



# The Temple of Solomon

## September 2009 Knights Templar Education

### Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Florida

In our several Masonic rituals, nothing is more impressive and profound than the Chamber of Reflection. We see it in the first degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite and in our own Chivalric orders. We found an article on the Chamber of Reflection. It is more reflective of the Chamber used in the first degree of other rites but it gives us an idea of its use in our rite. Due to its length, we divided the same in three issues. Enjoy!

## The Chamber of Reflection Part One

by W. Bro. Helio L. DaCosta Jr.

The tenets of Freemasonry are universal, however, the way in which they are presented to the profane, as he knocks on the doors of our temples, varies according to the ritual used at any particular temple. Although the lessons presented in these rituals may be similar, the way in which they are transmitted to the prospective initiate may be quite different from one area to another. Therefore, in order to acquaint the Brethren of our Grand Jurisdiction, the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of British Columbia, with a piece of ritual widely practiced throughout the world, but absent here, I propose to expound on the Chamber of Reflection.



Most of the Brethren who received their initiations in Mexico, Central and South America, Europe, Middle East and Africa will be acquainted with the Chamber of Reflection. It is used in the first degree in the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, the French Rite, the Brazilian Rite and other rites derived from the ones just mentioned. The word chamber is an archaic term for room and the word reflection means, according to the Oxford Dictionary of Current English, “reflecting or being reflected; reflected light or heat or color or image; discredit or thing bringing discredit; reconsideration (or reflection); idea arising in the mind, comment (on or upon).” Albert G. Mackey in his Encyclopedia of Freemasonry explains that the Chamber of Reflection is: “...a small room adjoining the Lodge, in which, preparatory to initiation, the candidate is enclosed for the purpose of indulging in those serious meditations which its somber appearance and the gloomy emblems with which it is furnished are calculated to produce. It is also used in some of the advanced degrees for a similar purpose. This small room or chamber, which does not necessarily adjoin the Lodge room, is dark, with the walls painted black, or, as in one case I saw, imitating a rocky underground cave. It contains the following: a simple rough wooden table on which we find: a human skull, usually on two crossbones, a chunk of bread, a pitcher with water, a cup with salt, a cup with sulphur, a lighted candle or lantern, an hourglass, paper, ink and pen, a wooden stool or chair painted on the wall: a rooster, a sickle, the acronym V.I.T.R.I.O.L. (U.M.) and various sayings.

Before commenting on these symbols, let us follow a candidate's journey into the Chamber of Reflection on the day of his initiation. The profane, dressed in a black (or at least dark) suit and tie, is brought to the Lodge building by his sponsor. He must not meet any of the other Brethren. The  
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Treasurer and the First Expert, an officer, who in the rituals we observe here would be equivalent to the Senior Steward, both dressed without any Masonic insignia, meet the candidate. The Treasurer collects the necessary fees and returns to the Lodge room. The Expert stays with the candidate, while the sponsor also goes into the Lodge room. The Expert blindfolds the candidate and introduces him into the Chamber of Reflection and gives him a piece of paper with questions that the candidate must answer. He also indicates to the candidate that he must also write on the paper his moral and philosophical testament. The Expert also instructs the candidate that when he has finished this task, he should ring a bell to manifest that he is ready to proceed with the rest of the initiation. He is also told that once the door is closed he should remove the hoodwink. Once our profane does that, he sees the chamber and the objects described earlier.

### THE CHAMBER

The chamber reminds one's self of the caves where primitive men lived. In psychoanalysis, it is a symbol of regression. It is also a symbol of the maternal womb. The profane is regressing to a time of innocence and to a state in his mother's womb. When he emerges from the chamber, it shall be as if being born as a new man. Contrariwise, the cave can also be the symbol of a sepulcher, as the tombs of the ancients in biblical times. Thus, the chamber indicates, at the same time, a beginning and an end: the end of one's life as a profane, and the beginning of a new life as an initiate in search of light, truth and wisdom. This can also be interpreted as a form of resurrection. This motif of death and resurrection is mentioned in Plutarch's Immortality of the Soul thus: The soul at the moment of death goes through the same experiences as those who are initiated into the great mysteries. The word and the act are similar: we say *telentai* (to die) and *telestai* (to be initiated).

### THE SKULL

Together with the crossbones, sickle and the hourglass, the skull naturally refers to mortality and is linked to the alchemical references also present in the Chamber. The alchemists aimed at transmuting base metals into silver and gold through the process of putrefaction. So must the profane transmute his nature, through a symbolical burial in the chamber, into a new transformed man in the form of an initiate. In alchemy this is called the great work. Indeed, man's refinement, transmutation and transformation from a brute base metal into gold require great work! The skull in alchemy, named *caput mortem*, is the epitome of decline and decay. The crossbones are usually tibias, the weight-bearing bones of the lower legs. (To continue in our next newsletter)

If your Commandery has any ideas or topics they would like to be included in future monthly newsletters, please contact one of the members of the Knights Templar Education and Leadership Committee:

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