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### Introduction to Freemasonry

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### Historical overview of Freemasonry

Jean Théophile Désaguliers is one of the main organizers of speculative Freemasonry, whose beginning date is in 1717. He was born on March 12, 1683 in Aytré, near La Rochelle, France. His father was pastor of the small Protestant community in his village. The date of the initiation of Désaguliers is not certain, but is probably before the first assembly of the Grand Lodge of England on June 24, 1717.

The advent of speculative Freemasonry does not mean that there was an immediate break between the "Moderns" and the "Ancients". Even after 1717, operative masons were present in the Lodges. It is only gradually that modern Freemasonry gained the upper hand over the Freemasonry of the old operatives. Indeed, more and more lay people, who were not trading people, were being initiated.

They were people of the bourgeoisie, people of letters, art and science, but above all people of the nobility. Speculative Freemasonry, the "Moderns", sought the protection of the powerful. Indeed, history tells us that lodges existed long before this date. For example, James Anderson (1684-1739), who was a Protestant clergyman, was chaplain of a lodge in Scotland in 1709. In 1721 he was also chaplain of St. Paul's Lodge in London. It was there that in 1723 he ministered to the Presbyterians. Désaguliers was elected Grand Master on June 24, 1719, becoming the third Grand Master and the last commoner to become one.

The first Grand Master was Anthony Sayer (1717-1718) and the second, George Payne (1718-1719), then from 1720-1721. George Payne ordered the preservation of the archives, but an arson, lit in 1722 by Masons, destroyed all the work of G. Payne.

It is to Désaguliers that we owe most of the historical documents of the obedience since 1723. His zeal led him to develop the Fraternity and to elevate the spirit of the Order. The quality of

execution and the ceremonial of Masonic rituals have certainly played as a force of attraction for Freemasonry.

The Order held its first convent on June 24, 1717, in a London tavern, with four Lodges under the sign of the Goose and the Grill. Members of the four lodges were mostly people from high society backgrounds.

From 1721, Désaguliers helped Anderson to write the Constitutions of modern Freemasonry, at the request of the Duke of Montagu.

Initially, only the first two ranks existed (Apprentice and Followcraft). It was in 1725 that the rank of Master was adopted.

Operative Masons in London spoke of their "Old Charges", which had governed their craft for centuries. Anderson synthesized these "Old Charges", amalgamating them with other ideas drawn from various traditions, for example the "Gothic documents".

Anderson's Constitutions of 1723 resulted in the separation between speculative and operative Masons. Under the impulse of Désaguliers, the Bible, qualified as the Book of Sacred Law, replaced the old obligations on which the oaths are pronounced.

The first Constitutions, called Roberts Constitutions (editor) were submitted to the lodges on March 25, 1722 and published on January 17, 1723. The final title was entitled "The Old Constitutions belonging to the Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons". Nowadays, we speak of "English Constitutions" or "Anderson Constitutions". We can affirm that these Constitutions were marked by the thought of Désaguliers.

Désaguliers also contributed to the drafting of the first rituals. Désaguliers wanted to give a universal dimension to Freemasonry, with the notion of equality between lodges. He affirmed, from the first article of the Constitutions, the obligation for the Mason to believe in God, refusing atheism.

But Freemasonry in no way fights revealed religions. It differs from the Roman religion in that it does not impose any orthodoxy on its members. Freedom of thought, free choice, freedom to leave Freemasonry, equality between all brothers, are important facets of Freemasonry.

The invocation of the Great Architect of the Universe invites, without constraint, to rally to an idea of God. This is an apologetic position that does not deny Christianity. Tolerance is implicit and the search for universality is essential at Désaguliers.

In the Middle Ages, trades were grouped into corporations and each corporation comprised the hierarchy of Apprentices, Companions and Masters. Thus, Freemasonry feels close to the builders of cathedrals.

Indeed, one of the most venerable corporations was that of the builders of cathedrals. These are the tools of these corporations that modern Freemasonry still uses today in "symbolic" form: Compass, Square, Mallet, Chisel, Lever, Trowel, Apron, etc.). The word "Lodge" also comes from these corporations.

For the ancient Masons, the art of construction was mystically linked to the construction of the Temple of Jerusalem and to King Solomon, hence the term Royal Art to describe Masonry.

In the 17th century, Masonry spread from the British Isles to other parts of the globe. It is interesting to pin down the definition given by the Grandes Lodges of Freemasonry. For example, according to the Moroccan National Grand Lodge, it is “an initiatory and traditional Masonic Order whose essence is based on faith in God “Grand Architect of the Universe”, Fraternity and Tolerance.»

### **Definition and Principles of Freemasonry**

The « Grand Orient Du Maroc » describes the Mason: "A Mason is a peaceful Subject with regard to the Civil Powers, wherever he resides or works, and must never be involved in Plots and Conspiracies against Peace and Well-being of the Nation, nor fail in its duties towards the lower magistrates; for Masonry has always suffered from War, Bloodshed and Disorder..." (Precepts from the General Regulations of the Grand Orient of Morocco).

The Grand Lodge in Switzerland “Alpina” gives an interesting definition of Freemasonry and its principles:

Freemasonry is universal. “Freemasonry is foremost an alliance of free men of all faiths and from all social backgrounds. Based on tolerance, it is rich in this denominational and social diversity which flourishes in a common direction: that of following each one the path of improvement which is specific to him.

For this, Freemasonry provides each person who wants to work on themselves with the tools of Symbolism and Tradition. It is a school of life and a teaching of moral conduct where everyone can flourish on their own.

It is a fraternity which makes it possible to enrich each other and to respond concretely to the problems that our time poses to each of us through the multiplicity of points of view.

Modernity no longer calls for monolithic thinking, but takes into account the complexity and richness of our relationships.

It is a spiritual process, structured both as a human organization and as a path. The Masonic organization is there to ensure everyone's freedom and independence of work, while ensuring collective support. The path is made up of steps that allow you to evolve gradually without any power relationship being possible.”

*Source: <https://freimaurerei.ch/fr/principes-maconniques/>*

For Freemasonry, the biological unity of humanity presupposes the suppression of racism. From this conception emanates the desire to build a more egalitarian world.

Freemasonry is also a teaching of moral conduct. For example, during the Initiation of the layman, he will be required to be free – upright – of good morals. He will have to take several oaths throughout his Masonic journey.

According to Freemasonry, man is perfectible, but for this he must do introspection and seek the "light" to improve and make progress in Freemasonry. This improvement is done individually and collectively, thanks to the Brothers who surround him. This is why Freemasonry is a fraternity allowing joint work to move forward. This also requires a spirit of tolerance and in particular, respect for difference.

To succeed in the bet of diversity in harmony, traditional Freemasonry appeals to a superior principle which transcends material, social and religious reality: the Grand Architect of the Universe, "God", for regular Freemasons. Moreover, it is interesting to read that in the Constitutions of the Regular Grand Lodge of Belgium, the obligation of the Regular Mason to believe in God, Architect of the Universe. However, article one bis stipulates that members may interpret this divine notion according to their conscience.

Freemasonry is also a very structured organization. Indeed, Freemasons work in lodges under the auspices of Grand Lodges or Grand Orients.

Each Lodge works under the direction of a Worshipful Master, assisted by his dignitary Officers.

Freemasonry is not an elitist society. The principle of co-optation exists, but laymen can, on their own initiative, knock on the door of a Lodge to request their Initiation.

Freemasonry has its roots in Christianity, Judaism and alchemy. The roots are noticeable when the Mason practises the ritual of his Lodge. These roots appear more or less pronounced depending on the Obediences, between the "regular and the irregular", depending on the practiced rite, etc.

The Age of Enlightenment certainly influenced Masonic ideas and ideals. We realize this when we read the rituals.

Freemasonry is a spiritual approach based on the freedom of each and therefore on reciprocal tolerance. Freemasonry is therefore not a philanthropic society, since it aims foremost at the improvement of its members. This does not prevent the Lodges from having philanthropic and charitable actions.

Freemasonry is not a secret society, since it makes no mystery of its existence or its goals. Moreover, most of its symbols and rites can be found in any bookstore or on the internet. The only secret finally, which is incommunicable and which can only be felt by the Initiate, is his initiation.

It is the Freemason who must form his own understanding of what Freemasonry is. However, his Brothers can be there to help him. The Freemason must be discreet; this is the reason why the Freemason cannot divulge the names of other Freemasons during their lifetime.

Freemasonry is not an occult society or practicing occultism, but Freemasonry is esoteric. Indeed, one should not confuse occultism and esotericism. If occultism is based on practices of a magical nature, esotericism is an approach based on personal experience. It is the discovery

of the inner, personal way. It is in this that Freemasonry can claim to offer a particular way to follow which is spiritual alchemy.

Esotericism is opposed to exotericism, because the latter is an external and not an internal and personal way, in which a truth is imposed by others. The practice of rituals is essential. Indeed, if one wants to go beyond the strictly intellectual work, the experience of the practice that the rituals offer, gives the mason perspectives of understanding and enriching and personal interpretation.

### **What Freemasonry can offer initiates**

- A school of life and learning about freedom, affecting the affective (fraternity), intellectual (introspection, critical thinking, tolerance, etc.), social (life in the Lodge, charitable actions, etc.)
- It is one of the paths where self-improvement is a goal
- Freemasonry offers a diversity of opinions and encourages constructive dialogue, respect
- What unites the Freemasons is the faith in the perfectibility of each one and its possible influence on the other men.
- Justice, tolerance, charity are essential values
- Absolute freedom of conscience is an essential element

Freemasonry is therefore an essentially philanthropic, philosophical and progressive institution, has as its object the search for Truth where solidarity is not an empty word. Thus, the material and moral improvement, the intellectual and social improvement of humanity becomes a mission.

Since metaphysical conceptions are considered personal, Freemasonry refuses any dogmatic assertion. There are therefore no political or religious debates in the Lodge.

### **Why be or become a Freemason?**

According to the National Grand Lodge of Morocco, for example, it is

“To build and flourish in existence, both in reflection and action.

To live is to think and act, to design and achieve, to give and build meaning to one's life and to contribute to the positive evolution of the world around us. »

### **Importance of theological and cardinal virtues in Freemasonry**

The three theological virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity.

If these virtues are present in the Christian religion, in Freemasonry, these virtues refer to Humanism. This does not prevent these virtues from being considered as sacred in essence. Freemasonry is therefore not a religion, but a place of life where the initiate tries to "conquer his passions", to get rid of his chains, to take a step back from perceptions and beliefs, to "progress" in Freemasonry.

The four cardinal virtues are of a human nature, with a Platonic reference: Prudence, Temperance, Strength and Justice.

Thus the initiate seeks the strength to fulfil his duty as an honest man.

The Masonic Alliance is an association of free men which traces its origins to the Masonic corporations and brotherhoods of the Middle Ages. It still recognizes today as means of teaching and guidelines the prescriptions formerly in force in these corporations and preserved in various documents, in particular in what is called "Les Anciens Devoirs des Francs-Maçons de 1723" and in the rituals which have been transmitted to us.

The Freemasons recognize themselves as brothers and consider their alliance as an alliance of brothers. They also know that all men, no matter how different their talents or social position, are born with the same duties. Remembering that this truth is often overlooked in life, they therefore consider it their duty to foster and strengthen among themselves first, then among other men, feelings of brotherhood and equality.

### **Freemasonry and the importance of its social dimension**

As part of my research (doctorate in anthropology, Ballsbridge University, 2022), I was able to collect the perceptions of many Apprentices with regard to their Initiation into Freemasonry on the one hand, and on the other hand, I was able to collect the perceptions of Master Masons with at least ten years of Masonic experience concerning Freemasonry.

This survey was conducted through a questionnaire of 36 questions. This original research allowed me to highlight a number of interesting things that I will detail.

Apprentices have a very positive view of their initiation. This Initiation made a strong impression on them. Apprentices experience Freemasonry as an institution where Brotherhood is not an empty word, which means that membership in Freemasonry is very strong. Apprentices arguably have an angelic image of Freemasonry initially compared to experienced Master Masons.

However, over the years, cracks are marked concerning fraternity, the pedagogy used concerning the transmission of knowledge. Moreover, throughout the Masonic evolution, a Masonic reality appears with the conflicts in the Lodge, the search for power by some, the regret of having taken the step to enter Masonry, the dissatisfaction of the Masonic experience, etc. .

Satisfaction to be Freemason, the impressive initiation remains strong after at least 10 years of Masonic experience (280/300), i.e. a rate of 93.33%.

There are 31/300, or 10.33% of regret for entering Masonry.

My meetings with the Masonic milieu have allowed me to highlight that despite certain regrets, Masons remain members despite everything in a very large proportion, because social ties have been woven over the years.

The older ones told me that for them, Masonry was practically part of their life and that the social ties, woven in the Lodge, motivate them to continue their journey with Brothers who are at the same time friends. So, aside from the inconvenience of small conflicts, Brothers who are

not very fraternal, brothers who want to shine in Masonry, because they probably do not shine elsewhere, the friendship of the Masons is more important than the rest.

When we examine the responses of Apprentices and Master Masons, we can highlight a pedagogical problem in the transmission of knowledge. According to the Masons encountered, if the symbolism, materials and tools, the study of the Tracing Board, the rituals represent a base of knowledge to be transmitted, a problem exists concerning the pedagogical and methodological aspects related to the transmission of knowledge and Masonic values.

According to the Master Masons encountered, there are Lodges reputed to be more spiritualistic than others. On the other hand, there is no methodological standard and so Apprentices can learn better in some Lodges than in others.

Freemasons are also more attracted to this or that rite that they discover during visits to Lodges. In more detail, in the answers given, here are the most important elements:

After at least 10 years of Masonry, 269/300, or 89.66% do not regret having entered Freemasonry. Satisfaction with the Masonic evolution remains high after 10 years of Masonry. Of the remaining 31, or 10.33%, most do not want to leave Masonry because they have found Brothers there who have also become friends.

The proportion of friends in Freemasonry increases with the number of years spent in Masonry and this proportion "number of friends in Masonry and outside" is clearly different from that of Apprentices. It appears that the Master Masons have more friends in Freemasonry than elsewhere. This means that Freemasonry is an Institution that promotes fraternal friendship and the more Masons remain members, the more their social network develops within Masonry.

Satisfaction with the Masonic knowledge is dominant, but there are still 58/300 Masons who are dissatisfied.

Visits by Masons and affiliation to another Lodge tell us that Master Masons seek other masonic affinities, while Apprentices discover the Masonic world in their Lodge.

We must note that at the level of knowledge and at the level of spirituality the Master Masons respond positively with a large majority. Freemasonry therefore brings them knowledge and spirituality (298/300. After discussions with Master Masons, I conclude the following: Some Freemasons seek spirituality less than others and it should be known that some Lodges are more "spiritualist than others."

Finally, the Rite also implies more or less spirituality, such as the RSR (Rectified Scottish Rite) or the Philosophical Rite or the AASR). The search for spirituality also depends on the members of the Lodge and their aspirations.

Master Masons respond differently than Apprentices: 180/300 respond that Masons are better in morality. They explain this by the fact that they must respect the Constitutions of Anderson, that they must try to be exemplary in the Lodge as in everyday life.

290/300 of Master Masons believe that Freemasonry helps create social ties. Following the meetings, most of them told me that indeed, Freemasonry also had a sociological and even affective dimension in some older Masons.



288/300 are still motivated to remain in Freemasonry. After discussions with the Brothers met, among the 12/300, only 2 want to leave Masonry, and 10 want to become members of an irregular Lodge. The reasons given for migrating to an irregular Lodge: the friends who are there, philosophical differences.

It should be noted that the reverse also occurs: irregular Masons come knocking at the door of the Lodge, generally for the same reasons. The spirituality more present in regular Masonry is a reason to knock on the door of the Lodge.

38/300 of Master Masons thought of leaving Masonry, but in fact, most stay because of the friends present, the knowledge passed on. If there is a conflict in their Lodge, most Masons apply for membership in another Lodge, but remain in Freemasonry.

If among Apprentices, the Masonic experience is very positive (294/300), among Master Masons, the experience is less positive while remaining a strong majority (254/300). Following the meetings with the Master Masons, the main reason concerns the tensions between Brothers or the existence of conflicts in the Lodge. In the majority of cases, the conflicts are conflicts of people, of power or of different perception at the philosophical level.

Masons (281/300) believe that Masonic life can be a social refuge for old Masons.

A big difference in perception between the Apprentices and that of the Masters. Indeed, for the Master Masons (74/300), unfortunately there is no real brotherly love in all the Lodges. On the other hand, 262/300 think that in their Lodge reign peace, harmony and fraternal love. The meetings allowed me to qualify the answer: according to the Master Masons, there may be a few disruptive Brothers, but there may exist in this Lodge many very fraternal Brothers.

The race for power of certain Brothers as well as the search for honours lead one to think that the members remain men with their weaknesses.

The knowledge transmitted presents a certain chronology, on the other hand, the method to achieve it (applied pedagogy) should be improved (215/300).

Master Masons have experienced conflict in the Lodge (195/300).

Master Masons do not really want Freemasonry to be more visible in the world (34/300), which contrasts with Apprentices (292/300).

Master Masons respect the Landmarks and Constitutions of Anderson. Regular Lodges have no relationship with Irregulars, however, privately most have friendly relationships with irregular Masons, in contrast to Apprentices. Master Masons have had much more time to encounter irregular Masons in their secular life. Why? Because irregular Masons are in the majority in France and Belgium and they are much less discreet about their status as Masons.

Irregular Masons may appear in social movements, political meetings, trainings, etc. In addition, among the irregulars, there are "Brotherhood Circles" open to all Masons. In Europe, it is not forbidden for a "regular" to attend a Fraternal Circle, since it is not a Masonic Meeting.

A majority of Master Masons (188/300) have already encountered a lack of brotherly love from another Brother. Freemasonry is a noble institution with a beautiful ideal of Peace, of individual and collective progression in the Lodge, however, the members of a Lodge remain men with their passions, their qualities and their faults.