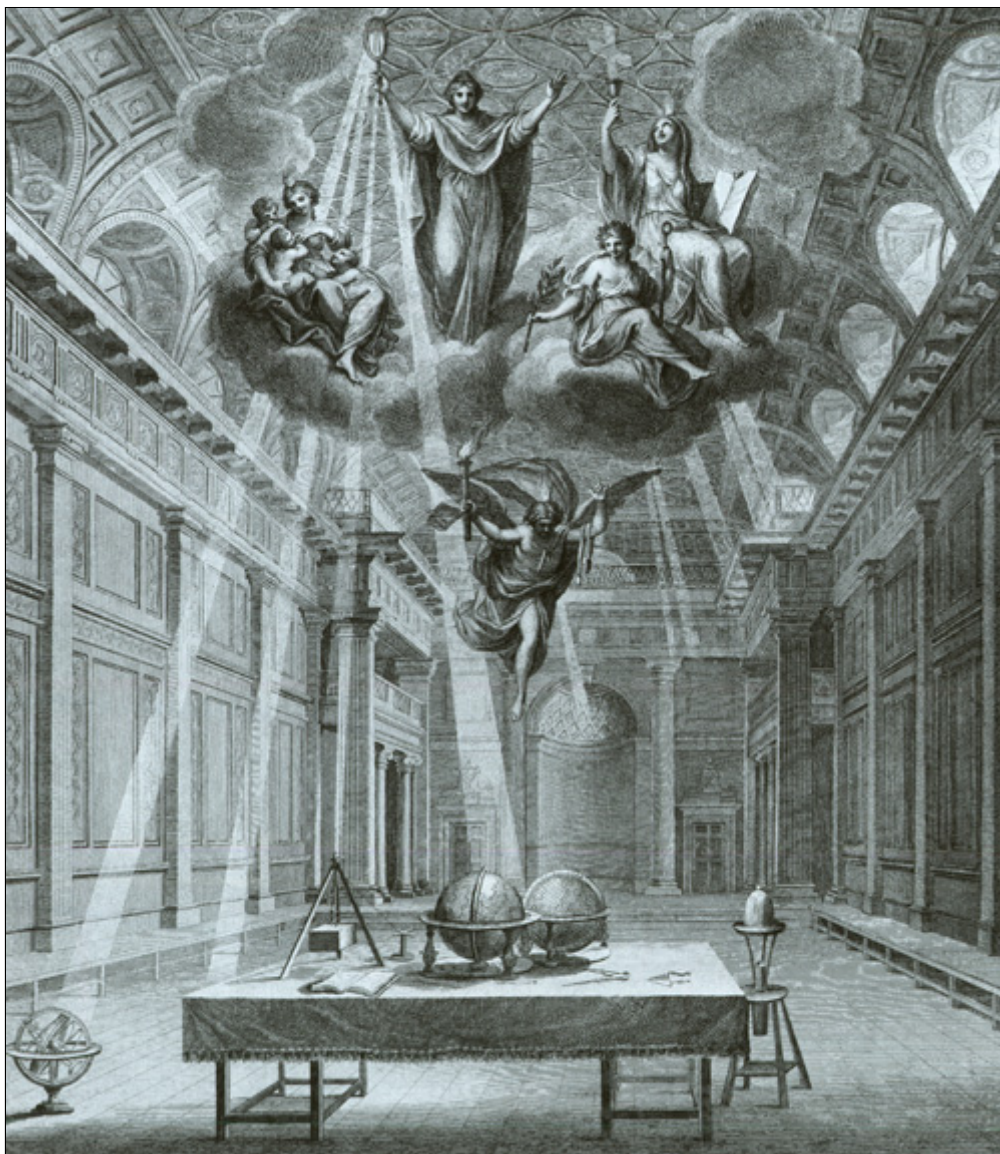


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Descendit E Cælo



Descendit e Cælo ("It descends from heaven")
 Frontispiece to *The Book of Constitutions*
 1784 edition

This was published as the frontispiece (illustration facing the title page) of the 1784 edition of James Anderson's *Constitutions of Freemasonry*. It was designed and drawn by Giovanni Battista Cipriani and Paul Sandby (brother of the famous architect). The actual engraving is by Francesco Bartolozzi and James Fittler.

An unnumbered page within the book offers this explanation of the piece:

"The architectural part represents the inside of Free-masons' Hall. The uppermost figure is Truth, holding a mirror, which reflects its rays on divers ornaments of the Hall, and also on the Globes and other Masonic Furniture and Implements of the Lodge. Truth is attended by the three Theological Virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity: under these, the Genius of Masonry, commissioned by Truth and her Attendants, is descending into the Hall, bearing a lighted Torch; she is decorated with some of the Masonic Emblems, and on her arm hangs a ribbon with a Medal pendant, with which she is to invest the Grand Master, in token of the Divine approbation of a Building sacred to Charity and Benevolence."

Despite this explanation, there is no question that the descending figure is male. Still, his identity as the Genius (guiding spirit or angel) of Masonry is obvious. He was referred to frequently in the songs of the Craft. For example, as Brother John Bancks as aptly penned in circa 1730:

Genius of Masonry! descend,
 In mystic Numbers while We sing:
 Enlarge Our Souls; the Craft defend;
 And hither all Thy Influence bring.
 With social Thoughts Our Bosoms fill,
 And give Thy Turn to every Will!

The Genius of the Craft and the figure of Uriel, angel of the Sun, played similar roles in early Masonic imagery.

A close examination of the picture reveals an interesting double meaning on the Latin title, which means "It (or he) descends from heaven." While the initial interpretation is that the angel Uriel is the one descending, one must also pay attention to the ashlar held by the tripod. The idea of the stone descending from heaven is key in Solomonic and kabbalistic symbolism.

And it is surely worth noting that Elias Ashmole—who became the second documented British Freemason in 1646—included this ancient, anonymous alchemical poem in his 1652 collection entitled *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*:

I figure now howr bessel Stone,
 Fro Heven wase sende downe to Solomon:
 By an Angele bothe goude and styllle,
 The wych wase than Christis wylle. (p. 350)

(In today's language: "I now describe how our blessed Stone from Heaven was sent down to Solomon, by an Angel more good and peaceful both than even the will of Christ was needful.")

Notes by Shawn Eyer, P.:M.:

IN VIAM
INITIATORVUM

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