

G.A.O.T.U.

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The Masonic abbreviation G.A.O.T.U. meaning the Great Architect of the Universe, continues a long tradition of using an allegorical name for the Deity.

G.A.O.T.U. means the Great Architect of the Universe. In some Masonic jurisdictions the abbreviation is considered to mean Grand Architect. Also, sometimes the abbreviation includes, at the beginning, a capital T meaning The. The abbreviation can also mean Grand or Great Artificer of the Universe. According to the Mentor's Manual published by the Grand Lodge of Indiana, "In any event, these are titles under which Freemasonry refers to Deity."

G.A.O.T.U. has been used by members of religious groups to attack Freemasonry. Some of these critics have claimed that this is a false god worshipped at our altar; other critics claim that G.A.O.T.U. "makes God seem like an abstract being."

The question then becomes how did G.A.O.T.U. enter into Masonry? Our search starts with the Compass. The Indiana Monitor states in the section on the Master Mason Degree that "The Compass is peculiarly dedicated to this degree."

What is a compass? One of the definitions of a compass in The Oxford English Dictionary is "an instrument for taking measurements and describing circles." The dictionary then cites an "ample of this usage of a compass from Milton's Paradise Lost vii 224 "In His hand He took the golden Compasses prepared ... to circumscribe This Universe." The capitalized pronouns refer to the Deity. An even earlier work, Dante (1265-1321) in his Divine Comedy has the following: "He that with turning compass drew the world's confines." Like Milton, Dante is referring to the Deity.

A 13th century painting (the artist is not mentioned in the reference book) in the Austrian National Library shows the Deity as The Great Architect of the Universe circumscribing Heaven and Earth. Another

painting depicting the Deity using a compass is by William Blake (1757-1827), an English poet and artist. Blake's painting is titled The Ancient of Days whose subject matter is the Deity using a compass.

By itself the compass has been used as an allegorical tool by which the Deity created the Universe. As a compass is a measuring device, it is logical to assume that the instrument would be used by the operative masons in the era of Cathedral building. In the Middle Ages, the terms Master Mason and Architect were used interchangeably. Architect is defined in The Oxford

English Dictionary as "a master builder." This definition also infers that a Master Mason would also be a craftsman or artificer.

This leads back to The Oxford English Dictionary which defines an artificer as "one who makes by art of skill; especially a craftsman." The definition also refers "to the Artificer of the Universe; meaning the Creator." The dictionary cites two further usages of artificer in this manner. One is from Person's Creed of 1659 "The Great Artificer of the World" The second is from Wordsworth's Excursion vi 551 "By the Great Artificer endued With no Inferior power."

But exactly how did G.A.O.T.U. come to be used in Freemasonry?

Wallace McLeod, an eminent Canadian Masonic scholar, discusses T.G.A.O.T.U. in his book *The Grand Design*. McLeod states the phrase entered Freemasonry in the first Book of Constitutions of 1723 of the first or premier Grand Lodge of England, *The Book of Constitutions* was written by the Reverend James Anderson who was minister of a Scottish Presbyterian Church on Swallow Street in London from 1710 to 1734. Anderson was a graduate of Marischal College which is a part of the University of Aberdeen in Scotland.

In the seventeenth century, when Anderson was probably studying at the University of Aberdeen, the role of education in Scotland's universities was to train their students to become ministers. This meant the students learned the Bible and their theology "according to the reasoned theology of Calvin's Institutes."

John Calvin (1509-1564) was a French reformer of the Church who, at the age of 26, first published his classic work of theology, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1536. In this work, which formed the basis of theology for Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, Calvin repeatedly calls the Deity "the Architect of the Universe" and refers to His works in nature as "Architecture of the Universe" ten times. Calvin also refers to the Deity as the Great Architect or Architect of the Universe in his Commentary on Psalm 19. In literature, art, and theology the Deity has been referred to as an Artificer and Architect. Thus, in using G.A.O.T.U. Freemasonry has continued a long tradition of using an allegorical name for the Deity.

Endnotes

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FREEMASONRY AND RELIGION

Basic Principles. Freemasonry is not a religion, nor is it a substitute for religion. It requires of its members belief in God as part of the obligation of every responsible adult, but advocates no sectarian faith or practice. Masonic ceremonies include prayers, both traditional and extempore, to reaffirm each individual's dependence on God and to seek divine guidance. Freemasonry is open to men of any faith, but religion may not be discussed at Masonic meetings.

The Supreme Being. Masons believe that there is one God and that people employ many different ways to seek, and to express what they know of, God. Masonry primarily uses the appellation, "Grand Architect of the Universe:" and other non-sectarian titles, to address Deity. In this way, persons of different faiths may join together in prayer, concentrating on God, rather than differences among themselves. Masonry believes in religious freedom and that the relationship between the individual and God is personal, private, and sacred.

Volume of the Sacred Law. An open volume of the Sacred Law, "the rule and guide of life," is an essential part of every Masonic meeting. The Volume of the Sacred Law in the Judeo/Christian tradition is the Bible; to Freemasons of other faiths, it is the book held holy by them.

The Oath of Freemasonry. The obligations taken by Freemasons are sworn on the Volume of the Sacred Law. They are undertakings to follow the principles of Freemasonry and to keep confidential a Freemason's means of recognition. The much discussed "penalties:" judicial remnants from an earlier era, are symbolic, not literal. They refer only to the pain any honest man should feel at the thought of violating his word.

Freemasonry Compared with Religion. Freemasonry lacks the basic elements of religion:

- (a) It has no dogma or theology, no wish or means to enforce religious orthodoxy.
- (b) It offers no sacraments.

(c) It does not claim to lead to salvation by works, by secret knowledge, or by any other means. The secrets of Freemasonry are concerned with modes of recognition, not with the means of salvation.

Freemasonry Supports Religion. Freemasonry is far from indifferent toward religion. Without interfering in religious practice, it expects each member to follow his own faith and to place his Duty to God above all other duties. Its moral teachings are acceptable to all religions.