

FREEMASONRY IN FRANCE

Introduction

Any study of the history of Freemasonry in France raises the most profound questions regarding our beliefs, our practices and our administration. This paper attempts to summarize the actual position in France and the reasons why it evolved. The paper concludes with my personal opinion on what position we might take. A much more thorough examination of this whole question is contained in a paper by **Rt Wor Bro Juan Alvarez**¹. But first the paper needs a brief history of France and a note about some famous French Freemasons.

History of France

The history of France goes back to around 40,000 BC. The first historical records appear in the Iron Age, when what is now France made up the bulk of the region known to the ancient Greeks and Romans as Gaul. The medieval Kingdom of France emerged out of the western part of Charlemagne's Empire and achieved increasing prominence under the rule of the House of Capet, founded by Hugh Capet in 987. A succession crisis following the death of the last Capetian monarch in 1337 led to the series of conflicts known as the Hundred Years War between the House of Valois and the House of Plantagenet. The wars ended with a Valois victory in 1453, solidifying the power in a highly centralized monarchy.

During the next centuries, France experienced the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, as well as recurring religious conflicts and wars with other powers. A burgeoning worldwide colonial empire was established from the 16th century.

In the late 18th century the monarchy and associated institutions were overthrown in the French Revolution, which forever changed French and world history. The immediate trigger for the Revolution was Louis XVI's attempts to solve the government's worsening financial situation. He wanted a new land tax that would, for the first time, include a tax on the property of nobles and clergy. Paris was soon consumed with riots, anarchy, and widespread looting. Because the royal leadership essentially abandoned the city, the mobs soon had the support of the French Guard, including arms and trained soldiers. On 14 July 1789, the insurgents set their eyes on the large weapons and ammunition cache inside the Bastille fortress, which also served as a symbol of royal tyranny. Insurgents seized the Bastille prison. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen was adopted by the National Assembly in August 1789 as a first step in their effort to write a constitution.

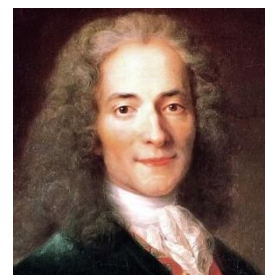
The Revolution brought about a massive shifting of powers from the Roman Catholic Church to the state. The Church had been the largest landowner in the country. Legislation enacted in 1790 abolished the Church's authority to levy a tax on crops, cancelled special privileges for the clergy, and confiscated Church property. The country was governed for a period as a Republic, until the French Empire was declared by Napoleon Bonaparte. Following Napoleon's defeat in the Napoleonic Wars France went through several further regime changes, being ruled as a monarchy, then briefly again as a Republic, and then as a Second Empire, until a more lasting Republic was established in 1870.

France, in World War I, fought alongside the United Kingdom, Russia, and their allies against the Central Powers. It was one of the Allied Powers in World War II, but was conquered by Nazi Germany within two months. Most of the country was controlled directly by the Axis Powers, while the south was controlled by the collaborationist Vichy government. Following liberation, the Republic was re-established. Since World War II France has been a leading member in the UN, the European Union and NATO, and remains a strong economic, cultural, military and political influence in the 21st century.

¹ Juan Carlos Alvarez, "*A commentary on the Grand Orient of France*", Research Lodge of NSW, 1986

Freemasons and the French Revolution

There is no question that freemasons, as individuals, were active in the French Revolution² In 1789 the established power in France was Louis XVI, a weak sovereign. The reality of power had been the nobility, many of whose members now embraced the philosophers and rationalists, such as **Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet)**; the clergy, whose lower hierarchy understood the misery inflicted on the lower classes; the army, whose members were drawn from and often sympathetic to the lower classes; and the public service, whose members were drawn from an educated bourgeoisie who saw themselves locked out from much political and social advancement.



Many of the army were freemasons. **Bernadotte**, who led the troops expelled from Grenoble, and later was a general for Napoleon and then King of Sweden, was a freemason. **Bernadotte** reigned as King Charles XIV of Sweden and King Carl III Johan of Norway from 5 February 1818 until his death on 8 March 1844, in Stockholm. The cautious response of the army to the outbreak of rebellion in Brittany has been ascribed to the number of officers who were freemasons.

The rules for the Estates-General were developed by **Minister Necker** whose Masonic membership is unproven but considered probable, while the election committees created by these rules are claimed to have been mainly composed of freemasons. As Finance Minister, **Necker** published his most influential work which summarizes governmental income and expenditures, giving the first-ever public record of royal finances. It was meant to be an educational piece for the people, and in it he expressed his desire to create a well-informed, interested populace.



Less admirable, **Louis Philippe Joseph**, 5th duc d'Orléans from 1785, Grand Master of the Grand Orient and later "Citoyen Égalité" (1747/04/13 -1793/11/06), was driven by his hatred for his cousin the King. Within freemasonry two loosely knit groups can be seen to be developing: those who see the Duke as a symbol to achieve their goals of equality, and those who would use Freemasonry as a vehicle for their own political goals. When the National Assembly is formed, out of the 1,336 delegates to the Estates-General at least 320, or 24%, are believed to have been freemasons.

Other Famous French Freemasons

In the American Revolution, **Marquis De La Fayette** served as a major-general in the Continental Army under George Washington. In the middle of the war he returned to France to negotiate an increase in French support. On his return, he blocked troops led by Cornwallis at Yorktown while the armies of Washington prepared for battle against the British.



Back in France in 1788 he presented a draft of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Lafayette was appointed commander-in-chief of the National Guard and, in response to violence during the French Revolution, **Lafayette** ordered the National Guard to fire on demonstrators at the Champ de Mars in 1791. In 1792, as the radical factions in the Revolution grew in power, Lafayette tried to flee to the United States but was captured by Austrians and spent more than five years in prison. Lafayette returned to France after Napoleon Bonaparte secured his release from prison in 1797.

² "Freemasons in the French Revolution" Grand Lodge of British Columbia



François-Adrien Boieldieu (1775–1834) was a French composer, mainly of operas, often called "the French Mozart". Although his reputation is largely based upon his operas, Boieldieu also composed other works. Among them was his Harp Concerto in C, written in 1800-1801 and one of the masterpieces of the harp repertory. Boieldieu became professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire and in 1817 and was a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. He received the Légion d'honneur in 1820.

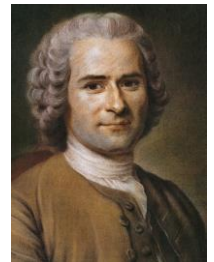
He was initiated at the Parisian Lodge Arts and Friendship.

François-André Danican Philidor (1726–1795) was a French composer and chess player. He contributed to the early development of the Comic Opera. He was also regarded as the best chess player of his age; his book "*Analyse du jeu des Échecs*" was considered a standard chess manual for at least a century, and a well-known opening and checkmate method are both named after him.



Stendhal was the pen name of the French novelist **Henri Marie Beyle**, (1783-1842). Largely ignored during his lifetime by readers and critics alike, he has long since been recognized as a great master among psychological novelists. An extraordinary mixture of historical settings, autobiographical analyses, and psychological subtlety, his novels depict the intellectual and moral climate of France during the period of disillusionment following the battle of Waterloo. He was a member of the French Lodge Sainte Caroline.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) was a major philosopher, writer, and composer of 18th-century Romanticism. His political philosophy heavily influenced the French Revolution, as well as the overall development of modern political, sociological and educational thought. His "*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*" and his "*On the Social Contract*" are cornerstones in modern political and social thought and make a strong case for democratic government and social empowerment. He was interred as a national hero in the Panthéon in Paris, in 1794, 16 years after his death. His novel, "*Émile: or, On Education*" is a seminal treatise on the education of the whole person for citizenship. **Rousseau's** autobiographical writings: his "*Confessions*", which initiated the modern autobiography, and his "*Reveries of a Solitary Walker*" were among the pre-eminent examples of the late 18th-century movement known as the *Age of Sensibility*, featuring an increasing focus on subjectivity and introspection that has characterized the modern age.



Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715-71), was born in Paris and became a noted French Philosopher. He was a member of Lodge Nes Neuf Soeurs in Paris and was a Fellow of the Royal Society. He boldly attacked everything considered orthodox and this brought him immediate recognition, as well as severe condemnation by the Pope and by the Sorbonne. **Helvetius** began with the view that all people pursue their self-interest and are guided by innately equal intellectual abilities. Only artificial and accidental environmental differences account for the diversity of human beings. A prudent legislator should, therefore, construct a society based upon enlightened self-interest. Such a society would establish political equality, achieve the perfection of individuals through education, and create laws based upon utilitarian considerations of reward and punishment.

Charles Louis de Secoudat Montesquieu was a prominent French philosopher, political thinker and social commentator. He became famous for his articulation of the theory of separation of powers, taken for granted in modern discussions of government and implemented in many constitutions throughout the world. He was also largely responsible for the popularization of the term 'feudalism'. He was a member of the Lodge at Horn Tavern, London and a Fellow of the Royal Society





Louis Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803) was a French philosopher. He tried first law and then the army as a profession but left the army to become a preacher of mysticism. A nobleman, he was interned and his property was confiscated during the French Revolution. His ideal society was a natural and spiritual theocracy, in which God would raise up men of endowment, who would regard themselves strictly as divine commissioners to guide the people. All ecclesiastical organization was to disappear, giving place to a purely spiritual Christianity, based on the assertion of a faculty superior to the reason moral sense, from which we derive knowledge of God.

Joseph de Lalande (1732-1807) was a French astronomer widely known for his improvement of Halley's astronomical tables and for his popular books on astronomy. He published the first significant catalogue of stars listing nearly 50,000.



He became involved in many astronomical controversies and took an active part in scientific and literary organisations. In 1769 he instituted the Lodge Des Sciences and was a founder of Lodge Les Neuf Soeurs at Paris.



The Frenchman **Pierre de Laplace** (1749-1827) is best known for his nebular hypothesis of the origin of the solar system, which viewed the solar system as originating from the contracting and cooling of a large, flattened, and slowly rotating cloud of incandescent gas.

He also provided a stronger mathematical basis for Newtonian thinking and his 5-volume '*Treatise on Celestial Mechanics*' was the culmination of over a century of work devoted to the mathematical explanation, on the basis of gravitational theory, of the motions of the bodies of the solar system. He held Grand rank in the Grand Orient of France

Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, (1743-94), was a French philosopher and mathematician. He first made his reputation as a mathematician with his essay on the theory of probability. Later, he engaged in political activity and became a prominent member of the Legislative Assembly during the French Revolution. **Condorcet's** opposition to the excesses of the Jacobins, however, caused him to be arrested for conspiracy. He died in his cell, presumably a victim of suicide. While in hiding, he wrote "*Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*".



Condorcet has been called a prophet of progress. He stressed the importance of education, the free exchange of ideas, a republican form of government, a guided economy, the emancipation of women, and a language with one clear meaning for each word. He was said to have been a member of Lodge Les Neuf Soeurs at Paris.



Jules Henri Poincaré (1854–1912) was a French mathematician, theoretical physicist, engineer, and a philosopher of science. He is often described as a polymath, and in mathematics as "*The Last Universalist*", since he excelled in all fields of the discipline as it existed during his lifetime. He made many original contributions to pure and applied mathematics, mathematical physics, and celestial mechanics.

Historical Beginning

It is generally believed that Freemasonry in France came from Scotland and that two Lodges existed in France as early as 1535, in Paris and Lyon³. English Lodges were first established from 1721 but the first French-style Lodge was established in 1725, whose Grand Masters were all Scottish exiles who fled with the deposed King James II. Jacobite politics no doubt influenced its relationship with GLE and French Freemasonry apparently ignored the “Ancients” and “Moderns” dichotomy in England in the 18th Century.

The Problem

However, Freemasonry in France today is dispersed between many Grand Lodges as shown in table 1⁴.

Table 1 - The Diversity of French Freemasonry

Name	Founded	Members	Lodges
Grand Orient de France	1738	43,000	1,000
Grande Loge Nationale Francaise	1913	30,000	1,250
Grand Loge de France	1894	26,000	670
10 others	1881-2002	> 38,500	> 990

We, together with the majority of Grand Lodges around the world, are not in harmony with the largest, the Grand Orient of France. We are in harmony with the National Grand Lodge of France, whose Lodges may work any one of five different rites and was originally called the “Independent and regular Grand Lodge for France and Colonies”.

The Grand Orient - Origins and Similarities

The Grand Orient has, in Masonic parlance, a “regular” beginning. It was founded in 1777 on the dissolution of the first French Grand Lodge and was “recognized” for the first 100 years of its existence. It changed its rules in 1877 and the following year the Grand Lodge of England withdrew recognition. There is no thought that members of the Grand Orient do not live their lives according to the moral teachings of Freemasonry.

Basic differences

There are three basic differences between the practices of the Grand Orient and “recognized” Freemasonry as follows:-

- Admission of atheists
- Omission of the Volume of the Sacred Law (VSL) from the ritual ceremonies
- Admission of females

Atheists - The Grand Orient has explained that admission of atheists into their order recognizes the need to allow total freedom of thought, unrestricted by dogma. This by no means infers that all members of the Grand Orient are atheists.

VSL - The Grand Orient of France banished the VSL, from its Lodges and deleted all reference to TGAOTU from its ceremonies, maintaining that "the basis of Freemasonry is absolute liberty of conscience and the solidarity of humanity"⁵.

Females – The Grand Orient recognizes orders admitting females into Masonry.

There are other differences including the abolition of the office of Grand Master but the main issues are the ones mentioned above.

³ Reference to “*Les Annales Maconniques de Pays-Bas*” written in 1922 in J S Walshe.

⁴ J S Walshe, “*Freemasonry in France*”, Metropolitan College Study Group, Oct 2002

⁵ Jean Baylot, “*A Vindication of French Regular Masonry*”

Cultural Issues in France

In order to understand how Freemasonry in France has taken this path, it is really necessary to look at some basic cultural differences between our traditional Anglophile view of life and some issues in life in France.

By the eighteenth century the Renaissance movement had produced a flowering of literature, science, art, religion, and politics and widespread educational reform. This provided the setting for the "Age of Reason", when philosophers and thinkers seriously questioned the autonomous power of the Pope and the King and sought openness and democratic ideals. They sought an end to privilege, serfdom and slavery in the name of liberty, fraternity and equality.

An important philosophical position was the call for "free rational inquiry" into all subjects, especially religion. Saying that early Christianity was founded on freedom of conscience, the philosophers of the day demanded religious toleration and an end to religious persecution. They also demanded that debate rest on reason and rationality. They believed all things in the universe must obey God's laws of nature. They argued that priests had deliberately corrupted Christianity for their own gain by promoting the acceptance of miracles, unnecessary rituals, and illogical and dangerous doctrines. The worst of these doctrines was original sin. By convincing people that they required a priest's help to overcome their innate sinfulness, religious leaders had enslaved the human population. They therefore typically viewed themselves as intellectual liberators.

In France the French Revolution evolved from this thinking. Freedom from tyranny and the Pope meant that Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette had been executed. But Britain's freedom had evolved in a different way. Britain had restricted the power of the King with Magna Carta and the Henry VIII had restrained the Pope's power. The restoration meant that Charles II ruled by the will of the people not the will of God. After the execution those few British radicals who still supported the ideals of the French revolution were viewed with deep suspicion by their countrymen. The British conservative government, headed by William Pitt, following an attack on George III, passed the Seditious Meetings Act and the Treasonable Practices Act. These acts prohibited freedom of assembly for some groups and encouraged indictments against radicals for "libelous and seditious" statements.

There was therefore a major difference between French and British social directions. The French attitudes fell into three different but intertwined areas as follows:-

- Egalitarianism and respect for Royalty
- The Law
- Politics and Religion

Attitudes to Royalty

Our Freemasonry, while egalitarian in nature, nevertheless shows that it is proud to attract Royalty amongst its members. Our rituals explain that Monarchs have "seen fit to exchange the Sceptre for the Trowel" and, in other degrees, it is not uncommon to wear swords and act out the dubbing of a Knight. Attitudes to Royalty are more problematical in France.

Divided loyalty between the French Royal family and the heroes of the revolution has never been completely eliminated from the French national psyche – perhaps because of the savagery of the guillotine. Perhaps because some families still farm lands they worked in feudal times and remember their patrons in family history. Perhaps this is simply because of France's long history and the fact that remnants of their Royal heritage exist in every Province and City.

Descendants of France's royalty still claim to be the legitimate monarch of France. These groups are descendants of the Bourbons, rejecting all heads of state since 1830, descendants of Louis-Phillippe, rejecting all heads of state since 1848 and descendants of Napoleon I and his brothers, rejecting all heads of state since 1870⁶.



Louis XIX (1830) Louis-Phillippe (1830-1848) Napoleon III (1852-1870)

In the United States of America, where similar divided loyalties existed at a similar time, they have been resolved and play a negligible part in the national culture if at all. However, they do not have many of these daily reminders of the past. We in Australia have no long or significant revolutionary history and no feudal past so it may be difficult for us to understand the long historical view that people take of themselves in many European and Middle East countries.

Juan Alvarez takes the view that, as only nobility were permitted to wear swords, the higher Masonic degrees, where members were knighted, were very popular in France despite the egalitarian nature of Freemasonry. If so, this vividly illustrates the above dichotomy in cultural values.

Attitudes to the Law

In our Constitution, the Monarch, or his/her representative, is the basic custodian of the law and signs new laws into being. Attitudes to royalty are related to attitudes to the law. In addition the principles of our laws are regarded as timeless and we place legal weight on precedence. But it has been said that Napoleon's greatest lasting achievement was the total reform of the French legal system.

Daily life in France is governed by a much larger number of detailed laws than we are used to. As an illustration, I recall a conversation about the negotiations about wine names between Australia and France, when they focused on the laws regarding what could be said on a wine bottle label – even the size of the lettering. Laws governing this are very detailed in France and this was seen as a primary instrument with which the attempt to restrict or protect their trade was to be implemented.

The natural consequence of having too many laws is that people have less respect for, and pay less obedience to, them. When affairs become too detailed, it is natural to shy away from the detail and look for the principles instead. Some laws may seem unnecessary or even irritating to us but we tend to obey them anyway. The French are more philosophical about that. So it is natural to expect them to not pay much homage to conformity with international Masonic practise but to go their own way.

A basic tenet of law in France is that one is assumed guilty until proven innocent of a criminal charge and the laws of evidence are different. Moral law, as expressed by the Church, has less significance than secular law in France.

⁶ From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Secular Law and Religion

In Australia, although we generally seek to separate the law and religion, we accept that politicians may have a 'conscience vote' or may speak about their religious convictions on a social issue. Certainly the Churches speak out in the pulpit or media on social issues and expect some degree of attention when they do so.

In Germany and for many years in Russia, the church was an instrument of the State, administered by a Government Ministry. While this may have, in Germany, resolved religious wars, or in Russia, restricted the Church's conservative attitude to the social reforms begun by Peter the Great, nevertheless this restricted rather than enhanced the ability of the Church to voice its concerns on behalf of Christian values in questions of social justice. This has possibly harmed both the church and the State by turning people away from the traditional churches and reducing respect for politicians.

In France, where the age of reason had a very dramatic outcome, the other extreme occurred and it is considered to be politically suicidal to invoke a religious attitude in a political debate because the principle of separating the Church from politics is far more ingrained in the national culture. It is fundamental to apply the principle not the dogma. It is of value to try to understand why this is so and how it influences French Freemasonry.

Even amongst the clergy these attitudes exist as there have been 16 different French Popes but not one for over 600 years⁷. This alone may account for some part of the French attitude to formal religious edicts from Rome. Although the French Kings were invariably more powerful than their Popes, they needed their endorsement and both were cast in the same autocratic and oppressive mould. Dissatisfaction with Rome has a long history and played a large part in the revolution, but even Napoleon ordered the Pope to attend his coronation (but not to crown him).

Freemasons and the Pope

The first Papal Bull against Freemasonry, issued by Clement XII stated that the main objection is to having the horrific penalties and the oath taken upon the bible. **In propitiation, either the oath or the bible had to go.**

In 1877, when the Grand Orient made optional the presence of the VSL from their altars and removed any reference to TGAOTU from their rituals, the action was possibly due to some need to recognise these objections of the church. But Rome still held the belief that the Craft was used as a medium to reach the republican cause because of its well-developed central organisation able to provide the infrastructure for such a liberal movement. Feelings against the clergy were brought about by the aggressive attitude of some of the Churches towards the French Lodges. Masonry in the early times had been defensive in character. However others believed that the Grand Orient, by showing religious neutrality, maintained an attack on the Church. The Vatican was well aware that the political clubs (and the French Freemasons by association) were advocating that one of the prerequisites of an effective democratic political system was the secularisation of society, or the exclusion of religious activities in government.

The French Revolution

In 1789 the established power in France was the King. However Louis XVI was a weak sovereign. The reality of power was the nobility, many of whose members embraced:-

- The philosophers and rationalists, such as the Freemason **Voltaire**;
- The clergy, whose lower hierarchy understood the misery inflicted on the lower classes;
- The army, whose members were drawn from and often sympathetic to the lower classes; and
- The public service, whose members were drawn from an educated bourgeoisie who saw themselves locked out from much political and social advancement.⁸

⁷ See Appendix A.

⁸ "Freemasons in the French Revolution", [Grand Lodge](#) of British Columbia and Yukon A.F. & A.M.

The clergy were well represented in Freemasonry, and the membership of some lodges, such as La Vertu in Clervaux, were composed entirely of Catholic clergymen. While the nobility were attracted to Freemasonry, the greater majority was made up of the bourgeoisie, to whom the Masonic motto of equality meant that they were the equal of the nobles.

Many of the army were freemasons. **Bernadotte**, who led the troops expelled from Grenoble, and later was a general for Napoleon and then King of Sweden, was a Freemason. The cautious response of the army to the outbreak of rebellion in Brittany has been ascribed to the number of officers who were Freemasons. While it is doubtful, it is claimed by some that Napoleon was a Freemason.⁹ As were his brothers.



Napoleon I



Napoleon II

There is no question that freemasons, as individuals, were active in building, and rebuilding, a new society. The rules for the Estates-General were developed by **Minister Necker** a probable Mason, while the election committees created by these rules are claimed to have been mainly composed of Freemasons.¹⁰ The two anti-Masonic papal edicts, that of Pope Clemence XII on May 4, 1738 and that of Pope Benedict XIV on June 15, 1751, were never registered by the French Parliament and therefore never took effect.

Gould states that “any evaluation of French Freemasonry must take into account the large number of bodies claiming authority to confer degrees and warrant lodges: there were ten such bodies active in the days preceding the French Revolution.” **Gould** detailed over thirty bodies that existed between 1725 and 1885, noting that he only included those that exercised any considerable influence on the Grand Orient¹¹. Accordingly, it is difficult to believe that there was any real organized and coordinated Masonic thrust during the revolution but Masonic preferences for freedom of thought and action, as opposed to compliance with edicts from Rome, are obvious.

Some Administrative Matters

A necessary condition of “Recognition” is that a Grand Lodge is considered to be “regular” according to a set of rules. “Recognition” usually confers “Visitation Rights”, which enable members of each Grand Lodge, which are in recognition of each other, to visit Lodges in the other’s jurisdiction. Despite this, there appears to be a wide-spread convention in France which allows members to visit Lodges in a jurisdiction which is not recognized by their Grand Lodge, although Grand Lodge officers will not do so “Officially”. This informality is not acceptable to many.

Exclusive Territorial Jurisdiction

In Australia we generally operate in accordance with a policy of Exclusive Territorial Jurisdiction, by which Grand Lodges in one State agree not to erect Lodges in another State so as to provide each Grand Lodge exclusive jurisdiction over all Lodges in its State. The major exception is in Western Australia where several Lodges hold allegiance to the United Grand Lodge of England. There are minor other exceptions.

⁹ Napoleon allegedly Initiated: June 12-19 1798 (1795-98) in the Army Philadelphia Lodge, Malta

¹⁰ See Appendix B for the sequence of events during the revolution.

¹¹ R F Gould, “*The History of Freemasonry, Its Antiquities, Symbols, Constitutions, Customs, etc*”. Vol. III, New York, John C Yorston & Co., Publishers: 1886.

The policy of exclusive territorial jurisdiction originated in response to the dissipation of Military Lodges after the Civil War in the United States of America, where it is widely applied except in reference to the recognized Prince Hall Grand Lodges.

The policy is not one of the “ancient landmarks” of Freemasonry and it is debateable whether its application is useful on balance. While it simplifies administration, it may well stifle innovation and diversity. It is not observed by the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland or Ireland and in many other Masonic Jurisdictions in other countries around the world so cannot even be said to be acknowledged as a widespread Masonic principle of administration.

It does also not apply in France but it means that we tend to make choices as to which we recognize in any area. At present we recognise GLNF but no others in France.

Masonic Persecution during World War II

During the war, Freemasonry was banned by edict in all countries that were either allied with the Nazis or under Nazi control. As part of their propaganda campaign against Freemasonry, the Nazis mounted anti-Masonic exhibitions throughout occupied Europe. Paris hosted an anti-Masonic exhibition in October 1940. Displaying Masonic ritual and cultural artefacts stolen from lodges, such exhibitions aimed to ridicule and direct hatred towards Freemasons and to heighten fears of a Jewish-Masonic conspiracy. German wartime propaganda, particularly in the army, charged that the Jews and Masons had provoked World War II.

Some of Germany's Axis partners decreed police and discriminatory measures against Masons. In 1940, the Vichy France regime issued a decree declaring Masons to be enemies of the state and authorizing police surveillance of them. The French wartime authorities even created a card file that identified all members of the Grand Orient of France.

After World War II, the “Independent and regular Grand Lodge for France and Colonies” changed its name to the French National Grand Lodge (GLNF).

Masonic Colonialism

The obverse of the policy of Exclusive Territorial Jurisdiction is Masonic colonialism, which may have its own faults and limitations.

The early colonization by Britain, Sweden and France of many areas in the world has marked the spread of Freemasonry. However, the mark of a wise colonist is to know when to grant independence so that the trade, laws, influence and institutions left behind by the colonizing powers survive but take on the “face” of an alternative culture.

While, generally speaking, Britain has shown itself, by this definition, to be wise, nevertheless British Freemasonry still clings to old colonizing principles and has Lodges (English, Scottish and Irish) in parts of the world which have long since shed British rule.

By this definition, France has not shown itself to be wise in Vietnam and other parts of Indo-china and still clings to colonies in the Pacific. French Freemasonry still holds Lodges in places such as Mauritius where it was forced to give up colonial administration long ago.

This is in marked contrast to the early colonization by Spain and Portugal, which did not generally spread Freemasonry, but these nations have very clearly given up all colonization claims. Further, it could almost be said that Freemasonry spread with the revolutionary anti-colonizing movements in South America. But the Grand Orient of France has caused considerable difficulties there too.

The problems caused by Masonic colonization have been seen in Australia in the Rose Croix, Templars and Constantine orders and in the Craft in Western Australia. The confusion caused by French Masonic colonization in Russia, for instance, although different in nature, was also significant. The recent initiatives taken by Grand Lodges in France to form the Grand Lodge of Europe raise these questions again.

Masonic Practices

At least some of the customs in French Freemasonry could well be emulated in our procedures. Candidates are required to prepare papers on Freemasonry, setting out their beliefs and understanding, before they can progress to the next degree or even before they are initiated. By all means let us study their customs and adopt those procedures of value that can advance our craft.

Current Situation

The GLNF has recently been troubled by accusations that the Grand Master **Francois Stifani** had refused to allow the financial records to be independently audited and that he was involving the Grand Lodge in political activities. The GLNF observes the landmark that politics and religion are not issues for Lodges and Grand Lodges but the Grand Master has wanted his Grand Lodge to have the kind of influence that the Grand Orient apparently enjoys. The aftermath of these accusations saw widespread sackings and resignations from the Craft

It is also reported that “since 2009, GLNF is facing serious troubles (financial issues leading to bankruptcy, governance conflicts)”¹² and that “in January 2011 Miss Monique Legrand has been designated by French legal authorities to manage the situation leading to a major internal crisis.”

Following the publication of the suspension of the Recognition by most of the "Regular" European Grand Lodges the UGLE decided on 19th July 2011 to suspend relations with the GLNF.

While the causes of the GLNF disruption are of no direct concern to the issues and principles which are primarily addressed in this paper, this recall of recognition by UGLE has obvious and serious repercussions for all of the Grand Lodges in Australia although no action has yet been taken.

Conclusion

It is one thing to try to understand how French Freemasonry evolved into this dilemma. It is another matter to decide where it might lead us. I believe there is little doubt that most people would like to see a situation where there is full recognition and acceptance of each other as Masonic brothers.

Some people join Freemasonry for the social enjoyment, or for the opportunity it provides for community service, without seeking the philosophical and spiritual experience it also affords. To these people the issue is, at most, one of sorting out the Masonic administrative conflicts before all of the Grand Lodges in France could rejoin the international Masonic family.

However, for those who see Freemasonry as a spiritual journey as well as a social and charitable one, the Masonic situation in France confronts us with a basic decision, which, irrespective of the implications of Masonic administration, is of fundamental personal importance. We must decide, as individuals, whether God is central to our lives or whether we accept that a total freedom of belief is more important than this and, in consequence, that belief in God is irrelevant to the spread of moral behaviour.

To Christians, this question is fundamental as Christians believe to be saved by faith in God and that this incites our moral behaviour. Our Muslim brethren will see this question differently but abhor any thought that it is acceptable not to believe in God. Similarly, our Jewish brethren could not excuse atheism in an applicant for Masonry. So it is, to me, impossible to accept the position of the Grand Orient where belief in God is not a basic requirement for membership.

Issues of Masonic administration, such as the admission of female members, the presence of a VSL in our rituals, mutual recognition and visitation are of secondary importance and might possibly be resolved in time although not without considerable difficulty. Admission of atheists, in the name of greater freedom of thought, is a much more crucial issue.

¹² Wikipedia

In today's world how often are we told that "times are changing"? How often do we have to reply, if silently, "but our fundamental beliefs are not". If Freemasonry cannot hold firm on this issue, where are our principles? This is not just a theoretical debate about our ancient landmarks or about international Masonic administration. However reluctant we may feel in refusing recognition to this body of good people, the consequences of doing so are potentially much more painful.

I would welcome any worthy French Freemason into my home and my circle of friends but I would rather continue to hold a pitying respect for atheists than make the changes necessary to admit them as participants in my spiritual life in Freemasonry.

Right now, with the isolation of GLNF from the UGLE and European Grand Lodges, the issue is moot anyway.

Appendix A - List of Popes with French ancestry.

1. **Pope Silvester II**, 999-1003: Gerbert of Aurillac.
2. **Pope Stephen IX**, 1057-1058: Frederick of Lorraine.
3. **Pope Nicholas II**, 1058-1061: Gerard of Burgundy.
4. **Pope Urban II**, 1088-1099: Otho of Lagery (or Otto or Odo).
5. **Pope Callistus II**, 1119-1124: Guido of Vienne.
6. **Pope Urban IV**, 1261-1264: Jacques Pantaléon.
7. **Pope Clement IV**, 1265-1268: Guy Foulques.
8. **Pope Innocent V**, 1276: Pierre de Tarentaise.
9. **Pope Martin IV**, 1281-1285: Simon de Brie.
10. **Pope Clement V**, 1305-1314: Bertrand de Got.
11. **Pope John XXII**, 1316-1334: Jacques d'Euse.
12. **Pope Benedict XII**, 1334-1342: Jacques Fournier.
13. **Pope Clement VI**, 1342-1352: Pierre Roger.
14. **Pope Innocent VI**, 1352-1362: Stephen Aubert.
15. **Pope Urban V**, 1362-1370: Guillaume de Grimoard.
16. **Pope Gregory XI**, 1370-1378: Pierre Roger de Beaufort.

Appendix B – Sequence of Events during the Revolution

1. **February 1787** - Assembly of "notables" called by Charles-Alexandre de Calonne.
2. **May 5, 1789** - Estates-General met at Versailles
3. **July 14, 1789** - Parisian mob seized the Bastille.
4. **Aug 4, 1789** - National Assembly abolished feudal regime and tithe.
5. **Aug 26, 1789** - Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.
6. **Oct 5, 1789** - Paris mob marched on Versailles brought King to Paris.
7. **June 20, 1791** - Louis XVI tried to flee country.
8. **April 20, 1791** - France declared war on Prussia and Austria.
9. **Aug 10, 1792** - revolutionaries occupied Tuileries imprisoned the royal family.
10. **Jan 21, 1793** - Louise XVI executed.
11. **Sept 5, 1793** - Reign of Terror (to July 27, 1794) by Committee of Public Safety.
12. **July 27, 1794** - (9 Thermidor II) "White Terror" coup against Jacobins and Robespierre by National Convention.
13. **Oct. 5, 1795** - Napoleon crushes Royalist attempt to seize power in Paris.
14. **Nov, 1795** - Directory established (until Nov 9, 1799).
15. **Nov. 9, 1799** - Coup of 18-19 Brumaire VIII Napoleon proclaimed end of the revolution and instituted Consulate.