

What's in the Package?

by Sir Knight **David E. Stafford**

Like so many of you, I am an E-bay junkie. I spend hours on my home computer electronically rumbling through thousands of items until I find that one collectable I cannot live without. I usually have these precious treasures shipped to my office. Why do I have them shipped to the office instead of to my home? Well, the answer is simple. I don't want my wife to know on what precious Masonic item I spent our grocery money. Last week, the two-volume edition of Blanchard's Scotch Masonry arrived at school. The ladies in my office are always excited about my boxes. They find it exciting to learn what unusual item Dr. Stafford has bought now. There is an element of excitement in the unknown contents of the boxes that arrive in the post. The ladies carried the box of books into my office, and stood in front of my desk waiting for me to open it . . . Is it another pair of double-headed eagle candlestick holders, is it more books, is it another funny plumed hat? I opened the box to reveal the books. Books are never as exciting to them as glass, knick-knacks, ties, tuxes, robes, lithographs, and the other countless items that occasionally arrive, but the excitement was still there.

As I sat at my desk flipping through the pages of my new treasure, I began to reflect on the ladies repeated excitement about my mail. In my mind it began to take the form of a Masonic allegory. The packages are not unlike Freemasonry. The world just like the ladies cannot see what is inside, but they have an insatiable curiosity. What it holds is a puzzle, and those who do not know its secrets have a desire to know for sure what Masonry hides. My packages always have an obvious exterior which clearly shows to whom and from whom it was sent, but there is never an indication from its exterior as to what item is contained therein. Freemasonry does the same. We have an outward appearance, we are a charitable institution that seeks to take good men and make them better, but the spiritual and philosophical secrets we teach are never revealed to the outside world.

A long shot? Well, it may not make any sense to you, but it made me begin to think about Freemasonry's exoteric and esoteric teachings. I suppose the best place to begin with this discussion is to look at the definitions of exoteric and esoteric. Webster's Dictionary gives three definitions for the word exoteric: "1.a. suitable to be imparted to the public 1.b. belonging to the outer or less initiate circle. 2. relating to the outside. For esoteric, Webster's has the following: 1.a. designed for or understood by the specially initiated alone. 1.b. requiring or exhibiting knowledge that is restricted to a small group, difficult to understand. 2.a. limited to a small circle. 2.b. private or confidential. 3. of special, rare, or unusual interest." Now, how do these definitions apply to Masonry?

I propose that there are two basic applications of the terms exoteric and esoteric to Freemasonry. The first involves the ritual and the second involves those who practice those rituals. The rituals of Freemasonry generally have two interpretations; one that is obvious and superficial (exoteric) and another that is deeper and hidden within the text and symbols of the ritual (esoteric). In ancient times symbols were used to conceal

teachings and knowledge; whereas, in today's society we are accustomed to the use of symbols to proclaim the obvious. In previous times, symbols were used by groups, fraternities, and cults to disguise teachings. To the uninitiated a symbol would have superficial meaning, but to the initiated, the same symbol would remind them of mystic or esoteric teaching.

The esoteric teachings of Freemasonry are personal and individual. It is up to each Mason to decipher the hidden meanings for himself. The idea is to surround yourself with well-informed brethren to help guide your path to realization within the Craft. The problem arises when you realize that there are few brethren who are interested in the more esoteric elements of Masonry. This brings us to the next way in which esoteric and exoteric refers to Masonry.

It has been stated that there are two types of Masons, non-reading Masons (exoteric) and reading Masons (esoteric). In the May 1885 edition of *The International Standard* appears a review of a book entitled *Freemasonry from the Great Pyramid of Ancient Times* by Tho. Holland. In this review the following may be found, "An exoteric Mason is one of whom the apostle says, 'They are not all Israel that are of Israel,' but occupy the outer courts, and probably many will never enter the holy of holies" (p. 169). In contrast, the same article describes an esoteric Mason as "a deep student of all the (Masonic) mysteries, and especially of those that are divine." An exoteric Mason is a man who is satisfied with the superficial, basic understanding of the meanings within the lessons of the Craft. They are the Masons who have no greater ambition than flipping pancakes and supporting high school scholarships (all well in good in their place). Mackey in his article *Reading Masons and Masons who do not Read* states, "there are more Masons who are ignorant of all the principles of Freemasonry than there are men of any other class who are chargeable with the like ignorance of their own profession." Many of these exoteric or non-reading brethren petitioned the lodge looking for economic, political, and professional advancement. Many of them found it; however, that is far from a noble reason to unite with the Royal Order. I do not say this to offend any of my brethren. Those of you reading this edition of *Knight Templar* magazine are most likely reading Masons.

In opposition to an exoteric Mason is an esoteric Mason. An esoteric Mason is a brother who has a zeal for knowledge and higher thought. These are those men who petition the Craft in search of greater knowledge and understanding of the world about them. They surround themselves with well informed brethren and engage in edification through reading, debate, and in-depth study of the Craft's rituals. They seek out the rituals of other Masonic systems and compare them to gain more light. They study the rituals of Freemasonry in the contexts of time, religion, politics, philosophy, sociology, and human progress. They apply their spirituality and question their own basic beliefs in the journey for a greater understanding of themselves and the mystic bond. An esoteric Mason is a man of the enlightenment in modern times.

It is not to be assumed that one Mason is better than the other. In order for the fraternity to be all that it can be, it is essential for lodges to have a balance between exoteric and esoteric Masons. A lodge made up completely of exoteric Masons quickly loses its status

as a secret society and holder of great secrets and becomes little more than a Rotary, Lions, or Kiwanis Club. A lodge made up entirely of sole minded esoteric Masons could rapidly become uncharitable, indulgent, and elitist. There is one thing that I have learned; it is taught over and over within both the lodge and church; this is moderation or balance. In order for the lodge or any organization to have success there must be a balance. Freemasonry is no different.

<http://www.merriam-webster.com>

The International Standard issue containing the book review (pp. 168 & 169) may be found at <http://books.google.com/books?id=JRYAAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover> Albert Mackey's "Reading Masons and Masons who do not Read" was first published in 1875 in The Master Mason. It is available on-line at: <http://www.mn-masons.org/assets/3536.pdf>

Sir Knight David E. Stafford, 32° is a member of Nashville Commandery No. 1, Nashville, Tennessee. He holds an earned doctorate in education from Tennessee State University and serves as a school administrator for the Sumner County Board of Education. He is a past master and the current secretary of Bethpage Lodge No. 521. He may be reached at david.stafford@sumnerschools.org

Update: July 11, 2014

Knight Templar Magazine Index - ARCHIVE of ARTICLES

HOME	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------

[Top](#)