



Grand Collège des Rites Écossais

SUPRÊME CONSEIL DU 33 DEGRÉ
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When Moses brought down from Mount Sinai the Tablets of the Law which the God of Israel had given him after he had engraved them, he was pursuing a shared objective among all human communities in the course of History: an ability to carry out the sacralised reaffirmation of the identity of his people. Such reaffirmation of identity strengthens the feeling of belonging to the community which does it; it provides it with the framework of its future and it highlights, de facto, the differences which the group believes to be incompatible with other human communities.

Masonic communities are no exception to those anthropological processes. They also edict their own Tablets of the Law which they call *Landmarks* and which they put up as so many borders, the intangibility of which is confronted, however, with the frailty of every human construction.

Every mason knows that one of the basic *landmarks* of English freemasonry, which claims to be the guardian of what it calls regularity, is the intangibility of the masculinity of its brethren. Nevertheless, it seems that the United Grand Lodge of England became mixed when one of its brethren who had become a sister was allowed to stay in his/her Lodge. It also seems that women who become men might be allowed to become brethren...

Other *landmarks* cannot withstand an analysis of their historical evolution any better than the gender question.

Such is the case of the three great Lights of English Freemasonry: the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square and the Compasses which, as one must understand, only result from an artificial Trinitarian construction.

If the Square and the Compasses have been present since the origins of freemasonry, and there is no freemasonry without the Square, the Compasses or the Square + the Compasses, the same is not true of the Bible.

The first Lodge of stonemasons was documented in Strasburg in 1015, and in 1245 there was an assembly of five grand Lodges. Yet the Bible could not be present in the Lodge before the Reformation and Luther (1483-1546), who was excommunicated in 1521 or even before the printing press and Gutenberg (1394-1468), for obvious technical and theological reasons. In effect, canon 14 of the Council of Toulouse (1299) forbade Catholics to own or to read the Bible and that prohibition was confirmed by the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563).

Before Gutenberg, bibles, which were extremely rare, were reserved to regular or secular clerics who exercised a Magisterium in the Catholic Church.

Therefore, the Bible could not make its entrance in the Lodges before at least the 16th century, as it is confirmed by the Melrose manuscript (1581) which mentions a book (?) on which the masons take their oath. Its presence was to be confirmed by the Dumfries manuscript (1700) i.e. over 7 centuries after the first recorded Lodge.

The same applies to the Great Architect of the Universe. A belief in a revealed God is obvious in those Lodges whose members have taken their oath in His Name since 1015. But the name of the Great Architect of the Universe first occurs in the Constitutions of Anderson in 1723. Therefore it is a very late addition to the original Freemasonry and a consequence of the evolution of ideas following the contributions of the Enlightenment.

What, in this context, is masonic regularity if its criteria only concern the communities which claim them in the sole period when they claim them?

In my view, it only rests – institutionally and historically – on the duration of a period of documented masonic practice. The Grand Collège des Rites Écossais has been at the origins of Ecosism since Etienne Morin (1717-1771), since the establishment of the Rite of Perfection in Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) in 1764, since the aggregation to the Grand Orient of France of the Scottish Rite of Heredom and of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite (1804).

Which criteria of regularity are called for in the times in which we currently live?

With no ambition to creating such criteria, with a close attention to the evolution of ideas and “good conduct”, the Grand Collège des Rites Ecossais leaves its Lodges free to have or not to have mixed-gender labours, in the context of the demanding practice of a genuine Scottish Rite initiatory progression. It recognises de facto the significant and signifying Jurisdictions, in the respect of their initiatory specificities within a Scottish Rite sphere made universal by the practise of those same Scottish Rite rituals.

It ought to be noted that Moses broke the first Tablets of the Law, although they had been written by the hand of God, because the Hebrew people were worshipping the golden calf. Moses later carved the second Tablets of the Law himself. One is to understand here that divine, therefore perfect Tablets of the Law cannot be suitable for men and to realise that it was absolutely necessary to create a second set of Tablets which had become human, hence imperfect and thus accessible to the people.

This observation should incite all Scottish Rite masons to meditate on this ternary sequence: *Tablets of the Law – Golden Calf – Tablets of the Law* and to analyse, further to that meditation, the practicality and the frailty of the *landmarks*.

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