

## The Meaning of the 33rd Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite and A View of Masonry from Above

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The present essay is part of the Teaching Material that I have written in order to train the members of the Supreme Council 33o who work under my directions in the context of the *Modern and Perfecting Rite*<sup>(c)</sup>, which I officially delineated and pronounced in England in 2023 as a peculiar way of organizing, interpreting, and practicing the three degrees of the Craft (Symbolic Masonry) and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

The history of Freemasonry constitutes a dynamic historical process that has unfolded through successive stages of institutional and intellectual development. Although the documented history of Freemasonry can be systematically examined from 1717 onward, it is nevertheless possible to identify earlier forms of organization in the working lodges, guilds, and trade associations that existed prior to that date.

Before 1717, the Craft appears to have been organized in relatively autonomous structures that may be described as “cells,” within which each Lodge functioned independently under the leadership of its own Master or Masters. Within this framework, the building craft itself served as the primary regulatory authority governing its professional domain. After 1717, however, one can identify a range of institutional conditions, regulatory principles, and behavioral norms among the Lodges that adopted the model established by the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster, as well as among those Lodges that either preceded that development or continued along alternative organizational trajectories. During this period, secrecy remained a defining feature of the Masonic tradition, particularly with regard to its Rituals. These Rituals were carefully guarded: members were generally prohibited from recording them in writing, and they were transmitted orally within private chambers, Temples, or working Lodges. The principle of secrecy is deeply embedded within the symbolic culture of Freemasonry—often represented metaphorically by the folded wings of the Egyptian Sphinx, an emblem of silence—and serves to protect the sacred character of initiatory

practices from those who are considered profane or otherwise unauthorized to participate.

Regardless of the specific causes that led to the events of 1717, that year marked a decisive turning point in the development of Freemasonry. It signaled the transition from “operative” Masonry, primarily associated with the practical craft of building, to “speculative” Masonry, characterized by philosophical reflection and symbolic interpretation. This transition was accompanied by a shift from highly restricted modes of knowledge transmission toward broader initiatory networks that would eventually expand across national and international contexts. These developments emerged from the deliberate efforts of particular Masonic groups to reorganize both themselves and the institutional structure of Freemasonry more broadly, most notably through the formation of the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster. The underlying causes of this transformation can be examined from multiple historical perspectives; however, it is evident that this development coincided with a significant expansion of British political and cultural influence, which also affected the dissemination and institutionalization of Freemasonry in other countries.

Although Masonic organizations had already existed in various regions of Europe, the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster—and later the United Grand Lodge of England—assumed a position of symbolic authority within the international Masonic community and advanced the claim that the United Grand Lodge of England constituted the “Mother Grand Lodge of the World.” This assertion may be interpreted as a political, administrative, and institutional decision that effectively established a framework of influence extending over smaller or differently organized Masonic bodies. The historical record of these developments is well documented and provides valuable material for scholarly analysis.

Three centuries later, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the contemporary condition of Freemasonry remains the outcome of numerous human decisions regarding its institutional organization, periodic reorganization, and the interpretation of its traditional principles. These processes have been shaped by a wide range of social, cultural, moral, economic, and political factors. Consequently, the history of Freemasonry cannot be understood solely in terms of symbolism, philosophical doctrines, or organizational structures; it must also be analyzed within the broader context of historical forces that have influenced the evolution of modern societies.

During the eighteenth and subsequent centuries, numerous Masonic Rites and Ritual systems emerged, many of which were characterized by significant moral, symbolic, and esoteric dimensions. In the present day, several distinct “streams” of Masonic Orders and Rites continue to exist, generally functioning as affiliated bodies connected to the institutional framework of the Grand Lodges of Symbolic Masonry. Among the most widely recognized are the Scottish Rite, the York Rite, the Emulation Rite, the French Rite, the Schröder Rite, the Egyptian Rite, and the Swedish Rite, together with several other systems that are less widely practiced.

The Rites and Rituals employed by Masonic Lodges were maintained in secrecy both before 1717 and throughout much of the eighteenth century. At the same time, the formation of the first Grand Lodges and the drafting of the earliest Masonic Constitutions—often based on traditional “landmarks” and preserved manuscripts—were accompanied by significant developments in scholarly research and symbolic interpretation. The emergence of standardized institutional models of Freemasonry gradually led to corresponding efforts to standardize Masonic Rituals, particularly under the authority of the dominant Grand Lodges.

Importantly, the various Rites, Rituals, and Orders that developed during earlier periods were not originally conceived as fixed or immutable dogmas. Rather, they evolved through processes of revision, reinterpretation, and adaptation within the diverse institutional contexts in which they were practiced.

Indeed, these Rites and Orders should be understood as the products of ongoing historical development rather than as static institutions. Their formation involved multiple stages of intellectual and organizational transformation. A number of scholars and thinkers influenced by the intellectual climate of the Enlightenment played an important role in preserving the cultural heritage of operative Masonry while simultaneously composing Rituals intended for use within the framework of modern speculative Masonry. For example, in eighteenth-century England the Moderns' Grand Lodge—officially the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster—and the Ancients' Grand Lodge—formally designated the “Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of England according to the Old Constitutions”—employed distinct Ritual traditions. These traditions were eventually reconciled through the union of the two Grand Lodges in 1813, which resulted in the establishment of the United Grand Lodge of England and contributed to the development of what later became known as the Emulation Rite.

The historical trajectory of individual Rites and their governing Orders can similarly be traced through comparable processes of reform and institutional adoption. In Germany, for instance, the influential Masonic reformer Friedrich Ludwig Schröder undertook a significant revision of the Ritual of Symbolic Masonry. The subsequent adoption of Schröder's revised Ritual by several German Grand Lodges and individual Lodges contributed to the formation of a notable German and international Masonic alliance.

In this sense, *the evolution of Masonic Rites reflects broader developments in human intellectual history, particularly in relation to changing interpretations of Masonic knowledge and the evolving dynamics of civilization.* In the contemporary era—often described in terms of postmodern intellectual tendencies and the critical reexamination of earlier institutional norms—certain Masonic jurisdictions have experienced fragmentation or institutional tension. These developments may be attributed, at least in part, to organizational frameworks that were originally designed to provide practical administrative coherence but which gradually assumed more rigid and dogmatic forms. Within this context, some contemporary thinkers have proposed new approaches to the renewal or reform of Masonic practice. Among such proposals is my decision to advance a new Masonic system known as the “Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry.” This proposal reflects an attempt to articulate an alternative framework for Masonic ritual and organization, drawing upon both traditional elements and contemporary intellectual perspectives. The ideas associated with this Rite invite careful scholarly examination as part of the ongoing discourse concerning the future development of Freemasonry. In particular, I created the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry as a peculiar way of organizing, interpreting, and practicing the three degrees of the Craft (Symbolic Masonry) and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

In 1813, the United Grand Lodge of England declared and pronounced that “pure Antient Masonry consists of three degrees, and no more, viz., those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch”; but, in Continental Europe, the period 1740–1800 saw the rise of a host of so-called Masonic Rites and degrees that were fabricated by Masons to whom the traditional system of English Masonry was not sufficient, and who devised

rituals that enlarged and expanded the scope of Masonry to encompass various elaborations.

Even though some of the degrees within the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite had an earlier origin, this Rite was originally formed in the early 1760s, when a system of 25 degrees was instituted, several of which were in name only. In fact, there were different rival bodies controlling Rites of so-called Scottish degrees, but the Grand Lodge of France in conjunction with the Council of Knights of the East deputed Stephen Morin to promulgate this new Masonic Rite in the West Indies, and his labor gave rise to Scottish Rite Masonry in America. By about 1765, a Rite of Perfection of 25 degrees was being practiced in Continental Europe and the Americas, and, toward the end of the 18th century, the Rite was increased to 33 degrees, and, finally, it was renamed to Ancient and Accepted Rite.

### **Earliest documentary sources related to the 33° (not full ritual texts)**

#### **1. Grand Constitutions of 1786 (foundational text)**

The **oldest foundational document connected to the 33rd Degree** is the so-called *Grand Constitutions* (often dated 1 May 1786, Berlin).

- These constitutions defined:
  - A system of **33 degrees**
  - Governance by a **Supreme Council**
  - Authority of 33° Inspectors General
- They are traditionally attributed to Frederick II of Prussia (though historians debate the extent of his involvement).

However:

- No original 1786 signed copy survives.
- The earliest known manuscript copies date to c. 1801–1802.

Hence, the “oldest text” in physical form is actually early-19th-century copies of an 18th-century constitution.

#### **2. Dalcho Manuscript Copy (c. 1801–1802)**

One of the earliest surviving texts is a manuscript written by **Rev. Frederick Dalcho**, a founder of the first Supreme Council (Charleston, 1801).

Title (paraphrased from manuscript heading):

“Constitution, Statutes, Regulations &c. for the Government of the Supreme Council of Inspectors General of the 33rd ...”

This document outlines:

- Powers of the 33°
- Jurisdiction over degrees 17–33
- Structure of Supreme Councils

This is **administrative/constitutional**, not ritual.

#### **3. The 1802 “Circular Throughout the Two Hemispheres”**

First printed document issued by the Charleston Supreme Council.

It:

- Publicized the creation of the 33°
- Repeated the 1786 constitutional claims
- Asserted royal authorization origins

Again: explanatory, not a ritual exposure.

#### **Earliest ritual material (manuscript level)**

The **original 33° ritual** existed in manuscript form by the early 1800s.

Fragments quoted in historical studies describe:

- The degree's purpose as transmitting "Sovereign Masonic power"
- Creation of Inspectors General councils
- Governance after the monarch's death

But:

- These manuscripts were restricted.
- Full early ritual texts are not publicly standardized or universally accessible.
- Different Supreme Councils used variant versions.

### **Later published compilations (much later than the origin)**

Public or semi-public printed ritual collections only appear in the **late 19th–early 20th century**.

Examples include:

- Compilations used roughly **1885–1925** in U.S. jurisdictions.
- Ritual books compiling degrees 1–33 for internal instructional use (limited circulation).

These are **not the oldest texts**—they are later editorial syntheses.

### **Key historical timeline**

- **1760s**: Rite of Perfection develops precursor high degrees.
- **1786**: Grand Constitutions define 33° system.
- **1801**: First Supreme Council (Charleston).
- **1801–02**: Earliest surviving manuscript constitutions.
- **1802**: First printed circular.
- **Late 1800s+**: Printed ritual compilations appear.

## **A SUMMARY OF THE 33RD DEGREE RITUAL**

### **33° — Inspector General (Honorary)**

**Full traditional title:**

**"Sovereign Grand Inspector General"**

Conferred by a Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite.

It is:

- The **highest administrative degree** of the Rite
- Usually **honorary** (awarded for service)
- Governing rather than instructional

### **Core Purpose of the Degree**

Unlike philosophical degrees (e.g., 18° or 30°), the 33° is about:

- Transmission of **supreme authority**
- Custodianship of the Rite
- Protection of Masonic continuity
- Moral accountability of leadership

It transforms the candidate symbolically into a **guardian of the entire system**.

### **Ceremonial Structure (Typical Western Jurisdiction Model)**

While wording varies, most rituals follow this structural arc:

#### **1. Opening of the Supreme Council**

Setting:

- Council chamber rather than a lodge
- Throne or East reserved for the Sovereign Grand Commander

- 33° members present as Inspectors General

Symbolism:

- Supreme governance
- Collegiate authority (rule by council, not monarch alone)

The Council Chamber of the 33rd Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite is illuminated by eleven lights placed as follows (5-3-1-2):

(i) One candelabrum of five lights in the East. The five lights symbolize the five basic parts of the Masonic Teaching, which are the following:

- Devotion to the Great Architect of the Universe (G::A::O::T::U::), representing the principle of transcendence (this concept will be explained later).
- The system, or “mystery,” of the laws of nature.
- The perfection of the true Temple, which is the human heart.
- The victory of Light over Darkness.
- The triumph of Virtue against error and the passions.

(ii) One candelabrum of three lights in the West. The three lights symbolize the triptych cause–means–result as well as the triptych motion–fermentation–life, upon which the material world is based.

(iii) One candelabrum of one light in the North. This light symbolizes the first (or root) cause and the active force.

(iv) One candelabrum of two lights in the South. The two lights symbolize the principle of duality.

## 2. Reception of the Candidate

The candidate is introduced as:

- A Knight of the Rite
- A proven servant of humanity
- One found worthy of supreme trust

Key theme: **Merit, not ambition.**

## 3. Historical Transmission Narrative

A lecture or oration recounts:

- The lineage of high degrees
- Preservation through persecution
- Establishment of Supreme Councils

This often references:

- Chivalric orders
- Enlightenment philosophy
- Defense of liberty and conscience

## 4. The Investiture

This is the central act.

The candidate receives:

### a) White Cap (Tiara-style cap)

Symbolism:

- Purity of judgment
- Equality among Inspectors
- Authority tempered by virtue

### b) 33° Jewel

Typical design:

- Double-headed eagle
- Crown above
- “33” within triangle

Symbolism:

- East & West vigilance
- Temporal & spiritual balance
- Completion of the Rite

### c) Patent / Charter

Formal document declaring:

- Rank of Sovereign Grand Inspector General
- Jurisdictional authority
- Duty to uphold constitutions

## 5. The Obligation

A solemn vow is taken (non-verbatim summary):

Themes include:

- Loyalty to the Rite
- Protection of its integrity
- Service to humanity
- Defense of freedom of conscience
- Secrecy of deliberations

Unlike lower degrees, the obligation is framed as **stewardship, not secrecy alone**.

## 6. The Consecration / Anointing Motif

In some jurisdictions:

- Symbolic consecration occurs
- Sometimes with sword, light, or touch

Represents:

- Transmission of governing power
- Moral sanctification of authority

## 7. Charge to the Inspector General

This is one of the most important lectures.

Key teachings:

### **Authority is conditional**

Power exists only while used justly.

### **Leadership is sacrificial**

The 33° must serve, not rule.

### **Preservation of the Rite**

Guard doctrine, ritual, and fraternity.

### **Defense of human dignity**

A recurring Scottish Rite theme.

According to Grand Master Giuliano Di Bernardo, the Masonic anthropology can be summarized by the quintuple “Freedom, Tolerance, Brotherhood, Transcendence, Initiatory Secret.”

## Moral & Philosophical Themes

The 33° synthesizes all prior degrees into governance ethics:

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Justice	Fair rule without tyranny (specifically, without arbitrary/irrational authority)
Tolerance	Religious & political liberty (spiritual tolerance)
Responsibility	Authority = burden (moral responsibility)
Continuity	Protect tradition (transfer of meaning from the past to the future)
Enlightenment	Reason (language + thinking) guiding power

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### **Esoteric / Symbolic Interpretations**

Researchers often interpret deeper layers:

#### **Double-Headed Eagle**

Represents:

- Dual sovereignty (spiritual + temporal)
  - East/West unity
  - Ancient imperial symbolism reinterpreted morally
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### **Number 33**

Common interpretations:

- Completion of human moral ascent
  - Mastery of body (3) + soul (3)
  - Age of spiritual perfection in Christian mysticism
  - Highest point before transcendence
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### **White & Gold Colors**

- White → purity of intent
  - Gold → incorruptible wisdom
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### **Administrative Reality vs Symbolism**

Important distinction:

- **Symbolically:** Supreme wisdom and guardianship
- **Practically:** Governing board membership

33° members:

- Elect leadership
  - Manage Rite affairs
  - Oversee degrees 4–32
  - Maintain constitutions
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### **Variations by Jurisdiction**

Ritual structure differs across Supreme Councils, e.g.:

- Scottish Rite Southern Jurisdiction — heavily reworked in 19th c. reforms
- Scottish Rite Northern Masonic Jurisdiction — different dramatic structure
- European Supreme Councils — often shorter, more administrative

But core elements remain:

- Investiture
- Obligation
- Charge
- Governance symbolism

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### What the 33° Is *Not*

Contrary to conspiracy claims:

- Not “higher Masonry” above Freemasonry (the “Craft”) itself
- Not a separate religion
- Not political rulership

It is an **appendant governing degree** within the Scottish Rite system.

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### The Philosophical Meaning of the 33rd Degree: From governance to cosmic moral stewardship.

At the level of philosophy, the 33rd Degree is not only an administrative degree, but also the culmination of moral, intellectual, and spiritual responsibility acquired through all prior degrees.

- Lower degrees teach virtues
  - Higher degrees test justice
  - The 33° **embodies universal guardianship**
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#### 1. From Power → Responsibility

From the perspective of Masonic governance, the 33rd Degree means and implies supreme authority over the Rite.

From the perspective of Masonic philosophy, the 33rd Degree means and implies supreme accountability before humanity and the Great Architect of the Universe (G::A::O::T::U::). According to Grand Master Giuliano Di Bernardo’s Masonic philosophy, which I endorse, the G::A::O::T::U:: should be interpreted as an ideal of transcendence, specifically, as a symbol of humanity’s perfection (neither as a distinct, ontological God nor as a religious syncretistic doctrine).

In few words:

- Authority is symbolic, not dominative
- The 33° answers to moral law, not personal will

Framed leadership is primarily a **moral burden, and not a privilege**.

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#### 2. Universal Justice Philosophy

The Inspector General undertakes the responsibility to operate as:

- An arbiter of fairness
  - A defender of conscience
  - A protector of human dignity
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#### 3. Integration of Philosophical Universalism

Truth is universal; the 33° must recognize wisdom across civilizations.

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#### 4. The Crowned Double-Headed Eagle

The crowned double-headed eagle symbolizes:

- Balanced sovereignty
  - Wisdom ruling power
  - Moral oversight of governance
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#### 5. The Number 33 — Symbolic perfection of the Rite’s hierarchical system

$$3 \times 11 = 33$$

where:

**3 symbolizes:** harmony, creativity, and completeness, often representing the union of opposing forces (1 and 2) to create a new, **balanced whole**. Across various traditions, it signifies the “middle ground,” the “third element” that balances a pair. In **dialectics**, we have the triad thesis–antithesis–synthesis.

**11 symbolizes:** the apex and perfection of the mastery of the Tetraktys. The **Tetraktys** is a triangular symbol composed of ten points arranged in four rows, which was of profound mystical and mathematical importance to the followers of Pythagoras in ancient Greece. It represents the sum of the first four numbers ( $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$ ), symbolizing the organization of space, the cosmos, and the foundation of musical harmony. Hence, the number 11 can be regarded as a “**Master Number**.” It generally symbolizes intuition, spiritual awakening, enlightenment, and a bridge between the mortal and the divine.

## 6. The Inspector General as “Sentinel of Civilization”

The 33° is not just guardian of Masonry — but of:

- Liberty
- Knowledge
- Ethical governance
- Human progress

Thus the 33° becomes:

A philosophical knight of humanity.

## 7. Esoteric Light Motif

The “Light” symbolism:

The 33° safeguards light for the world

Light =

- Knowledge
- Moral truth
- Transcendence (a vision of anthropological perfection)

This ties the degree to the Rite’s overarching illumination theme.

## 8. Internal vs External Authority

True sovereignty is inward.

Meaning:

- Mastery of self > mastery of institutions
- Moral discipline precedes governance
- Without virtue, rank is void

Thus the 33° is:

- Symbolic culmination of inner initiation
- Not merely administrative promotion

## 9. Chivalric Reframing

In the context of Masonic Orders, “chivalry” is symbolic, not literal in a historical sense. The chivalric degrees of Masonic Orders are symbolic in nature and do not form part of the honors conferred by monarchs (e.g., the Sovereign of the UK, the Sovereign of Spain, etc.) or senior ecclesiastical dignitaries (e.g., the Pope of Rome, the Patriarch of Constantinople, etc.). The chivalric degrees of Masonic Orders are not public offices/honors, but esoteric titles, and, therefore, they have meaning and validity only within the symbolic context of the respective Masonic Orders. Hence, in the context of

Masonic Orders, chivalric degrees, such as Knight Kadosh (30°), create symbolic “Knights,” and symbolic (Masonic) chivalry means and implies:

- Defense of the oppressed
- Protection of truth
- Resistance to tyranny
- Service without selfishness

### **10. Splendor vs Decadence: A Theme in Need of a Focus**

The members of the 33rd degree realize, and are explicitly taught, that their object is not to rebuild the material Temple of King Solomon, but a moral temple, wherein truth and love will dwell, and people will live as an ecumenical brotherhood abiding by the laws of eternal equity and justice. Moreover, the members of the 33rd degree realize, and are explicitly taught, that they have not to avenge the murder of Hiram Abiff, who is a symbol of Masonic wisdom—which ignorance, lust for power, and falsehood have concealed from many people—but they must go on in search of the laws that regulate the moral world.

However, particularly since the mid-20th century, humanity, with the historical West at its center, has entered an era characterized by constant performance, shouted opinions, “flabby pluralism” (a pejorative term, often associated with Richard Bernstein), rewarding the outrageous, valuing speed more than depth, and outweighing intellectual rigor by popularity. In a society that rewards visibility over understanding and that has substituted the Cartesian principle “cogito ergo sum” with the principle “I pay or consume therefore I am,” what happens to those who think more deeply and are genuine rationalists? Topics like these pull me towards the Masonic philosophy of Giuliano Di Bernardo, especially his analysis of the decadence of Masonry after the end of World War II. Di Bernardo sees the “decadence” of Masonry as the result of:

- moral drift and loss of ethical grounding,
- misunderstanding or empty use of symbolism,
- institutional corruption and identity confusion,
- and a widening gap between the philosophical ideal and everyday practice.

For him, the cure is not cosmetic reform, but a philosophical and moral **return to initiatory purpose** and clarity about what Masonry truly is—a practical philosophy of human self-understanding and moral improvement.

#### **Origins: Enlightenment “Splendor”**

Di Bernardo frames early modern Freemasonry—particularly 18th-century European Masonry—as a moment of **intellectual and moral splendor** rooted in Enlightenment culture.

#### **Key features he highlights:**

##### **a) Rational spirituality**

Freemasonry harmonized reason and transcendence without dogmatic religion. It provided a symbolic path to ethical elevation compatible with Enlightenment rationality.

##### **b) Universal brotherhood**

It transcended confessional and national divisions—radical in an era marked by sectarian conflict and/or nationalism.

##### **c) Moral anthropology**

Di Bernardo interprets early Masonry as a philosophical project about the nature of the human being:

- freedom,

- dignity,
- perfectibility,
- ethical self-construction.

#### **d) Initiation as inner transformation**

Initiation originally meant a disciplined journey of moral and intellectual refinement—not merely ceremonial progression.

In this period, symbolism functioned as a **language of philosophical truths**, not mystical ornament.

#### **Institutional Expansion—The Turning Point**

Di Bernardo sees decline beginning when Freemasonry shifted from **elite philosophical circles** to **mass institutional organizations** (19th–20th centuries).

##### **Structural consequences**

- Rapid numerical growth diluted intellectual rigor.
- Administrative and bureaucratic concerns overshadowed initiatory depth.
- Lodges became socially prestigious rather than philosophically demanding.
- The attitudes of American democracy and pop culture swept away the traditional European elitist Masonries.

He does not treat expansion as inherently negative—but as the point where **quantity began to undermine quality**.

#### **Politicization and Instrumentalization**

A central historical argument is that Masonry gradually became entangled in:

- nationalist movements (going hand-in-hand with the division of Masonic jurisdictions according to state borders),
- anti-clerical struggles,
- party politics,
- power networks, and
- public relations techniques.

While Masonry historically interacted with political modernity, Di Bernardo argues that it **ceased to be supra-political** and instead became instrumentalized.

This shift marks a decisive break from Enlightenment universalism.

#### **Ritual Without Philosophy**

As Masonry spread, Di Bernardo argues that:

- Rituals were preserved,
- but their philosophical content was forgotten or trivialized.

He sees modern practice as often characterized by:

- formalism,
- shallow theatrical symbolism,
- memorized catechisms without understanding.

Thus, initiation became **performative rather than transformative**.

#### **Identity Fragmentation**

Historically, Freemasonry diversified into many rites, obediences, and interpretive schools.

Di Bernardo argues this pluralization produced confusion about what Masonry *is*:

**Historical Masonry**                      **Decadent Masonry**

Philosophical anthropology      Mysticism / occultism

<b>Historical Masonry</b>	<b>Decadent Masonry</b>
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Ethical initiation	Social club
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Universalist	Politicized
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Rational-symbolic	Mystical-dogmatic
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He is especially critical of attempts to redefine Masonry as:

- a religion,
- a substitute church,
- a system of religious syncretism,
- or a system of pure mysticism (i.e., a method without clearly formulated teleology).

### Case-studies

There are several case-studies of degeneration of Masonic institutions:

- scandals,
- mafiocracy,
- factionalism,
- loss of moral authority,
- petit-bourgeois opportunism,
- public mistrust.

For Di Bernardo, these are not isolated failures but manifestations of a deeper philosophical decay.

### From Enlightenment Project to Institutional Shell

Di Bernardo's historical thesis can be summarized as a three-stage trajectory:

1. **Foundational Splendor:** Enlightenment philosophical-initiatory project.
2. **Expansion and Dilution:** Growth, politicization, bureaucratization.
3. **Decadence:** Loss of moral center, symbolic illiteracy, identity confusion.

Regarding a thorough analysis of society's glamor and annoyances as well as of the tension between deep thinkers and mass culture, I should refer my readers to works by Arthur Schopenhauer.

### Refounding vs Superficial Reform

Because the problem is historical and structural, we should reject superficial reforms and all beautification and public relations techniques.

We need a “**refoundation**” grounded in:

- restored philosophical rigor,
- authentic initiatory pedagogy,
- moral seriousness,
- clear identity as philosophical anthropology.

In other words: a return not to the past institutionally, but to its **foundational intellectual spirit**. This is the project that, in line with Giuliano Di Bernardo's analysis, I put forward in my Masonic Book (in Greek): *Μαθήματα Τεκτονικής Φιλοσοφίας*, [https://www.iambos.gr/index.php?route=product/product&product\\_id=36259](https://www.iambos.gr/index.php?route=product/product&product_id=36259) and in my Masonic essays published in English on my website:

<https://nicolaslaos-official.gr/a-guild-of-literati/>

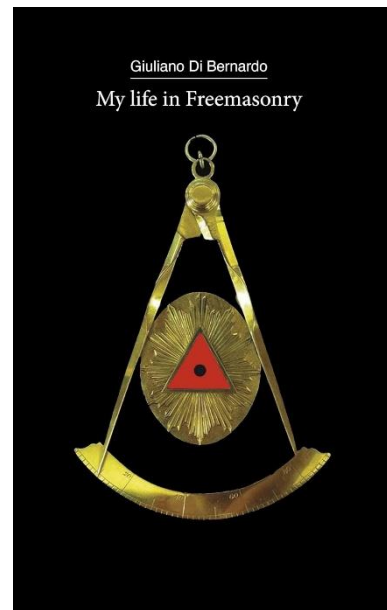
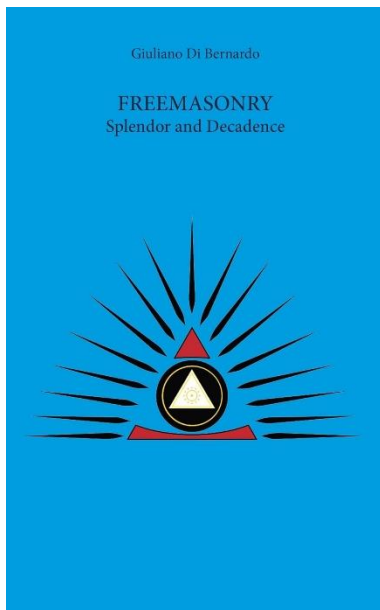
### Big-picture interpretation

For Di Bernardo, the history of Freemasonry mirrors a broader trajectory of modernity:

- Enlightenment ideals arise with philosophical clarity.
- Institutions expand and distort them in a context of popularization and profanity.
- Bureaucracy, politics, and mass culture dilute them.
- Symbolic traditions survive—but emptied of meaning.

Thus, Masonic decadence is both:

- an internal crisis,
- and a symptom of wider civilizational drift.



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- Italian, American, and French Rituals of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite



*Clarification Statement:*

I manage an international, globalist Masonic Project practicing Symbolic Masonry (the “Craft”) and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in the context of one, unified, international Obedience, according to, and in the service of, the Masonic teachings and guidelines that I have received from the Most Eminent Brother Professor Giuliano Di Bernardo in his capacity as the Founder and Grand Master of the Dignity Order and the Accademia degli Illuminati and as a former Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy and active member of the 33rd Degree of the Supreme Council for Italy affiliated to the Grand Orient of Italy.

Nicolas Laos

Reference: Νικόλαος Λάος, *Μαθήματα Τεκτονικής Φιλοσοφίας*, Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Ταμβος,

[https://www.iambos.gr/index.php?route=product/product&product\\_id=36259](https://www.iambos.gr/index.php?route=product/product&product_id=36259)