

The Degree of St. Lawrence the Martyr

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Before discussing the importance of the degree of St. Lawrence the Martyr, I would first like to give a brief summary of the development of the AMD, first in England and then in the USA.

The formation of the Ancients Grand Lodge in 1751 was said to have occurred as a reaction against certain modernizations which had been introduced into the Craft by the premier Grand Lodge, or Moderns. A secondary reason was to preserve the Holy Royal Arch degree which the Ancients claimed had been worked in their Lodges for many years & which the Moderns had been reticent to recognize.

As a result, lodges holding Ancient Warrants were entitled to work any Masonic Degree "of which they had knowledge". Most of the so-called higher degrees which existed in England in the early 1800's developed in this environment.

After the reunion of the Grand Lodges in 1813, the Royal Arch was given an honoured place and the other degrees were left to fend for themselves. Over time some of these became strong enough to form their own grand bodies. Thus governing bodies arose for the Mark Masters, the Knights Templar, the Ancient and Accepted Rite, the Royal and Select Masters and the Red Cross of Constantine.

There were still a number of unattached degrees being worked so in 1879, the Grand Council of Allied Masonic Degrees of England was formed to take charge of all degrees and orders which had no central authority at the time. The AMD took control of the Grand High Priest, St. Lawrence the Martyr, Red Cross of Babylon and the Knights of Constantinople.

To protect England against the invasion by foreign jurisdictions, it was declared that no new body purporting to be Masonic could be legally established in England without the consent of the governing bodies of the Mark Masters, the Knights Templar, the Ancient and Accepted Rite, the Royal and Select Masters and the Red Cross of Constantine and the new Grand Council, and that any new body established with such consent should be under the direction of the new Grand Council.

A similar process took place in the USA with the Sovereign College of Allied Masonic Degrees for the USA being formed in 1892.

This new body took control of the Grand Tilers of King Solomon, the Secret Monitor and the Order of Holy Wisdom, among others.

In 1893 and 1895 the Grand Council of England received the Grand Tilers of King Solomon, the Secret Monitor from the Sovereign College of the USA. In 1897 the Grand Council of England acquired control of the 32 degrees of the Knight Templar Priest series, although these were never worked under the Grand Council. After the formation of the Grand College of the Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests or Order of Holy Wisdom,

the Grand Council gave up control of these degrees. In 1924 the Grand Council also gave up control of the Secret Monitor degree to the Grand Council of the Order of the Secret Monitor.

In contrast to the Grand Council of England, the Sovereign College of the USA gradually became moribund. In 1933 the present Grand Council of Allied Masonic Degrees of the USA was formed from degrees received from the Grand Chapter of Scotland, which included the Excellent Master Degree, or the Veils ceremony in our Royal Arch ceremony. The Grand Council soon absorbed the earlier Sovereign College gaining thereby another group of degrees.

Now to the premier degree of the AMD system.

The Degree of St. Lawrence the Martyr was designed to commemorate the martyrdom of the Saint in Rome in the middle of the 3rd century A.D. It teaches the lessons of fortitude and humility.

There is evidence that this degree was a piece of old Operative ritual, intended to distinguish genuine Craftsmen from the Speculatives, when the latter started to join Craft Lodges. The degree has been known to have been worked in its present form for over 200 years in the Lancashire and Yorkshire regions.

Because of the antiquity of this degree it has always been given precedence in the Grand Council of the Order of the Allied Masonic Degrees. It is used as the business degree of the Order and the degree into which applicants are received into the Order. Also, the installation ceremony of the Degree of Master of the Lodge of St. Lawrence is the only ceremony of installation for a Master of a Council of the Order.