

A Light-Hearted Treatment of an Ugly Topic

by

Sir Knight Don Radloff

While I was at our North Central Department Conference, we were informed by the editor that when the September issue was published, a gargoyle appeared on the cover of the *Knight Templar* magazine and that the publisher had received communication from someone who asked him why the Masons would place a picture of Satan on the front cover of our magazine. This picture was not of Satan but of a gargoyle from the Catholic Cathedral of Notre Dame, and everyone in the Universe should know that the Catholics do not worship Satan.

Gargoyles originated between the 9th and 13th centuries. They served two purposes; first, to ward off evil, and second, to divert rain water away from the foundations, similar to the gutters and spouts we have today. The result was that many of the early gargoyles had very long necks. The word gargoyle comes from the old French word "Argüelles" meaning "throat" which fairly well

describes the gurgling sound of water going through the downspout.

The Catholic Church originally used gargoyles as a visual reminder to their pagan converts, many of whom were illiterate. They were considered something of a "sermon in stone" or a warning to teach the people how to behave in a non-written way. However, now they are joys of the ornamental and assume different forms.

Most of these gargoyles are very grotesque; some stone carvers in ages past honored relatives and friends by actually carving their faces into a gargoyle. There are five basic groups of gargoyles. One group includes faces with multiple smaller figures and one large figure, or one figure with mouth agape and protruding tongue which symbolizes the insignificance of the individual and how venerable we are to larger powers. Another features detached heads. This was a practice of the Celts, who were then believed to have been head hunters.



A grotesque on Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.



A gargoyle (water spout) on the Church of the Sacred Heart in Paris.

They were said to have worshiped the heads they severed and believed that these heads had supernatural powers. Some have ambiguous gender and species. These specimens again date back to the pagans. The pagan religions existed to overcome chaos and peril. These gargoyles are representatives of the fear of the unknown. This type of gargoyle is known as “Grotesque.”*

Some are composed of a head entwined with branches and leaves. A branch coming out of the mouth or surrounding the head was a sign of divinity to the Celts. The Druids often depicted oak leaves as the oak was sacred to them. This is often referred to as the “green man” today. Finally some have sexual themes used by pagan religions as symbols of fertility. If they were used on outside walls, they were thought to discourage evil. Still, we go back to the universal fear of sexuality that exists yet today. I hope this clears up the difference between Satan and gargoyles.



*Editor’s note: Architecturally, a Grotesque is a term used to denote figures which have no drainage function, and a gargoyle is the technical term for those which drain



water whether they are plain or carved figures. To learn more about gargoyles, I recommend a documentary and very entertaining DVD entitled *Gargoyles - Guardian of the Gate* produced in 2005. One of our editorial review board members referred to this article as a “light-hearted treatment of an ugly topic.” Another suggested that I pose the following question to our readers; “Do you know where a gargoyle in the image of Darth Vader can be found?”

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The figures on this page are all on Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. The one immediately to the left is perhaps the most famous. His name is Emmet, and his brother guards the editor’s flower garden.

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