

# Academia Lodge № 847

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## The Great Architect

by Shawn Eyer, P.:M.:

"Freemasonry is the science of human life. A science allegorized, it is true, in symbols, but in symbols so expressive, that he, who will, cannot fail to learn their lessons when once imparted, and so impressive, that once heard he can never forget. But, as man is confessedly a creature, and owes his existence to some great self-existent first cause, one and indivisible, no science professing to lay down rules for his conduct in life can be perfect, or even worthy of consideration, which does not provide for his relation to his Creator."

W. Bro. Samuel Lawrence  
1860

### God as Architect in Traditional Thought

In ancient times the Creator was often referred to as a "builder." Cleanthes' **Hymn to Zeus** uses the term φύσεως ἀρχηγέ, "originator of nature." (48.2) Other classical sources use the term δημιουργός, "Craftsman" as a divine epithet. (Plato, *Timaeus* 40c, *Republic* 530a; *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.9; Iamblichus, *Theology of Arithmetic* 5.24) These writings were extremely influential during the Renaissance period which preceded the appearance of the Craft.

In Hebraic thought, ideas of the Supreme Being as a cosmic architect are also found. For example, in the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom narrates her version of the creation:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old.

I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

...

When He prepared the heavens, I was there: when He set a compass upon the face of the depth. (Proverbs 8.22–3, 27)

The actual term "The Great Architect of the Universe" may be first found Masonically in the 1723 *Constitutions* of Rev. James Anderson. Some scholars believe that Anderson may have obtained the phrase from John Calvin (1509–1564), the well-known French Protestant writer. In *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), Calvin often describes God as "the Architect of the Universe." (that is, in the original Latin, *mundi opificem*).

Scholar Tobias Churton points out another source for the term, more closely connected to a Masonic milieu. A 1656 book titled *Astronomical Tables First Invented by George Hartgill* by Timothy and John Gadbury is addressed to Elias Ashmole (a Freemason) and wishes upon him "the safeguard of the Great Architect of Heaven and Earth."

One historian, Dr. Margaret C. Jacob, generally characterizes the Masonic use of the term "Great Architect of the Universe" as "Newtonian." For example, she refers to "the God of Newtonian science, the Grand Architect, as He was called by the freemasons." (*Origins of Freemasonry*, p. 24) Elsewhere, she says that the early Masonic lodges "worshipped the Great Architect, the god of the new science" (*Practical Matter*, p. 23) and "allowed men of many different faiths to express a more general belief in the God of the Newtonian order." (*Practical Matter*, p. 24) But this may be too much to attach to a concept—God as Architect—that existed in various forms from ancient times. Indeed, the literary and ritualistic evidence of early Freemasonry demonstrates more affinity with traditional mythic language than a new scientific paradigm; there is no reason to conclude that this term was really a "scientific" alternative to religious language or a deist circumlocution.

## A Divine Architect, A Divine Plan

In terms of the Solomonic tradition that forms the basis of Freemasonry's legends, the reference to God as the Great Architect refers to the tradition that David was inspired with the plans for the Temple that Solomon built, and that Hiram was inspired with the design for the two pillars that dominated the porch of the Temple. Earlier, Moses had been inspired with the design of the tabernacle, and Bezaleel with the design of the Ark. In all of these cases, the earthly architects' only job was to translate the divine pattern into material reality. This pattern was understood as primordial and supernal. For example, in the Book of Wisdom, Solomon says, "You commanded me to build a Temple on your holy mountain, and an altar in the city where your Presence is, **a copy [μίμημα] of the sacred tabernacle which you prepared from the very first.**" (9.8) Many ancient writings refer to this celestial

Temple (Jerusalem Talmud Berachot 4.5; Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 12b, Menachot 29a; Ben Sirach 24.8–10).

In Freemasonry this concept is known as the Supreme Grand Lodge or the Celestial Lodge Above, a "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." There, God as the Great Architect presides just as an earthly Master presides over the visible lodge. The brethren in the lodge are charged at every meeting to emulate those who serve in the Celestial Lodge:

"Grant that the sublime principles of Freemasonry may so subdue every discordant passion within us... that the Lodge at this time may humbly reflect that order and beauty which reign forever before Thy throne."  
(opening prayer)

The symbol in American Masonry that is most closely associated with this teaching is the Trowel. As the Master explains this working tool, it is used to spread "that cement which unites us into one sacred band or society of friends and brothers, among whom no contention should ever exist, but that noble contention, **or rather emulation**, of who best can work and best agree." The Trowel is only necessary in our world: in the celestial Temple every ashlar fits perfectly, of course. But in our lodges, we are rough ashlars, and the cement of brotherly love must be employed in order to approach the supernal unity.



"[A Freemason] must remember, always, that he is building a temple to God. He is building an edifice in consciousness in which he, himself, is an individual stone. In time, each human being will square his stone and place it in that temple, and when that temple is complete, God will behold God in the Mirror of Existence, and there will be then, as there was at the beginning, only God."

W. Bro. W. Kirk MacNulty  
*The Way of the Craftsman*, p. 148