

In the Centre of the Preceptory

About The Symbolism Used In Australian Templary
by The Reverend Sir Knight Frederick A. Shade

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Editor's note: This article was adapted from a paper presented in Metropolitan Preceptory No. 2, in July, 1990 by the Reverend Sir Knight Frederick A. Shade who is an Australian Templar. It will be interesting for our Sir Knights to contrast the symbolism we use with that used by our fraters in Australia. It was edited for length, to change some words to an American spelling, and to remove any references which we might think it improper to share with the public about our private ceremonies.

In the center of the Preceptory there stands a sepulcher. Upon it are placed a number of items that have special significance for the knights of the order. Some of these items are explained in the ritual, but there is much more that can be said about them. The sepulcher itself stands there as a silent witness to something which relates very closely to our faith, but there is no information about its meaning given in the ritual. For these reasons, I thought that I would put together the information that I have gathered and hope that it is of some interest to you. As there is not sufficient space to present a complete explanation of each of these, I will just add a little to what is already contained in our ritual. Some explanation is given in the lecture on the symbols of the order.

Let's put these things in some sense of order before we discuss them in detail. There are two groups of symbols of the sepulcher. In the first group is a triangle with twelve lights, a crucifix, a volume of Holy Gospels, the relics of mortality, a cup of wine, a lamb, a dove, and a cock. The second group includes a cube, a pen, a small stone, a dagger, and a Knight's sword.

There are quite a few items placed on the sepulcher.

And now, let us turn our attention to the first item on our list, the sepulcher itself. Some time ago I raised the question in my own Preceptory as to the origin and significance of the sepulcher; the ritual is silent on this matter. I did receive one answer, that it was a memorial for departed knights of the order, displaying the armor of a knight alongside it. This seemed a plausible answer. Another possible origin is that it is more especially a memorial of the last Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, who was martyred in France when the order was destroyed by the King of France. This too is a possible answer, especially if we accept the view that the black baldric we wear is in memory of his martyrdom. However, I think I have found the real answer to this question. When the candidate is invited by the preceptor to approach the East and receive the accolade, the preceptor uses the following words, "I make thee a knight of the Temple and Holy Sepulcher." We tend to overlook the

significance of these words. I therefore believe that the sepulcher in the center of the Preceptory is in fact a representation of that sepulcher in which our Lord's body was laid to rest after his crucifixion. It's as simple as that. Interestingly, the sepulcher in our Preceptory is empty and takes no direct part in the ceremony of Installation of a knight in the way it does in another order of chivalry.

To give added weight to my theory, we need only recall that the knights brought back from the Middle East many artifacts, symbols and memorials of their sojourn there, many of which were brought by them from the Holy Land and the city of Jerusalem in particular. The old Knights Templar were called, as we are today, Knights of the Order of the Temple. The "Temple" refers to the Temple of Solomon, adjacent to which was their first headquarters. But their special interest was the Holy Sepulcher, and it was this that they had pledged themselves to keep in the hands of Christians. For this reason they were also called Knights of the Holy Sepulcher, and we recognize this too in our title.

I also believe that we can give credence to the claim that the Templars were for a time in possession of the famous 'Shroud of Turin', which was believed by many to be the shroud in which our Lord was laid in the sepulcher. It also seems from the evidence available that the Templars made copies of the Shroud, or rather the face which is depicted on it, in their Preceptories. They kept it as a holy object, and would have it placed on the altar in their chapel when Mass was celebrated. And so, having a perpetual memorial of the Holy Sepulcher itself in each Preceptory also seems very likely, as the Templars had dedicated themselves to guard it when on duty in Jerusalem.

The sepulcher in the Preceptory is covered with a black cloth on which is a large white passion cross covering the full length of the sepulcher. Here we have two colors of the order, the white and the black, in addition to the official colors of white and red. This sepulcher represents the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, and the knights of the Preceptory guard it at different times during the candidate's initiation.

Since the earliest period in man's history he has had a special veneration for the tombs in which have been deposited the remains of his heroes, whether they were his tribal leader, chief, prophet or saint. The tombs of the prophets, preserved by the Israelites, give testimony to their reverence for their leaders. In Christian times this tradition was continued, and the supposed resting place of our Lord was especially venerated. In the Middle Ages it became the goal of all Christian pilgrims to travel to the Holy Land. It also became the goal of the crusading Knights.

In the American Commanderies the sepulcher is placed outside the Commandery in another room which represents the Holy Land (palm trees etc.) (Scottish influence, probably.)

The triangle appears at the eastern end of the sepulcher and is black in color. Upon the triangle appear twelve white candles. Together they indicate the colors of the order, black and white.

The triangle is also called a delta and this is a symbol of deity, of God. No explanation is given in the ritual as to its significance. What we can say here is that the triangle, often called a delta because it is the design of that letter in the Greek alphabet, has always been used to represent the deity whom the people worship. This is the case in all civilizations, and Christianity is no exception. For us the equilateral triangle or delta represents the Trinity-in-Unity, the Triune God, whom we worship, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

There are other triangles that have been given a spiritual significance, such as the right-angled triangle of Pythagoras, under which symbol he revealed the mysteries of the universe. There is also the triple triangle. In the American constitution of Knights Templar, this device is worn by the Prelate. We use a variant of this design for the Past Master's jewel in the Allied Masonic Degrees, but this appears to be unique to Victoria.

The candles represent the twelve apostles. The lighting of the twelfth candle by the candidate is a most significant moment in the ceremony. It indicates the close identity he now has with our Lord and with His apostles, as he has willingly accepted the engagement as a Soldier of the Cross, a Knight in Christ's service, replacing the disciple who had betrayed Him.

The extinguished candle can be likened to the empty chair at King Arthur's Round Table. The chair, called the Siege Perilous, could only be filled by a Knight who is virtuous and pure. The new Knight in our order is invited to light the candle at the sepulcher and take his seat in our Preceptory, for he is a valiant and virtuous Knight who has passed all the tests required of him.

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A Crucifixion Cross consists of a plain Latin cross on which appears the corpus or body of our Lord as at his crucifixion on Mt. Calvary. The crucifixion cross appears on the sepulture within the large triangle. The design of the figure on the cross varies from Preceptory to Preceptory. The figure on ours at Metropolitan Preceptory is the suffering Christ, i.e. the head is inclined and in an upward position.

Normally there are three steps at its base, but Metropolitan Preceptory has seven as does Geelong, which has our old set of furnishings. This is because Metropolitan Preceptory derives its traditions from a different source, Canada.

As to their spiritual significance, the three steps represent the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. The seven steps represent the number of perfection. ($7 = 4+3$, matter and spirit; $5+2 =$ the five points of felicity and the Hermetic maxim.) It is also represented in the knocks of the order ($5+2$).

The base and cross are painted black, and the corpus or figure upon the cross is white as is the inscription above it. Again the two colors of the order are

emblematical of life and death.

Most crucifixes have three nails as the legs are crossed. In Metropolitan Preceptory, the crucifix appears with four nails as the legs are not crossed - rather unusual.

The crucifix should stand within the Triangle, but many Preceptories have difficulty in doing this, and so the crucifix appears outside and to the west of the triangle.

There is a veil that covers the cross. The veil is of black material.

Notice the term that is used in our order is "Holy Gospels", not "Holy Bible."

The Book of Gospels is a specific part of Christian scripture and has only the four gospels in it, i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The New Testament, on the other hand, is used to describe the book of Christian scripture which has the authority of the Church and includes the four gospels, Book of Acts, the Pauline epistles, the catholic (general) epistles, and the Book of Revelation. The Holy Bible is the term used to describe the complete canon of sacred scripture recognized by the Christian Church and includes both the Old and New Testaments. 1

It is not surprising that the Knights Templar give special reverence to the Holy Gospels and that it is this sacred volume on which the novice of our order takes his obligation, for it contains the very words spoken by our Lord.

The relics are symbols of death and mortality. They are used in just about every Masonic rite, from the craft to the higher degrees and orders of chivalry, as a means of stimulating the mind to contemplate the most solemn subjects - the knowledge of oneself and the meaning of life.

One is carried by the novice during his year of Penance, and is held in his left hand when the imprecations are made a most solemn moment in the ceremony.

This symbol also has a very close association with our Lord's crucifixion, and for this reason the relics are placed immediately below the crucifix.

Notice that the refreshment that the pilgrim receives on his arrival as a stranger in the Preceptory is water. It is only after he has proved himself worthy of being admitted a member that wine is presented to him, and then only for the purpose of participating in a series of toasts or commemorations.

Jesus is said to have partaken from the 'bitter cup' from which no one is exempt - the Cup of Destiny. (Matt.26:39)

The cup or goblet is reminiscent also of the Holy Grail cup, which provides the spiritual refreshment which all true knights seek. Wine is one of the principle elements of consecration in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. It was used by our Lord, together with bread, and given a special meaning. The special evening meal we know by the name the Lord's Supper. The cup is used in Freemasonry as a

symbol of fraternal affection and union with one another in the bonds of fellowship. It is also symbolic of inward refreshment or of a good conscience. As Mackey explains, "it is also intended, under the name of the 'wine of refreshment', to remind us of the eternal refreshment which the good are to receive in the future life for the faithful performance of duty in the present" - a beautiful description.

From a more mundane aspect, wine was consumed at all meals in those days and used as a panacea for all ills. The reason being that, apart from the benefits of its alcoholic content, it was guaranteed to be drinkable whereas water was often not safe unless it was fresh from the stream. The reference in both the Old and New Testament (e.g. 1 Timothy 5:23) to the medicinal qualities of wine I keep in my mind!

In ancient Freemasonry the lamb is a symbol of innocence, thus the use of lambskin for the apron of a mason. In the higher degrees, in the orders of chivalry, and in Christian art, the lamb is a symbol of Jesus Christ. The introduction of this Christian symbolism of the lamb comes from the expression of St. John the Baptist, who exclaimed on seeing Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God." (John 1:29)

In the vision of St. John the Divine, in the Apocalypse, Christ is seen in the form of a lamb opening the seven seals. (Rev.6:1) Thus the lamb is usually seen on the emblems of our order to be standing on a green field or on the book with the seven seals.

The sacrifice of the Mass and its related symbolism is a development of the mystery of our Lord's sacrifice on the cross. He pointed to this great mystery (Agape) in various ways, such as in the breaking of bread, when he shares himself with the disciples, as well as the crucifixion itself.

The star jewel worn by the Grand Master has the Paschal Lamb (Agnus Dei) in place of the Latin Passion Cross in the center of the jewel.

The dove is one of the sacred emblems or symbols of the order. It is symbolical of the Almighty Comforter (Holy Spirit). The presence of the Holy Spirit is reported in Matthew (3:16) appearing as a dove when our Lord was baptized in the river Jordan by John the Baptist. The dove is thus a symbol of peace and reconciliation. It also refers to certain theological virtues. Sometimes one will find in old churches a hollow receptacle in the shape of a dove that is designed to contain the Blessed Sacrament. The dove, representing the Holy Spirit, is often associated with the symbolism of the sacrament of confirmation, as the Holy Spirit is specifically invoked and conferred at the moment of the laying on of hands by the bishop.

The ancients made the cock a symbol of courage and consecrated it to Mars, the god of war. Other authorities say that the cock was a symbol of the sun, as it heralds the dawn. If we consider this latter interpretation, we can appreciate the particular reference to it in the story of Peter denying our Lord. (Matt.26:75) For all of these reasons it was an important symbol in the early Church. Drawings of this

symbol (the cock) can be seen in places such as the catacombs of Rome etc. It is used by our order as a monitor to avoid the breaking of a vow.

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In the second group of symbols, the cubic stone appears in many Masonic rites to represent either moral or spiritual perfection, and its meaning will be apparent to those who have taken the various degrees. It appears in the Craft, Mark, Chapter, Rose Croix, and K.T.P., and each refers to different aspects of its meaning. Our own Scriptures are also full of references to the mystical stone, as well as to its earthly equivalents. I will mention just a few of these.

In the Old Testament we read of the altar of stone on which Abraham sacrificed his son Isaac (Gen. 22) and of the same stone which became the pillow of Jacob (Gen. 46). In the New Testament we read of the stone which was rejected by the builder but later became the head of the corner (Mark 12:10 etc.). In the Book of Acts (4:11) it is declared that Jesus is the stone that was rejected. In the letter of 1 Peter we are instructed to become like living stones in the spiritual temple of God (2:5) and so on.

For the Companion-in-Arms who successfully completes his campaign as a Crusader, the reference to a stone in the Book of Revelation is particularly significant. There we read ... "To him who overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it" (Rev.2:17). 2

In American rituals, and in some European orders, a special room is set aside for use by the candidate for private contemplation. On the continent, orders such as the Rite of Strict Observance require the candidate to remain alone in that room, often in the presence of emblems of life and death, to write his will, or else to answer certain questions.

In the Preceptories of our constitution, the pen is used by the candidate to write his name on the M.S. according to ancient custom. In Metropolitan Preceptory, the pen is ceremoniously broken in two by the Marshal after it is used by the candidate, so that it cannot be used again.

The small stone is a memorial of an important ceremony. We are directed to keep this memorial as we may need to present it when endeavoring to be admitted into another Preceptory. The memorial of the ceremony (the stone) in which the mystical stone is presented to the candidate is his constant reminder of that spiritual event to come when, in the heavenly Jerusalem, he will have revealed to him that which the Sacred Word represents. The mystical stone also refers to his own spiritual nature that he, as a Freemason, endeavors to polish and adorn first with the qualities of wisdom, strength, and beauty, and later with the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Then and only then is he ready to be placed in the heavenly

temple as one of the living stones of the spirit and will no longer be required to go out of that temple.

The medieval knight usually had a small sword or dagger in his belt as well as a large sword with which to fight. The dagger is used here by the Marshal (not the candidate) for the purpose of carrying out one of the customs of the order.

In other orders of chivalry, the knight's sword is usually placed on the altar. In the Knights Templar, the candidate's sword is placed upon the sepulture on which are also his other accoutrements. He retains the sword after he is knighted and vested with the regalia as a Knight of the Temple.

There are other items of interest displayed in the Preceptory, but I have confined myself to those which appear in the center of the room. All of these signs, symbols, and memorials are an important part of our heritage. They are a memorial of a bygone age and the traditions of our illustrious predecessors. They are also tangible signs of a living heritage. They are a source of knowledge and wisdom as well as signs of power and of renewal for us today. They are symbols which can assist us in leading a life in which knightly courtesy and a dedication to our Lord give meaning and purpose in this modern age, qualities which are desperately needed in today's world.

Humanity is reluctant to learn from the lessons of history. We, as Knights of the Temple and Holy Sepulcher, are endeavoring to learn from the past and also to take the best it has to offer. Our touchstone is the teachings and traditions of the Knights of old, not their excesses and abuses of power and privilege but those things that are worthy of recalling and applying today.

Our Templar ritual is a beautiful one, and the setting of the ritual, this Chapel of the Order, is second to none in evoking the highest aspirations of its members. I hope my explanation of what we find in the center of our Preceptory has made these things more meaningful and relevant to you.

End Notes

1 The Book of Holy Gospels; "The reading of a passage from one of the four gospels concludes and forms the climax of "the liturgy of the word" which precedes the "liturgy of the eucharist" proper. The gospel reading is surrounded with much greater ceremony than the other readings; since the 4th century it has been reserved to the deacon. It is customary for all to stand while the gospel is read. The gospel book itself is venerated as a symbol of Christ. Before the reading of the gospel, the book is carried in procession to the lectern, accompanied by candles and incense." (A Dict. of Liturgy and Worship)

It is the book of gospels which is presented to the Deacon and Priest at their ordination. It is also the Book of Gospels which is placed open upon the head of the candidate for consecration as a bishop. This signifies that the ordinand takes upon

himself the weight and responsibility of the Word of God, to preach it, and to expound on its teachings.

2 The mystical stone has its many memorials and include the following:

(i) On this stone there stood the angel with the flaming sword to keep the way of Paradise guarded when Adam and Eve were expelled.

(ii) It formed the top of the altar raised by Abraham for the sacrifice of his son Isaac.

(iii) It was the pillow of Jacob when he saw in his vision the mystical ladder on which angels went up and came down.

(iv) Innumerable attempts were made to place it in one position or another during the building of the First Temple, but it found no rest anywhere till it became the capstone.

(v) It was saved from destruction with the Temple, was cherished as a safeguard by the Jews and after the death of Zedekiah was carried by a migrating colony, with "Scota, the King's daughter" under the leadership of the prophet Jeremiah.

(vi) It was taken to the "Isles of the Sea" and preserved as a Stone of Destiny "by the people of Scota."

(vii) Finally, it was 'stolen' by Edward, King of England, and placed in the Coronation Chair at Westminster Abbey. Recently, the stone was returned to Scotland.

This is a curious mixture of traditions, but one does find it related in this form.

(Ref. A.E.Waite)

The Scriptural references (New Testament) which are of particular interest include the following:

(i) Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; 1 Peter 2:7 - "the stone which was rejected...."

(ii) Acts 4:11 - Jesus is the stone that was rejected.

(iii) The reference to us becoming as living stones is found in 1 Peter 2:5

(iv) The reference to the mystical stone and a name appearing therein is to be found in Rev. 2:17

There are also numerous references to stones in the Old Testament. These are mainly to do with buildings, but they do include some to which a spiritual significance is given.

References

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