

A CONCISE STUDY OF FREEMASONRY IN FRANCE

by Dr. Claude Harrison Harris

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Grand Lodges of the United States have been for more than a century asking the question whether or not French Masonry is regular. One should point out that up to 1849 the Grand Orient of France contained no doctrine concerning a belief in God, following the non-sectarian view expressed by Dr. Anderson's Constitutions. Yet, the Grand Orient of France was recognized by almost every Grand Lodge in the world at that time.

In 1849 the Grand Orient of France declared that "Freemasonry has for its principles the existence of Deity and the immorality of the soul", taking a firm hold in its international Masonic recognition; but with abolishing the office of Grand Master, and substituting a governmental council in 1871, the Grand Orient again started a departure from the form of Freemasonry.

The greatest and most important change in its constitution came in 1877 when it declared that the basis of Freemasonry was "absolute liberty of conscience and the solidarity of Humanity." All of the rituals were amended to omit the reference to God, and within three years the display of the Bible was made optional within the lodges. The United Grand Lodge of England severed relations with the Grand Orient as did most of the Grand Lodges throughout the United States which had not already done so. This divided the Grand Orient which consequently resulted in the formation of the Grand Lodge of France.

Historically, one cannot prove that there was a requisite for any religious belief in the pre-Grand Lodge era. We do know that no such requirements were given in the 1723 Constitutions and it was not until 1815 that a belief in God was written into the constitutions of the newly formed United Grand Lodge of England. The Bible was not introduced into the ritual until about 1760 and its status was not clearly defined. It was called both a part of the furniture and a Great Light of the lodge.

With this historical evidence, the Grand Orient still maintains its decision of 1877 introduced by Brother Frederick Desmons, a French Protestant Minister; not because of atheistic inclinations, but to counteract the allegation of the Roman Catholic Church that Freemasonry was teaching a religion "encroaching upon the functions of the Church."

With the foundation of the National Independent Regular Grand Lodge on November 5th, 1913, we may now put these uncertainties aside, as with no doubt, this Grand Lodge follows in the strictest since all the Landmarks of Masonry.

It will not be my intention this morning to give a complete historical sketch of French Masonry, as time would not permit. Instead, I will present a clear and precise chronological account specifically dealing with misinformation about the development of Freemasonry in France. This will help simplify the very complicated growth of Freemasonry in a country of rebellions, religious condemnations and governmental turmoil.

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- 1649 Henriette of France, daughter of Henry IV, after the decapitation of Charles I of England, takes refuge at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France joined by a number of Scottish Nobles. Irish and Scottish nobles become Freemasons.
- 1689 Jacques II Stuart, after his capitulation at Limerick, takes refuge in France at the castle of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Jacobite lodges appear (catholic masonry).
- 1710 Birth at Grenoble of Martinez de Pasqually.
- 1717 (June 24) Foundation of the *Grand Lodge of London*, (protestant masonry) which patronized the first speculative lodges in French territory.
- 1723 Publication of *Anderson's Constitutions*.
- 1725 The *Grand Lodge of London* becomes the *Grand Lodge of England*.
- 1726 The date which is considered that Freemasonry entered France. Foundation of a lodge in Paris by Lord Derwentwater called *Louis d'Argent*.
- 1731 Initiation at La Haye of the Duke of Lorraine, future Emperor of Austria.
- 1735 (September 20) Installation in Paris at the Hotel de Bussy of the *Lodge d'Aubigny* under the precedence of the Duke of Richmond (protestant masonry).
- 1736 Lodges on French territory request for authorization to establish a Provincial Grand Lodge.
Charles Radcliffe, Count of Derwentwater, becomes Grand Master of the *English Grand Lodge of France*.
- 1736 (November 29) Foundation of the *Grand Lodge of Saint-Jean* at Edimbourg.
- 1738 Second edition of *Anderson's Constitutions*.
- 1738 (May 4) Condemnation of Freemasonry by the Pope Clement XII (bull *In eminenti*).
- 1741 The Baron of Hund (born in 1722, died in 1776) is received in German Templar Masonry.
- 1743 The Count of Clermont, Louis de Bourbon-Conde, grandson of Louis XIV, becomes Grand Master of the *English Grand Lodge of France* (1745-1771).
- 1750 J. B. Willermoz is received in Freemasonry at Lyon.
- 1751 Another condemnation by Pope Benoit XIV of Freemasonry.
- 1756 The *English Grand Lodge of France* revised its statutes and dropped the word, "English," from its name.

- 1758 The *Grand Lodge of France* becomes independent from England.
- 1758 Establishment in Paris by Pirlet of the *Emperors Council of Orient and Occident; Knights of the East*.
- 1761 Delivery of the patented letters from Etienne Morin for the institution of twenty-five higher degrees in America.
- 1763 Resurgence of the *Templar Rite (Strict Observance)* by the Baron de Hund.
- 1767 The Grand Lodge becomes restricted by the French government.
- 1771 Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin is received in the order by Martinez de Pasqually.
- 1771 The Duke de Chartres becomes Grand Master of the *Grand Lodge of France*.
- 1772 (August 9) Fusion of the *Emperors Council of Orient and Occident* with the *Sovereign Council* and *French Grand Lodge*.
- 1772 The *National Grand Lodge at the Orient of Paris* was proclaimed and known as the *Grand Orient of France*.
- 1776 Concord between the Scottish directories and the *Grand Orient of France*. A number of lodges stay loyal to the older *Grand Lodge of France* which was now named *Grand Lodge of Clermont*.
- 1778 Initiation of Voltaire at the *Lodge of Nine Sisters* in Paris.
- 1782 *Convention of the Strict Observance* at Wilhemsbad, with much importance given to the *Scottish Rectified Rite*.
- 1784 Death of the Count of Saint-Germain at Gottorp.
- 1786 (May 1st) Elaboration in Berlin of the Grand Constitutions regulating the 33 degrees of the *Scottish Rite*; these were attributed to Frederick II of Prussia.
- 1786 Adoption by the *Grand Orient of France* of the *French Rite* or *Modern Rite* in seven degrees.
- 1786 The *Royal Order of Scotland* chartered a Chapter at Rouen, France.
- 1789 The French Revolution started, lasting until 1797.
- 1799 By the treaty of union signed May 21, 1799, the *Grand Orient* took over all the authority of the older *Grand Lodge of France* (also named *Grand Lodge of Clermont*).
- 1801 Foundation at Charleston of the first *Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish*

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- Rite (33 degrees).*
- 1804 The Count de Grasse-Tilly founded in Paris a *Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite*.
- 1804 Creation of the *Grand Lodge of Scotland* using the *Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite*.
- 1804 Treaty between the *Supreme Council of France* and the *Grand Orient of France*. The *Grand Orient* would administer the first three degrees while the *Supreme Council* would control the 4th through 18th degrees.
- 1805 The *Grand Orient* absorbs the *Supreme Council* and creates a *Grand Directory of the Rite*. The *Supreme Council* would again take independence between 1814-1815.
- 1815 The *Rite of Misraim* entered into the *Grand Orient*.
- 1815 Belief in God was written into the English Constitutions.
- 1821 The *Supreme Council* organizes her rite. Formation of the *Central Grand Lodge of France* practicing the *Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite*.
- 1823 The *Royal Order of Scotland* unites with the *Grand Orient*.
- 1838 The *Rite of Memphis* appears in France.
- 1849 The *Grand Orient* is reorganized declaring that "Freemasonry has for its principles the existence of Deity and the immorality of the soul". Prior to this time, French masonry followed *Anderson's Constitutions*, espousing no religious doctrine.
- 1851 Louis Napoleon assumes throne as Emperor and Prince Lusien Murat was elected Grand Master of the *Grand Orient of France*.
- 1853 Formation of a civil society: the *Grand Orient* establishes its home on Cadet Street in Paris.
- 1854 Murat revises the constitutions of the *Grand Orient* becoming entirely subservient to him and the government.
- 1855 Murat invites the whole Masonic world to a Congress at Paris. Six out of the ninety Grand Lodges in existence at that time attended, *Virginia* was one.
- 1861 The *Grand Orient* refused to give the Grand Master's title to Prince Murat and named Jerome Napoleon Grand Master. The Prince Murat suspended meetings at Paris lodges and expelled members.
- 1862 (January 2) The Emperor Louis Napoleon issued a decree to the effect that the Grand Master, elected for three years, will be appointed by him, and named Marechal Magnan for the

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- position. Magnan who was not a Mason was conferred all 33 degrees in one sitting!
- 1862 Hostilities between the Marechal Magnan and the *Supreme Council* (Viennet) who did not accept the subordination in the *Grand Orient*.
- 1862 (November 12) The *Rite of Memphis* is aggregated in the *Grand Orient of France*.
- 1865 Death of the Marechal Magnan, Grand Master of the *Grand Orient of France*; he is replaced by the General Mellinet.
- 1865 (September 25) An international convention at Lausanne brings together all the *Supreme Councils*.
- 1869 The *Grand Orient* resolved that neither color, race, or religion should disqualify a candidate. This seemed to raise the Negro question and disturbed many of the Grand Lodges of the United States, breaking off relations with many.
- 1877 The *Grand Orient of France* modifies (directed by the report of the Paster Frederick Desmons), the first article of its constitution: *To the Glory of the Grand Architect of the Universe* and in lieu of a belief in God and immortality "its basis is absolute liberty of conscience and the solidarity of Humanity"
- 1877 All regular masonic ties are broken with the *Grand Orient of France*.
- 1880 Establishment of the *Scots Symbolic Grand Lodge* coming from the *Supreme Council*.
- 1884 Encyclical *Humanum Genus* of the Pope Leon XIII.
- 1894 (November 7) Anonymous commencement of the *Grand Lodge of France* by delegation of power of the *Supreme Council of France*.
- 1894 Establishment of the mixed obedience: *Le Droit Humain*.
- 1895 (May 10-12) Establishment of the Constitutions of the *Grand Lodge of France*.
- 1901 (May 29) Foundation of the *First Lodge of Adoption* for women by the *Grand Lodge of France*.
- 1904 The *Supreme Council* expresses their anonymity from the *blues lodges*; The *Supreme Council* administers only the 4th to 33rd degrees.
- 1913 (November 5) Two Lodges of the *Grand Orient of France*: *Logo Le Centre des Amis* and *Les Amis du Progres* set up an anonymous authority. Under the impulsion of Edouard de Ribeaucourt this obedience takes the name of *Grande Loge Nationale Independante et Reguliere pour la France et les Colonies Francaises*. (*The Independent and Regular/National Grand Lodge for France and the French Colonies*); the *United Grand*

- Lodge of England* immediately recognizes the new body followed by all the American Grand Lodges.
- 1922 The French Communist party restricts its members to belong to Freemasonry.
- 1940 The Vichy government disbands all secret societies.
- 1944 Freemasonry is revived in France.
- 1945 First general assembly of the *Feminine Masonic Union of France*.
- 1948 The *Independent and Regular National Grand Lodge of France* takes the title *French National Grand Lodge*.
- 1952 The *Feminine Masonic Union of France* takes the title *The Feminine Grand Lodge of France*.
- 1953 The *Grand Lodge of France* requires that the Bible be present on the altar in all its lodges.
- 1954 Constitution of the *Convention of Luxembourg* by the reunion of five regular grand lodges of continental Europe.
- 1956 The *Grand Lodge of France* adheres to the *Convention of Luxembourg* and proposes a national union of all French Grand Lodges.
- 1958 The *Grand Lodge of France* proposes to the *Grand Orient of France* and to the *French National Grand Lodge* to unify under a *National Grand Council*.
- 1959 The *Grand Lodge of France* stops relations with the *Grand Orient* because the former refused to adhere to *Anderson's Constitutions*.
- 1964 Split up within the *Grand Lodge of France*: certain brethren were recognized by the *French National Grand Lodge*.
- 1964 The *Grand Lodge of France* reestablishes relationship with the *Grand Orient of France*.
- 1965 Creation of the *Supreme Council for France* composed of brethren from the *French National Grand Lodge*. (This *Supreme Council* was promptly recognised as regular).
- 1974 End of historic conflict with the Catholic Church and Freemasonry by the issuance of the text called *document Seper* in the name of Cardinal Seper nullifying the condemnation of Freemasonry by Clement XII in 1738 and Benoit XIV in 1751.

The Grand Orient of France 23,000 members with 450 Lodges practicing the following rites: French Rite or Modern Rite; Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite; Rectified Scottish Rite.

The Grand Lodge of France 14,000 members with 300 Lodges practicing the following rites: Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite; Rectified Scottish Rite; York Rite; Emulation Rite.

The French National Grand Lodge 12,000 members with 450 Lodges practicing the following rites: Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite; Rectified Scottish Rite; York Rite; Emulation Rite; French Rite.

The Feminine Grand Lodge of France 3,000 members with 60 Lodges practicing only the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

The Droit Humain 5,000 members practicing only the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

The Rite of Memphis-Misraim 3,000 members with 6,000 members in the world

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