussion of the esoteric content of the 1734 *Dissertation*. The *Dissertation* strongly communicates both *social-exclusionary* (first taxon) and *textual-interpretive* (second taxon) concepts of esotericism. These two types of esoteric content are expressed concisely in one section of the sermon:

> Fourthly and lastly, the Lodge ought to Resemble Heaven in the most perfect secrecy of all their Transactions.
>
> > All that we know of those Above,
> > Is that they Sing, and that they Love:, . . . says the Poet.
>
> In like manner, all that is known of the Lodge should be that in our meetings we are Good natur'd and Chearfull, & love one another. The Essential Secrets of masonry indeed are Everlastingly Safe, & never can be Revealed abroad, because they can never be understood by such as are unenlightened[.] They are not what I am Speaking of, but I mean the Common private transactions of the Lodge, as if a Brother in necessity ask Relief, if an Erring Brother be Reprouv'd & Censur'd, if possibly little differences and animositys should happen to arise, such things as theys should never be heard of abroad. Learn to be Silent: a Babler is an abomination. Remember the fate of that unhappy man Strong indeed in body, but weak in mind; he discover'd his Secret to his Wife & thus his Ennemys came to the Knowledge of them, this prouv'd his destruction & eternal dishonnour, for he is now as a Brother never named among Masons.[55]

55 C.W. Moore MS, lines 204–223. The cited poet is Edmund Waller.

This is a lengthy statement of esotericism of the first type, with second-taxon esotericism noted along the way. The first-taxon *social-exclusionary* function is demonstrated by the *Dissertation* author's view that the basic transactions of a lodge be kept secret from outsiders. His reference here is not to the ritual or secret lore of the Craft, but to the necessity of its social privacy in the maintenance of dignity and propriety. If a Mason were to be sanctioned for misbehavior, or a member were in need of charitable aid, this information was to be kept within the confines of the lodge. And, invoking the Biblical example of Samson, the orator makes clear that violation of the *social-exclusionary* boundary will result in a loss of insider status—that is, the social exclusion of the violator.[56]

Sandwiched within this exhortation to maintain first-taxon privacy is an impressive statement of second-taxon esotericism:

56 The symbolic use of Samson as a disgraced member of the Freemasons is not unique to the *Dissertation*, but is found in numerous contemporary Masonic writings. Samson is mentioned in two songs in Anderson's *Constitutions* of 1723. The second has: "But Samson's Blot / Is ne'er forgot / He blabb'd his Secrets to his Wife / that sold Her Husband / who at last pull'd down / The House on all in Gaza Town." (91) A footnote in the 1738 second edition of Anderson's *Constitutions* also expresses the blotting out of Samson's name: "The *Tradition* of old Masons is, that a learned *Phenician* called SANCONIATHON was the Architect, or *Grand Master*, of this curious *Temple*: And that SAMSON had been too credulous and effeminate in revealing his Secrets to his Wife, who betray'd him into the Hands of the *Philistins*; for which he is not numbered among the antient *Masons*. But no more of this." (*New Book*, 10) Samson also figures in Masonic lore apart from his later exclusion for violating his oath of secrecy. In 1754, Alexander Slade recorded what purports to be a primitive Masonic practice of using a sign derived from the Biblical story of Samson drinking from a miraculous spring in Judges 15:19. Because this legend took place before Samson became disgraced by revealing secrets, it was still celebrated by Masons. (*The Free Mason Examin'd*, 21)

> The Essential Secrets of masonry indeed are Everlastingly Safe, & never can be Revealed abroad [i.e., outside the Lodge—Ed.], because they can never be understood by such as are unenlightened.[57]

It is also extremely interesting to note that the author of the *Dissertation* is fully aware of the distinction, because he immediately follows this by a statement that "They [the Essential Secrets] are not what I am Speaking of,"[58] contrasting them against the transactions of the lodge.

Although it is commonly suggested by modern interpreters that in early Freemasonry the only secrets were the modes of recognition, this statement shows that the "Essential Secrets" were conceived of as something only attainable by initiates through special understanding—a *textual-interpretive* layer of meaning. This higher order of Masonic secret was considered secure from exposure in a way that the password, grips, rituals, and catechisms were not. Relative to this more rarefied level of Masonic secrecy, scholar Henrik Bogdan remarks that "The construct of tradition in masonic societies thus centres on the transmission of something that in part is not communicable . . . ."[59] While verbally non-communicable, this insight is passed through the experience of initiation and subsequent reflection thereon.

> The experience of going through the various degrees can . . . be interpreted as an internalisation of the esoteric form of thought in the sense that the degrees ritually correspond to the stages of a transmutative process leading to the realisation of *gnosis*—the non-communicable experi-

57 C.W. Moore MS, lines 210–212.

58 Ibid., lines 212–213.

59 Bogdan, "The Sociology of the Construct of Tradition and Import of Legitimacy in Freemasonry," 220.

ence of the self and its relation with the godhead.[60]

In Bogdan's perspective, the external rituals of initiation correspond with a transpersonal process of a "realisation" that is essentially non-communicable and perhaps mystical.

However, as much as these secrets that "can never be understood by such as are unenlightened" might be conceived as a form of personal enlightenment, they could also be approached a second way within the dimensions of the *textual-interpretive* taxon. A large portion of the text is concerned with the location of esoteric Masonic meaning within the Bible, such as the claim that:

> …the learned annotators & Interpreters of Scriptures, however penetrating & clear they have been in other dark places, yet none of them been of ye lodge, they Could not possibly Conceive the apostle's true meaning in this mysterious part of his Epistle & I have therefore given the World an [otherwise] uninteligible Explication.[61]

Allusions to the belief that Freemasons could obtain special insight that allowed them to understand esoteric meanings in Biblical passages can be found in other early Masonic literature: the *Dissertation* is not the only example of this concept. The location of esoteric lessons in the Bible is a significant feature in the literature of early Grand Lodge era Freemasonry, although this aspect of Masonic culture has not been adequately developed in prior scholarship. While the authors of the Old Charges of prior centuries freely interwove Masonic legends and Biblical stories, by the end of the seventeenth century, there were signs of the existence of esoteric readings of the Bible itself. In 1689 and 1691, Robert Kirk recorded that the Mason Word was like a "Rabbin-

60 Bogdan, "The Sociology of the Construct of Tradition," 221.

61 C.W. Moore MS, lines 34–39.

ical mystery" or "Rabbinical Tradition, in way of comment on Jachin and Boaz, the two Pillars erected in Solomon's Temple."[62]

Many examples illustrate how early eighteenth-century Masons probed the Holy Bible in search of Masonic insight. Anderson's *Constitutions* features numerous instances of this, including the examination of the Hebrew text of several passages in order to shed light on Masonic ideas.[63] The earliest published grand lodge era initiation prayer, found in Pennell's *Constitutions* of 1730, entreats the divine Architect to "*endue him* [the initiate] *with Divine Wisdom, that he may, with the Secrets of* Masonry*, be able to unfold the Mysteries of Godliness and Christianity*."[64] The discovery or unfolding of latent Masonic teachings is alluded to in the chorus of "The Master's Song" by Anderson.[65]

In 1737, the first Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of England, Rev. John "Orator" Henley, taught that "The Book of God, his Will, and his Works, are Patterns of sacred Masonry: They are full of sublime Mysteries, not imparted to all."[66] In a striking parallel to the theme of the 1734 American *Dissertation*, Henley also connected this esoteric approach to certain language used by Paul: "St. *Paul* distinguishes between Milk and strong Meat, in his Instructions; and between Principles and Perfection . . . ."[67]

62 Knoop & Jones, *Genesis of Freemasonry*, 88. If accurate, this account could refer to Masonic adoption of typological interpretations similar to popular works like Samuel Lee's *Orbis Miraculum* (1659) and John Bunyan's *Solomon's Temple Spiritualiz'd* (1688). Typological or symbolic interpretations of the Bible reached their apogee in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

63 Anderson, *Constitutions* (1723), 10, 11–12.

64 Pennell, *The Constitutions of the Free Masons*, 59. See the discussion of this prayer in Christopher B. Murphy's article, "Assessing Authentic Lodge Culture," in this volume.

65 Anderson, *Constitutions* (1723), 105.

66 Henley, *Select Orations on Various Subjects*, 3.

67 Ibid., 8.

Examples like these demonstrate the interest that early Grand Lodge era Freemasons had in specifically *textual-interpretive* approaches. Through symbolism and the experience of initiation, they often appear to have believed that it was possible to gain special insight into sacred matters.

THE MASONS' FACULTY

The "original language" which "none but masons are capable of learning" is an important theme within early grand lodge era Freemasonry, and surely antedates it. Although, superficially, it is easy to understand in simple terms as referring to the modes of recognition and the signs of distress, a close examination of the early Masonic writings reveals a more extensive concept: the notion of a sophisticated primordial language of symbol. The 1721 dedication to *Long Livers* is written in a heavily symbolic style that Samber calls "the true Language of the Brotherhood," a special form of communication that is found in both "the holy Scriptures" and "an uninterrupted Tradition."[68] The Biblical reference is to the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9), wherein God disrupts the construction by confusing the language of the builders. In internal versions of this story, Freemasons connected their special language to the original language or suggested a vestigial connection to it. In other words, the Masons taught that they had special access to some form of this earlier, purer language. This may be viewed as a transgressive theme because the legendary stonemasons sought to mitigate the divine intervention of the confusion of languages by preserving their former means of communication—and the knowledge that would otherwise be lost—through either the preservation of a special "faculty" or the creation of a new means to facilitate that

68 [Samber], *Long Livers*, iii.

communication. This is reinforced in Anderson's *Constitutions* of 1723, where the Traditional History states that "the *Science* and *Art* were both transmitted to latter Ages and distant Climes, notwithstanding the Confusion of Languages or Dialects," which helped "give Rise to the Masons Faculty and ancient universal Practice of conversing without speaking."[69] In the 1738 second edition, Anderson added a note: "This old *Tradition* is believed firmly by the old *Fraternity*."[70] A lecture delivered most likely by Provincial Grand Master Joseph Laycock on March 8, 1735/6, at the constitution of a new lodge in Gateshead in the north of England, features additional details that are impressively vivid:

> Their Design and End in building this prodigious Tower (as we suppose) was not only for establishing a Name, but also to fix a Centre of Unity and Correspondence, to which they might, upon any Occasion, repair, least for Want of some such Remarkable, they might become dispersed over the Face of the Earth, and by that means loose that Intercourse with one another which they wanted to preserve. But their Designs running counter to the Purpose of the Allmighty, what they endeavoured to avoid, he miraculously brought about by the Confusion of Tongues, which gave Origin to the MASONS antient Practice of conversing without speaking, by means of proper *Signals* expressive of their Ideas. And the Professors of the *Royal* Art, knowing the Necessity they were under of dispersing, in order to populate the Earth, established several mysterious Ceremonials among themselves, to serve as Principles of Unity, and to distinguish one anothers by in Parts remote.[71]

69 Anderson, *Constitutions* (1723), 5.

70 Anderson, *New Book of Constitutions* (1738), 6.

71 Smith, *The Book M*, 1:19.

A 1754 exposure further expounds on the idea, saying that after the confusion of tongues, Belus [Nimrod] "assembled another Grand Lodge, and instructed his Men how to converse by Signs, *&c*. whereby they were capable of executing his future Designs."[72] A note on this passage reads: "This was what gave Rise to what is called Free-Masonry, being fifty-three Years after the first Assembly, or Lodge held. This Tradition is firmly believed."[73] A footnote later in the same source relates that this skill degenerated over time, from a technique that could convey ideas down to simple communication modes such as a distress sign:

> The Masons Faculty, and ancient, universal Practice of conversing, and knowing each other at a Distance, by Signs, &c is supposed to be greatly lost, by Reason there is so very little remaining, but however trifling the Remains, a Mason is oblig'd to answer all lawful Signs, therefore, if he be at work on the Top of a Building, he is obliged to come down, and answer, if such a Sign be given.[74]

In the Leland-Locke Pseudepigraphon—first published in 1753, and commonly referred to as the Leland MS, although scholars believe that no such manuscript ever existed—it is also clear that this language has extended capability and esoteric connotations.[75] In the "ancient" part of the text, the Masons are described as concealing many things, including "the Wey

72 Slade, *The Free Mason Examin'd*, 10.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., 20.

75 Although the Leland MS was a pseudepigraphon, it was accepted throughout in the eighteenth century as authentic, and Freemasons took no issue with its description of their Craft. A copy of it, in fact, follows the *Dissertation Upon Masonry* in the C.W. Moore MS. Sadly, this portion of the manuscript does not appear to have been photographed.

of Wynnynge the Facultye of Abrac, the Skylle of becommynge gude and parfyghte wythouten the Holpynges of Fere, and Hope; and the Universelle Longage of Maconnes."[76] The notes written in the name of John Locke explain this as follows:

> An universal language has been much desired by the learned of many ages. 'Tis a thing rather to be wished than hop'd for. But it seems the MASONS pretend to have such a thing among them. If it be true, I guess it must be something like the language of the PANTOMIMES among the ancient Romans, who are said to be able, by signs only, to express and deliver any oration intelligibly to men of all nations, and languages. A man who has all these arts and advantages, is certainly in a condition to be envied: but we are told, that this is not the case with all MASONS; for tho' these arts are among them, and all have a right and an opportunity to know them, yet some want capacity, and others industry to acquire them.[77]

Clearly, more than modes of recognition are intended here, since 1) this language is supposed to express ideas, and 2) it is said that some Masons lack the sophistication and dedication to learn the language, which is hardly an issue with the modes of recognition and signs of distress. The idea of a secret, information-bearing language understandable only by some Freemasons is difficult to classify, because it is apparent that it existed mostly in fiction. It is, of course, *exclusionary* per the first taxon, but the implication of these accounts is that prior to the degenerated versions (one-dimensional signs of recognition and distress) it was possible to convey complex information through the Masons' Faculty. Since there is no need to conceal information that is commonplace or

76 Anon., "An Antient MS on Free Masonry," 420.

77 Ibid.

unprivileged, the implication is that the content of such messages was esoteric itself and would therefore belong to the *interpretive* function, or the second taxon of Masonic esotericism.

THE TRIGRADAL SYSTEM

The orator's identification of Paul's vision of "the third heaven or paradice" with "the third & Chief degree of Masonry" is noteworthy, as it demonstrates that the so-called trigradal system of initiation—which, according to some, originated in the 1720s in London—was apparently well-established in this American lodge, and potentially others like it, by 1734. Although many scholars would suggest that the trigradal division was less than a decade old in 1734, the *Dissertation* gives no indication of the division into three degrees being new. First, of course, the speaker offers his ideas "by way of Instruction to younger Bretheren" (sic), which indicates that the lodge had members who were not recent initiates. This impression is reinforced by the document's position that "a particular Explication of these things to the well Instructed Mason would be needless." Thus, there are two classes of hearers: the younger and less instructed, and the older and well-instructed. It is reasonable to proposed that there may be a number of years involved in the distinction between these two categories within the lodge. If it is true that a segment of the original hearers of the sermon had been Masons for several years—long enough to remember the transition from two degrees into three—then the narrative's central conceit of Saint Paul experiencing the third degree many centuries prior would have met only with amusement. Instead, the lodge of which the *Dissertation* orator is a part seems to believe the trigradal division to be ancient.

This is a very notable feature, and one which poses some

challenge to the consensus position that the trigradal division originated in London around 1725 and spread from there. The mechanism of its propagation into the lodges remains a problem for scholars, as the premier Grand Lodge's authority was still in its nascent stages, and it does not seem to have had the prerogative to directly command lodges in (and beyond) England to so fundamentally revamp the structure of their degrees. In light of these circumstances, the propagation—and, if we are impartial, perhaps even the origination—of the trigradal system remain an intriguing problem. The *Dissertation* provides an important point of reference for the question.

MASONIC INSTRUCTION

The *Dissertation* reveals that Masonic instruction was offered in this Colonial lodge. As mentioned above, the "well instructed" members of the lodge are explicitly identified as a privileged group who have special understanding. The implication is clear both here and elsewhere in the *Dissertation* that there are both beginning and advanced Freemasons, and this distinction was defined not just by seniority but by the amount of instruction received. The orator says that it would be "needless" to provide an explanation "to the well instructed Mason." This indicates that, at least in the American lodge which received this address, Masonic instruction was taking place. This seems to contradict the popular view that there was no instruction in the lodges at this time beyond the ceremonies themselves. The implication of the orator's statement here is not necessarily that the brethren would already have understood the specific points being made in his speech, but the wording here and the overall nature of the *Dissertation* suggests that Freemasons in this lodge had received sufficient instruction to hear and contemplate his address.

This strongly suggests that a rather complex interpretive function was part of lodge culture within American Freemasonry in the 1730s. This should not surprise us, as it is well-documented that English lodges very often featured educational content. In addition to lectures offered on various outside subjects, orations were delivered by willing brothers explaining the meanings—as they perceived them—of Masonic symbolism, lore, and ritual.[78] Within this wider context, *A Dissertation upon Masonry* contributes to our overall understanding of intellectual activity within the lodges of English and American Masonry of the early Grand Lodge era.

THE LODGE AS A FORM OF PARADISE

Architectural historian James Curl describes how, when Masons gathered in spaces such private halls and taverns, they were actually striving to meet in an imaginary, symbolic space:

> . . . Freemasons had to set up their emblems and images in rooms acquired for meetings and so the décor was of a temporary nature, indicating perhaps a Lodge of the imagination, with objects and signs placed in certain positions as to aid in remembering ritual, secrets, and the Mason Word. [. . .]
>
> It is also clear from Masonic rituals and catechisms that there was an Ideal Lodge, a symbolic building, that Freemasons shared in imagination.[79]

78 See Trevor Stewart's Prestonian Lecture, "English Speculative Freemasonry: Some Possible Origins, Themes and Developments." Stewart often refers to this intellectual activity as "Masonic cerebration," and credits to it the expanding number of degrees.

79 James Stevens Curl, *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry*, 53.

The imaginal space of the Ideal Lodge often seems to have possessed an aspect of transcending time and referring, paradoxically, to various interconnected sacred contexts: Eden, the Temple of Solomon, and the celestial lodge. The assertion that a Masonic Lodge was a sacred space that may be viewed by initiates as a "type"[80] or representation of Eden was a key idea of eighteenth-century Masonic philosophy, in a manner parallel to the conception of the Lodge as a representation of Solomon's Temple.

Typological interpretation of scripture has existed since ancient times and is found in Biblical literature itself. It is defined as "the interpretation of persons, events, and institutions in light of their resemblance or correspondence to other persons, events, and institutions, within a common framework of sacred history."[81] Allegorical interpretations of this kind were a primary feature of kabbalistic literature in Jewish thought. In Christianity, this method of interpretation flourished after the Reformation.

Poetic interpretations of this kind may be understood as "merely" figurative or as revealing esoteric meanings intentionally concealed within an ancient text. In the *Dissertation*, both the identification of Paul's ascent to the third heaven with the third degree of Masonic initiation and the identification of the Lodge with paradise are examples of typology. The identification of the Lodge as a *typos* of paradise or heaven is, of course, still visible in Freemasonry today in the idea that the tiled Lodge represents or "reflects" the heavenly "celestial lodge."[82]

Typological interpretation fell out of favor after Enlightenment rationalism became the dominant mode of Western thought, perhaps because the connections that most typological

80 In the sense of "An imperfect symbol or anticipation of something." (OED).

81 Soulen & Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 203.

82 See Eyer, "The Lodge Primordial and Eternal," forthcoming.

readings make are considered historically impossible.

The typological readings of the *Dissertation*, however, predate that sense of disconnection, and the comparisons that it draws take place within an internally consistent world view: namely, that of the Traditional History of the Order. Freemasonry's Traditional History provides that "common framework of sacred history" needed to infer the kinds of connections that the *Dissertation* draws.

The Masonic literature, lectures, sermons, and songs of the early Grand Lodge era frequently hint at the mythical identification of the Lodge with paradise. This is rooted in the traditional concept of the secrets of Masonry being communicated to Adam and passed down through his sons.[83]

Although they were usually private rooms above taverns in reality, the environs used for Masonic ritual were ritualistically transformed into surrogates for sacred spaces. This sacred space has been viewed as representing Eden, the Jerusalem Temple, and Heaven—not necessarily from a mutually exclusive perspective, but in a simultaneous and multivalent way. It is reasonable to consider that the purpose behind such an identification was not so much that the brethren would "believe" those connections intellectually, but that the activity of the ceremony within the symbolic locus of a timeless and sacred space was intended to have a positive influence upon the affect of the candidate.

Scholar Olaf Kuhlke treats this subject in his 2008 study, *Geographies of Freemasonry: Ritual, Lodge, and City in Spatial Context*: "By symbolically transporting the candidate and the participating lodge members back to a time when a sacred place was built… the lodge temporarily becomes a sacred place and time where the presence of God can be felt."[84] Considered from

83 Anderson, *Constitutions* (1723), 1–2, 75, 80; *New Book* (1738), 1–3.

84 Kuhlke, *Geographies of Freemasonry*, 64. Speaking of the experience of the third degree specifically, Kuhlke argues that it

this perspective, the *Dissertation's* language seems less fanciful and more natural. The performative experience of the Master Mason degree becomes mythopoetically charged with meanings that temporarily conflate the individual candidate and his circumstances with the character of Hiram and the circumstances surrounding his fate and the so-called lost word.[85] Consequent to this experience, it would be fitting for the newly "raised" Master Mason to view his participation in the Lodge as an anticipatory *typos* of heavenly perfection.

An early Masonic lecture featured in *The Book M, or Masonry Triumphant* (1736) explicitly connects Masonic enlightenment with celestial life, and includes poetic descriptions of the experience of the heavenly brethren, whose bliss is "continually enlarged" within the celestial lodge:

> IN all our Pursuits of Knowledge we make Truth in the Particular the Summit of our Aim; for when we have attain'd

"should impress upon the candidate the notion that the Masonic Temple is a sacred place, and the times when meetings are held, are to be regarded as sacred time." That the main activity of both the second and third degrees of Freemasonry are dramatically set in the Solomonic era is explicit.

85 Jan Snoek, an academic scholar who has greatly advanced the study of the evolution of Masonic ritual, holds that in the early Grand Lodge era, the candidate's experience of the Hiramic drama was intended to communicate a mystical or symbolic identification of Hiram with the Supreme Architect. Snoek argues that "the candidate is identified with a hero, who turns out to be (a) deity. In that way, the ritual *Unio Mystica* between the candidate and the divinity is expressed and realized." See "The Evolution of the Hiramic Legend," pages 34 & 42. Snoek's understanding of the early version of the Craft working is not inconsistent with the thrust of the 1734 *Dissertation*. The *Dissertation's* comparison of the third degree to Paul's heavenly vision, though dissonant through a later, more rationalist, understanding of Masonry, accords well with the implications that Snoek's research presents.

to that we can go no further: Towards this glorious Height our Natures, if not depress'd, are continually soaring. Then open wide your mental Eyes, ye generous Fellows, let Truth's bright Radiations enter. He is most knowing that knows most of Truth, and he is wise, who acts according to it. Was it not Truth that form'd the wide Expanse of Nature, and rang'd it in such Beauty and Harmony? In fine, it was Truth that gave every Being to be what it is.

Great is the God of Truth, the only Fountain of true living Pleasures, unfading Joys, and never ending Bliss, such only worth the Quest, of all that know and love themselves, such only do as set a true Value on their own immortal Souls, and are not content to lye grovelling in the present transitory Pleasures, which the corporeal Life affords, but look farther, even into Eternity, and by that Means in some Measure prelibate those Soul enchanting Joys that surround the ineffable Throne of Heaven.

The Universe is that great Volumn to which we alone Confine our Studies, in which, each Line, each Letter, speaks the Almighty Architect, and in sweet Melody declare his Excellence. These are the Studies in which those immortal Youths that compose the Celestial Hierarchy, those Divine Philosophers that tread the Azure Empirean Plains of Heaven, and stand in Presence of their great Original, continually are exercised: By them the infinite Perfections of the Deity are continually traced thro' all the Footsteps of his Handy work, both in the upper and inferiour Natures; thus do they happy live in an eternal Increase of Knowledge; the more they know of him the greater is their Love, the more they love the greater their Fruition: Thus are their Minds and Bliss continually enlarged, and each new Entity by them discovered, or a new Scene of Nature open laid, proves a sweet Instrument for their skilful Touches

> to sound melodiously their Author's Praise. *These glorious Patterns let us Masters strive to imitate, that even, while confined to this narrow and gloomy Prison of our Bodies, we may open to ourselves a Kind of Heaven here below, till that dear Time, when (having finished well our Parts in this Lodge militant) we are called to that triumphant one above*.[86]

It is valuable to note that the celestial lodge is here characterized as the "Lodge triumphant" in contrast to the "Lodge militant" on earth. This direct parallel to ecclesiastical language is employed in order to illustrate the idea of a vital connection between the earthly brethren and those "those Divine Philosophers that tread the Azure Empirean Plains of Heaven, and stand in Presence of their great Original." This connection is dynamic enough, when Freemasonry is properly practiced, to allow earthly Masons to "imitate" the heavenly lodge "even while confined" to physical bodies, so that they might "open to [themselves] a Kind of Heaven here below." This Masonic version of the *communio sanctorum* is conceptually consonant with the main thrust of the 1734 *Dissertation* as given in the American Colonies. It also makes a subtle appearance in a speech given by Martin Clare before the premier Grand Lodge of England on December 11, 1735:[87]

86 Smith, *The Book M*, 1:11–12, emphasis added.

87 The speech had originally been given some months earlier at the lodge later known as the Grand Stewards' Lodge. As recently demonstrated, over 87 percent of the speech is actually paraphrased from an essay by John Locke. The sections discussed in this paper are original to Clare. For complete details about the intertextuality of Clare's speech and Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, see Shawn Eyer, "The Inward Civility of the Mind: The 1735 Grand Oration of Martin Clare, F.R.S." and Martin Clare, "A Discourse on Good Behaviour for the Guidance of the Members of the Craft," Shawn Eyer, Ed. *Philalethes: The Journal of Masonic Research and Letters* 69 (2016): 64–67.

> SHALL it then ever be said, that those, who by Choice are distinguished from the Gross of Mankind, and who voluntarily have enrolled their Names in this most Ancient and Honourable Society, are so far wanting to themselves and the Order they profess, as to neglect its Rules? Shall those who are banded and cemented together by the strictest Ties of Amity, omit the Practice of Forbearance and Brotherly Love? Or shall the Passions of those Persons ever become ungovernable, who assemble purposely to subdue them?
>
> WE are, let it be considered, the Successors of those who reared a Structure to the Honour of Almighty God, the Grand Architect of the World, which for Wisdom, Strength and Beauty, hath never yet had any Parallel. We are intimately related to those great and worthy Spirits, who have ever made it their Business and their Aim to improve themselves, and to inform Mankind. Let us then copy their Example, that we may also hope to obtain a Share in their Praise.[88]

Clare's perspective is that Freemasons are "distinguished from the Gross of Mankind" by their voluntary participation in an Order in which they become "the Successors of those who reared a Structure to the Honour of Almighty God," whereby they become "intimately related to those great and worthy Spirits, who have ever made it their Business and their Aim to improve themselves, and to inform Mankind."

By referring to the legendary Masonic builders of Solomon's Temple as "Spirits" who continue to grow and develop as well as act to benefit humanity, Clare's speech of 1735 parallels the

88 The first surviving printing of Clare's speech is from J. Scott, *The Pocket Companion and History of Free-Masons* (1754), 281–91. The section cited is from pages 289–90. For an accessible transcript, see Martin Clare, "A Discourse on Good Behaviour for the Guidance of the Members of the Craft," 67.

speech found in *The Book M* (which likely originated around the same time) that states that the heavenly Freemasons "live in an eternal Increase of Knowledge" and that "their Minds and Bliss [are] continually enlarged."

Alexander Piatigorsky observed that other material found in early Masonic literature and rhetoric "highlights the elite *religious status* of Masons, describing them as if they not only represented the supreme force among all the world's religions but also enjoyed a special and highly privileged relationship with God."[89] Rather than attributing soteriological significance to this "special" status, it was instead was tied to a privileged kind of knowledge or wisdom about certain "mysteries." This is illustrated by the prayer at initiation, of which the earliest printed form, which appeared in 1730, reads:

> And we beseech thee, O LORD GOD, to bless this our present Undertaking, and grant that this, our new Brother, may dedicate his Life to thy Service, and be a true and faithful Brother among us, *endue him with Divine Wisdom, that he may, with the Secrets of* Masonry*, be able to unfold the Mysteries of Godliness and Christianity.*[90]

Taken in wider context, the 1734 *Dissertation* seems less and less anomalous. While many of its themes are obscure and spiritual, they were not at all out of place in the Masonic literature of the time period.

Moreover, although the idea of transforming a part of one's

89 Alexander Piatigorsky, *Who's Afraid of Freemasons?*, 114. Piatigorsky's immediate reference was to the 1728 oration of Edward Oakley, using language cited from the March 1, 1721 Masonic essay of Eugenius Philalethes, Jr. (that is, Robert Samber).

90 John Pennell, *Constitutions*, 59. For a more detailed discussion of this passage, see Christopher B. Murphy's "Assessing Authentic Lodge Culture" in this collection.

community temporarily into paradise may strike the modern reader as nonsensical, it was a concept that enjoyed significant currency in the American Colonies, even outside of Freemasonry. The setting of the New World inspired ideas of a radical break from history and a new beginning for humanity. The aim of restoring paradise was a notable aspect of religious thought in New England, including Puritan beliefs. As Zachary Hutchins points out, among American Masons this took two forms: the symbolic identification of the Lodge with Eden, and the "hopes that Freemasons could collectively transform the American continent into a prelapsarian paradise."[91]

A clear expression of this is found in the language of a charge given by John Eliot at Boston on June 24, 1783, for the installation of John Warren as Grand Master. Eliot went beyond the idea of the Lodge as Paradise and poetically expressed the concept that Masonic virtues, practiced universally, could *return the world to an prelapsarian state*:

> If men practiced the divine social virtues—The curse would no longer devour the earth—Eden would yield forth her blooms and spices.—[Th]ere would be no prickling briar around the lilies and roses of this beautiful garden.—The sons and daughters of men might repose under the bowers of paradise, and angels of light and love would look down not with pity, but with joy upon us.[92]

And, as late as 1795, a Masonic sermon by a highly influential American Masonic cleric and educator emphatically describes, "without a metaphor, in what respects a Lodge on earth, duly regulated according to its professed principles, grounded in scripture,

91 See Hutchins, *Inventing Eden*, 238.

92 C. Gore, *An Oration: Delivered at the Chapel, in Boston* (Boston: William Green, 1783), 17.

may be compared to Heaven, or the Lodge of Paradise above."[93] In fact, as shown below, this sermon demonstrates literary dependence upon the 1734 *Dissertation*.

Evidence of Circulation and Literary Influence

Since *A Dissertation upon Masonry* was not published until its discovery by Charles Whitlock Moore in 1849, it might be supposed that it had no influence on Masonic thought in the eighteenth century beyond its 1734 context. However, the internal evidence of the C.W. Moore MS itself indicates that the *Dissertation* was in at least limited circulation decades after its original delivery. This is clear, because the MS also contains a transcription of the Leland-Locke Pseudepigraphon (or Leland MS), which first appeared in 1753.[94] Discounting the unlikely possibility that the C.W. Moore MS is somehow the earliest specimen of the Leland-Locke item, one concludes that the C.W. Moore MS was copied after 1753. This means that the *Dissertation*, though unpublished, was being actively preserved two decades after it was composed. Although this may indicate only an autograph (now lost) and the C.W. Moore MS copy, there is reason to believe that further pen-and-paper distribution of the *Dissertation* took place.

This is proven by a close review of the text of a sermon given in 1795 at St. Peter's Church, Philadelphia, by Rev. Dr. William

93 William Smith, *The Works of William Smith, D.D.*, 2:82.

94 C.W. Moore recorded that the manuscript he discovered contained the text of the Leland MS "appended" to the *Dissertation*; see Moore, "The First Masonic Discourse," 289. The manuscript is not currently available for inspection. Photographic images of the manuscript strongly support the accuracy of Moore's statement, as the final four lines of page 12 contain material that pertains to the Leland-Locke and has no bearing on the *Dissertation*.

Smith.[95] Smith (1727–1803) was an extremely prominent thought leader in the early Republic. In addition to his clerical duties as an Anglican priest, he was a visionary thinker in the world of higher education. He served as the first Provost of the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania), and founded two important liberal arts colleges in Maryland: Washington College in Chestertown, and St. John's College in Annapolis.[96]

He was also a devoted Freemason, and served as the Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania (Moderns) in 1755, and then as the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania (Antients) from 1778 to 1782. Additionally, he was directly involved in the establishment of the Grand Lodge of Maryland.

Smith was sixty-nine years old when he gave his last Masonic sermon at the June 24, 1795, communication of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. He took as his text Ecclesiastes 2:21, understood as the words of King Solomon: "There is a MAN, whose Labour is in Wisdom, and in Knowledge, and in Equity." Near the beginning, the founding father expresses his reluctance to deliver yet another Masonic address:

> *The emphatical meaning of the word Man, as used by our master, Solomon, in the Philosophical and Masonic sense of this text, I need not explain in this splendid assembly of Masons. It is understood within the walls of the congregated Lodge*, and carried abroad into the world by every true Brother, in the Grand Lodge of the heart.
>
> *As such a Man*, I would strive to acquit myself on this occasion. Forty years will this day have finished the long period, since I first addressed, from this pulpit, a Grand

95 Smith, *The Works of William Smith*, 2:73–88.

96 An excellent account of Smith's influence in American higher education may be found in Charlotte Fletcher's *Cato's Mirania: A Life of Provost Smith*.

> Communication of Brethren, with our great fellow-labourer, the venerable Franklin, at their head; and frequent have been the calls upon me for similar addresses, during the important æra that hath since succeeded.
>
> It was with reluctance, therefore, that I engaged in this day's duty, knowing that I had little new to offer; and that little must be offered, with a great decay of former vigour, both of body and mind.
>
> But the unanimous request of the Brotherhood operates as a command on me, once more to undertake what I trust they will accept as a final labour among them; squared by the Rules of Wisdom and Equity, and mensurated by the best Compass of my Knowledge; taking as a model not only the labours of Solomon, but of one greater than Solomon, so far as they can be imitated, namely, the Great Architect of the world; all whose labours are in the Infinite Perfection of Wisdom and Knowledge and Equity.[97]

Smith immediately directs the hearer's attention to the word "Man," which he interprets in a technical Masonic sense—a meaning he regards as esoteric (in the *social-exclusionary* mode). This directly parallels the rhetoric of the 1734 *Dissertation*:

> When I was a child, says he, I understood as a Child . . . but when I became *a man (an Expression Emphatically Significant among us)* when I became a man then . . . I put away Childish things.[98]
>
> I knew a man, Say's he, meaning himself, above 14 years ago whither in the body, or out of the Body I cannot tell, but I knew such a one taken up into the third heaven into paradice

97 Smith, *The Works of William Smith*, 2:73–74. Emphasis added.

98 C.W. Moore MS, lines 22–26. Emphasis added.

> where he heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for any Man to utter, of such a one will I Glory. *Freemasons know very well why the apostle calls himself a Man*….[99]

Both of these eighteenth-century Masonic texts use the word *man* in a special, technical sense that has to do with the Masonic status of an individual rather than his biological status as a human being. In 1734, the term is described as "Emphatically Significant among us." In 1795, it has an "emphatical meaning," in the context of a "Philosophical and Masonic sense" which "is understood within the walls of the congregated Lodge."

Smith then specifies that he (like, of course, his listeners) is "such a Man." Then, he connects the concept to St. Paul in terms nearly identical to those found in the C.W. Moore MS.:

> I knew a Man, says he (still using the word Man in the same emphatical sense, well understood by Masons, as it was used by Solomon in the text)—"I knew a man in Christ, above fourteen years ago—(whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth), but I knew such a man caught up to the third Heaven, into Paradise, where he heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a Man to utter—Of such an one will I glory." St. Paul speaks here of his own Trance and Vision, when converted and rapt up into the third Heavens . . . .[100]

The earlier 1734 version of this, already cited, follows:

> I knew a man, Say's he, meaning himself, above 14 years ago whither in the body, or out of the Body I cannot tell, but I knew such a one taken up into the third heaven into

99 Ibid., lines 40–45. Emphasis added.

100 Smith, *The Works of William Smith*, 2:81. Emphasis added.

> paradice where he heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for any Man to utter, of such a one will I Glory. Freemasons know very well why the apostle calls himself a Man, they know why he could not tell whether, when he was made a mason he was in the Body or out of the Body, and what is meant by the body, they know also that by the third heaven or paradice is figur'd out the third & Chief degree of Masonry, & they are very well acquainted with those unspeakable words, which is not lawful for a man to utter, as a particular Explication of these things to the well Instructed Mason would be needless, so to the World it is needless and Improper.[101]

The intertextuality between the 1734 and 1795 sermons is demonstrated further by the language used in equating the Masonic lodge to heaven. William Smith's version continues:

> Returning, therefore, to the words of St. Paul—"I knew a Man, whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell!" and comparing earthly things with heavenly—The Brethren here assembled, well understand what is meant by the emphatical words—"Man and Body;" and not being able to tell, in certain situations of the Initiated, whether they "were in the Body or out of the Body;" and also what is meant by their being taken up to the third Heaven, or Paradise of their Art and Craft; and hearing the words, which it is not lawful to utter, but to the true Brethren; to those who have the Signs and Tokens of fellowship, and the language of Brotherly-love!
>
> But passing over all those mysterious expressions (both in the scripture original, and in the copy brought down to the practice of the Lodge); I shall consider, in language

101 C.W. Moore MS, lines 40–53.

> familiar to all, and without a metaphor, in what respects a Lodge on earth, duly regulated according to its professed principles, grounded in scripture, may be compared to Heaven, or the Lodge of Paradise above.[102]

As seen above, Smith's sermon parallels the 1734 *Dissertation* once more by asserting a technical, "emphatical," meaning to the word "Body." Furthermore, the third degree of Masonry is compared to Paul's ascent to the third heaven. And, finally, Smith echoes the idea that Freemasons might possess traditions that parallel—but are not mere duplications of—the "mysterious expressions" of Biblical texts. As noted earlier, the 1734 sermon claims that only Freemasons can understand such passages fully:

> . . . the learned annotators & Interpreters of Scriptures, however penetrating & clear they have been in other dark places, yet none of them been of ye lodge, they Could not possibly Conceive the apostle's true meaning in this mysterious part of his Epistle . . . .[103]

In Smith's language, the "mysterious expressions" exist "both in the scripture original, and in the copy brought down to the practice of the Lodge." Smith's concept appears to be that the practices enacted "within the walls of the congregated Lodge" represent a "copy" that corresponds to a Biblical "original" that has been transmitted or "brought down" through the traditions of the Craft. As notable as Smith's presentation of this idea is, perhaps the fact that he regarded his listeners—the officers and brethren of the Grand Lodge—as familiar with this rhetoric is just as, or even more, remarkable. Smith is not speaking here as one introducing a new idea to his audience, but as one employing the internal parlance of an institution.

102 Smith, *The Works of William Smith,* 2:82.

103 C.W. Moore MS, lines 34–38.

Rev. Smith's sermon continues to delineate three ways in which the Lodge resembles "Heaven, or the Lodge of Paradise above." The first reason pertains to the perfection of the Order's design:

> And first the Lodge below may resemble the Lodge above, by the excellency of its Constitution and Government, which are so devised, that although the Will of the Master, like the Will of God, is a Law to the whole Family; yet He can neither Will nor Do any thing but what is according to Wisdom, and Knowledge, and Justice, and Right Reason; and therefore the obedience of his Lodge is cheerful and unrestrained. For the peculiar light of his profession assists him in discerning what is best for his Houshold or Lodge; and that Love, which is the lasting cement of his Family, disposes all the Brethren to act with One Mind and Heart. But not so hath it been among mankind in general. For although they have busied themselves in all ages, in the framing civil Constitutions, and plans of Government; in forming, and reforming them, in pulling down and building up—yet still their labours have been too much in vain—because they have daubed with untempered mortar, and their corner-stones, have not been laid (as in the Lodge, and according to our text,) in Wisdom and in Knowledge and in Equity of Rights![104]

This tracks closely with the first reason given in the 1734 *Dissertation*:

> 1s[t] In the first place, the Lodge may be likened to heaven on account of the Excellency & perfection of its Constitution and Government: it is an absolute Monarchy, in which the Will of the Sovereign is a law, but so wisely Contrived & Es-

104 Smith, *The Works of William Smith,* 2:82–83.

> tablished, that the Sovereign can never will nor Command any thing which is not exactly agreable to the nature & reason of things, & by the Subjects Received and Submitted to with Pleasure; the pecul[i]ar light of Masonry Enabling to discern what is best with Regard to the Lodge, & that love which is the lasting cement of our Society, disposes all the Brethren to agree to it with an unanimity not elsewhere to be practised. Men have in all ages busied themselfs in forming and Reforming Commonwealths, Monarchies, Aristocrasies & many other Species of Governments; but the Experience of all ages has shewn that all their forms were Imperfect, either unable to Support themselfs against outward violence, or dying of their inward deceases, hence we see no State or Constitutions have subsisted many Centuries without Violent convulsions[,] Revolutions & Changes: this has been the Fate of the Syrians, Persian & Grecian Monarchies, the Commonwealths of Sparta, Rome & Athens: but the Constitution of the Kingdom of Masons hapily Tempered, preserves to this day, its ancient and original vigour, and will doubtless last till time itself shall be Swallowed up in the boundless ocean of Eternity.[105]

In the first part of the second reason Smith offers in order to compare the Lodge to Heaven is the uniform prevalence of brotherly love that characterizes both sacred spaces, while a common set of signs unites people of many languages:

> Secondly, the Lodge may be said to resemble Heaven, on account of the universal Good Will which reigns therein, among the Brethren, although of different languages and countries. It is not necessary to have the labour of learning various tongues in the earthly, more than in the

105 C.W. Moore MS, lines 57–81.

heavenly Lodge. And although, at the building of Babel, the universal language of the workmen was confounded and divided, because they were divided in their hearts and workmanship; yet among the true Master-builders who have since remained at unity among themselves, there is but one language and the same tokens, which are known and understood by all in every country and clime; namely, the language of Love, and the tokens of Good Will![106]

The 1734 *Dissertation* stresses the same rationale:

> 2[d] I[n] the Second place the apostel might Justly liken the Lodge to a Heaven, on account of the universal understanding which subsistes therein betwixt brethren of vastly different Languages and Countrys. as in that place of Bliss we are not to suppose that none can converse or be understood but such as are able to speak English, Hebrew or any other particular national languages, so in the universal lodge the Beauty and benefit of masonry would be Extremely faint and narrow if Brethren of all nations, could not with pleasure know[,] converse with and understand each others Tongues. When God Confounded the Common language of mankind, at the Building of Babel, the language of Masons Remain'd unaffected and Intire; it is true the Building ceas'd because the labourers who were the Bulk of the people could neither understand the master nor one another, therefore the Brethren separated and dispersed with the Rest; but in whatever country they settled and propagated the Royal art, they carefully preserved the original language, which continues among their successors to this day: a language which none but masons are capable of learning, a happiness

106 Smith, *The Works of William Smith,* 2:83.

which none but Brethren are capable of enjoying.[107]

Smith's second reason continues, highlighting the classless nature of the Lodge and Heaven, wherein all distinctions of wealth are disregarded:

> In the Lodge, as in Heaven, there are no distinctions of Rich and Poor, but all meet on the Level, and act on the Square; distinguished only by their different Skill in their Craft; and a zealous desire, both in the Lodge and out of the same, to promote all that is praise-worthy among the Brethren, and tending to enlighten and bless mankind, by an amiable condescension, and a benevolent freedom, which pervades and actuates every member, and reigns undisturbed in the Lodge.[108]

This closely mirrors the 1734 *Dissertation's* third comparison of the Masonic Lodge and the heavenly realms:

> 3ly In the third place, the apostle might liken the lodge to a heaven on account of that human[,] Kind & fraternal treatment of each other which is therein used among the Brethren. The great, the Riche, or noble of the world, appear in the lodge without pride or Haughtines, an amiable Condescention, a Charming Benevolent freedom brightens their evry actions, those of the lower Rank of life, however they may behave abroad are in the lodge, found modest & peaceable[,] free from petulance or Sauciness to Superiours, gentle and loving to each other: In Heaven and in the lodge only are to be Seen humility without contempt, and dignity without Envy.[109]

107 C.W. Moore MS, lines 82–103.
108 Smith, *The Works of William Smith,* 2:83–84.
109 C.W. Moore MS, lines 104–115.

Smith's third reason to correlate the Lodge with Heaven is that both welcome men of all nationalities, creeds, and vocations:

> In the third place, the Lodge may be said to resemble Heaven, because in Heaven, without respect of persons, they who fear God and work righteousness are received into happiness; so likewise the Lodge opens its bosom to receive good men (who come with the proper signs and tokens) of all Nations, Sects and Professions; and entertains them with sincere Love and Friendship—even as the quiet harbour of some hospitable port, opens its arms to the tempest-driven voyager, and offers him that security and rest, which, on the common ocean, he sought to enjoy in vain![110]

This strongly reflects the 1734 *Disseration's* fourth reason:

> 4thly In the fourth place I would observe that the apostle might Justly Enough liken the lodge to a Heaven on this account, that it is been Composed of good people of all Religions, Sects[,] perswasions & Denominations, of all nations and countrys, & I might add of all Generations of men in all ages since the Beginning of mankind. the Scriptures says, that with Regard to heaven, Verily God is no Respecter of persons but in ev'ry nation those who fear him and work Rightiousness shall be Saved, in like manner in the Lodge no narrow distinctions are made or Ragarded, but good & worthy men who are so in practise & the general conduct of their lives, of whatsoever Speculatife believe or opinion have a Right to desire & if they apply in a proper manner & from true & laudable motives, will doubtless obtain admission: the lodge stands Reddy with an open

110 Smith, *The Works of William Smith,* 2:84.

> Bosom to Receave them all with sincere love & affectionate friendship: thus the Calm & quiet heaven of some hospitable port Extends its open arms to the wandring Tempest driven Voyager, affording him a Security & Repose which in a Restless ocean, (common life) is not to be met with.[111]

In his 1795 sermon, Smith continues to treat the theme of the "Paradisaical Lodge," guarded by the "*celestial Tyler*," using rhetoric that is profoundly beautiful:

> Thus instructed, and thus professing the principles and doctrines of the true Lodge, remember the fate of that first of Masons and of Men, our great progenitor Adam, who being found unworthy of the bliss which he enjoyed in his Paradisaical Lodge, was driven from thence by order of the omnipotent GRAND-MASTER; and a *celestial Tyler*, a mighty Cherubim, with a Sword of fire (mark the emblem)[112] was placed to guard the door, and forbid his future entrance.
>
> Since that time, the Lodges of his posterity have fallen from primitive order and perfection. Yet still they will be a resemblance of the Paradisaical lodge, and even of Heaven itself, so far as you labour earnestly in the exercise of Love, that great badge of your profession.[113]

Taken as a whole, these parallels reveal that, beyond question, William Smith's 1795 sermon demonstrates a direct literary dependency upon the 1734 *Dissertation*. Much of the structure and phraseology is so close that it seems that a copy of the 1734 ser-

111 C.W. Moore MS, lines 116–135.

112 This is a reference of the *flamberge* or wavy sword traditionally carried by the Tyler (or Tiler), an officer whose duty was to delineate the design of the lodge upon the floor of the meeting space and then to guard the lodge from outside during its meeting.

113 Smith, *The Works of William Smith,* 2:86–87.

mon must have been in William Smith's possession in the 1790s. Smith alludes to his borrowing elsewhere in the same sermon in a footnote: "The Masonic reader will readily allow, that in different Masonic Sermons, even by different Authors, repetitions and copying from each other, so far as concerns the mysteries of the Craft, Metaphors, Allusions, &c. are unavoidable."[114]

There is some evidence that Smith had a copy of the *Dissertation* as early as seventeen years prior, because he appears to quote from it directly in the sermon he gave at Christ Church in Philadelphia on December 28, 1778 (with, incidentally, George Washington in attendance):

> Learn when to be silent, and when to speak; for "a Babbler is an Abomination, because of the *unspeakable Words*, which a *Man* may not utter," but in a proper Place.[115]

The 1734 *Dissertation* has parallel language:

> Learn to be Silent: a Babler is an abomination.[116]
>
> . . . unspeakable words which it is not lawfull for any Man to utter . . . .[117]

In 1791, Smith was selected to lead a committee to develop an address to congratulate George Washington on his election to the presidency on behalf of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. The January 2, 1792, letter, which is reported to have been delivered personally by Rev. Smith, includes the Masonic concept of the "terrestrial Lodge" as an earthly counterpart of the "Celestial

114 Smith, *The Works of William Smith,* 2:75n.
115 Smith, *Ahiman Rezon Abridged and Digested*, 154.
116 C.W. Moore MS, line 218, paraphrasing 2 Corinthians 12:4.
117 Ibid., lines 50–51.

Lodge . . . where Cherubim and Seraphim, wafting our Congratulations from Earth to Heaven, shall hail you Brother."[118]

Interestingly, the 1734 *Dissertation* may be the first literary example of the theme that the harmony of the tiled Lodge reflects the harmony of the heavenly Temple. William Smith was influenced by this idea, and expressed it in his prayer given at the opening of the first communication of the Antients Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania after the interruption caused by the American Revolution, December 20, 1779:

> In thy Name we assemble, and in thy Name we desire to proceed in all our Doings. Let the Wisdom of thy blessed Son, through the Grace and Goodness of the Holy Ghost, so subdue every discordant Passion within us, so harmonize and enrich our Hearts with a Portion of thine own *Love* and *Goodness*, that the Lodge at this Time may be a sincere, though humble, Copy of that *Order* and *Beauty* and *Unity*, which reign forever before thy heavenly Throne.[119]

Adapted into a non-sectarian form, this verbiage was recommended as the opening prayer for American lodges in the Baltimore Convention's proposed national system of work and lectures.[120] It was later adopted as an official opening prayer within many American jurisdictions. It is not the contention of this paper that the 1734 *Dissertation upon Masonry* represents the original creation of any of its themes. However, its apparent influence upon William Smith, who in turn influenced American Masonic ritual practice, is of tremendous interest.

118 See Horace Wemyss Smith, *Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith,* 2:347–48.

119 Smith, *Ahiman Rezon Abridged and Digested*, 165.

120 Charles Whitlock Moore & S.W.B. Carnegy, *The Masonic Trestle-Board*, 13.

Conclusion

The 1734 *Dissertation Upon Masonry* is an exceptionally rare and important document whose obscurity until now is deeply regrettable. The *Dissertation* is, as noted earlier, the oldest extant American lodge oration, and the third oldest surviving Masonic oration in the world. Moreover, unlike the earlier two orations of Drake and Oakley, which have come down to us only in published forms which suggest the possibility or probability of an editorial stage between their initial oral delivery and their incarnations as printed artifacts, the transcript of the 1734 American oration was never intended to be published. It is clearly a lecture that could only be given in a tiled lodge, transcribed unedited. That means that it is *the oldest surviving unmediated record of the private educational speech of speculative Freemasonry anywhere.*

As such, its contents are of profound interest to any student of early Grand Lodge era Masonic thought. A systematic analysis of the *Dissertation* demonstrates that all of its features are consistent with other very early Masonic literature.[121] The special value of the 1734 sermon is that it unites these themes into a narrative that provides a more vital perspective on how early Freemasons may have received and understood various threads of tradition.

The mystical nature of the oration is scarcely deniable, and what it has to say about the role of instruction within the lodges during this period of Masonic history is worth emphasizing. The fact that the *Dissertation* is essentially focused on the Master Mason's degree is relevant to all scholars who investigate the origins and progress of the so-called trigradal system of Masonic degrees. The 1734 sermon's overt claims of esoteric tradition illuminate contemporary Masonic writings, and demonstrate that second-taxon esotericism was acknowledged within the early

121 See the author's "A *Dissertation* Upon Masonry, 1734, with Commentary and Notes."

Grand Lodge era—negating the more common finding that the secrets of Masonry were only the various modes of recognition during that phase of development.

The religious character of the *Dissertation* is deeply informative. First, its content—like most Masonic ritual and literature—is diametrically opposite what would be expected if the narrative that Freemasonry was a school of Deism were generally accurate. David Hackett's observation that "Most Saint John's sermons stressed polite Christianity, yet [the 1734] oration suggests a divergence between it and Freemasonry"[122] is worthy of comment. To be certain, there is nothing either impolite or impious in the *Dissertation*. It recommends a moral standard for Masonic society which would be the paragon of any community of faith: it stresses honesty, forgiveness, tolerance, inclusion, and charity. Furthermore, it is a deeply reverential sermon, arcing at times into the mystical and concluding with a stirring and sincere benediction. Its only conceivable point of divergence from what Hackett terms "polite" religion is its teaching—far from unique in early Masonic literature—that Masonic initiates have some special insight into "dark" passages of scripture that others are unable to understand. Hackett found that in this text, "not only did Freemasonry predate Christianity but the Christian story veiled Freemasonry's deeper meaning"—specifically, that "Paul spoke to his fellow Masons in code through the Christian story."[123] He characterizes this and other early religious traits of Freemasonry as heterodoxical.[124]

This aspect of the *Dissertation* clearly displays the deep concern that many Freemasons of the early Grand Lodge era had with locating concealed truth within sacred traditions such as Biblical texts. Although such an approach may strike a rationalist

122 Hackett, *That Religion in Which All Men Agree*, 51.

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid., 52.

reader in modern times as anachronistic and inherently invalid, this mode of interpretation has a long pedigree in mystical literature. It bears a strong resemblance to traditional kabbalistic hermeneutics, and appears to be very consonant with Christian typological interpretation.[125] These techniques allow readers to discern (or develop) esoteric knowledge "concealed" within a text—and there is a long, perfectly orthodox, tradition of engaging in such forms of exegesis.

Despite its obvious historical value, *A Dissertation upon Masonry* has been almost completely ignored since its discovery in 1849, which points to methodological blind spots that can be deleterious to our ultimate task of understanding early Freemasonry. Although academic historians Steven Bullock and David Hackett realized the *Dissertation*'s critical value, the contents of the oration have been all but disregarded by Masonic historians. It has therefore failed to leave a trace in historical narratives about the Freemasonry of the 1730s. Few were aware of it, and of those who did mention it, its existence was merely noted: what it had to say was not of interest, despite it being the only surviving example of American Masonic interpretation from the 1730s, the very decade that saw the Craft officially established in the Colonies.

Now that the importance of this document is becoming acknowledged, we may begin to better understand the American Freemasonry that thrived in the days of Henry Price and Benjamin Franklin. The 1734 *Dissertation* offers thought-provoking insight into the culture of early American Freemasonry, and cannot be legitimately excluded from any future historical analysis of the Craft in the American Colonies during the early Grand Lodge era.

125 For a summary of the kabbalistic "four-fold" method of interpretation (which allows for allegorical and "secret" readings), see Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 429–37. For background on Christian typological interpretation, see the section labeled "The Lodge as a Form of Paradise" in this paper.

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