

The Octagon in Freemasonry

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Everything in Freemasonry has profound significance. I can recall being told by an elderly Mason, after becoming a Master Mason, that the more I studied the Order, then the more I would be rewarded. I recently found the remarkable Masonic art seen here. It was created in 1733 and is made of marble and other stone.

The meanings of the various symbols and symbolism shown are familiar to every Freemason; however, one aspect might not be so obvious—Why did the artist use an octagon (eight-sided figure)?

In Freemasonry, the octagon would represent what are called the “Beatitudes,” the eight blessings recounted in the Sermon on the Mount (Sermon given by Jesus Christ) in the Gospel of St. Matthew. What the Beatitudes “profess” can be found throughout the Old Testament, but Jesus essentially re-focused them to concentrate on the spirit of love and humility, rather than the “force” in the Old Testament. He wanted to “draw a line” between the mind-sets of “old and new.” Here are the Beatitudes:

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.
2. Blessed are those who mourn: for they will be comforted.
3. Blessed are the meek: for they will inherit the earth.
4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they will be filled.



5. Blessed are the merciful: for they will be shown mercy.

6. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they will see God.

7. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they will be called children of God.

8. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The Masonic Order certainly recognizes the Beatitudes, and I am certain they are recognized in some form in every world religion. However, we can conclude that our early brethren took to heart the “separation” the Beatitudes represented; and used the octagon as a symbol for such. What was (and still is to some degree) this “separation?”

Freemasonry was not “invented” by one person; it was, for lack of a better term, a social movement. The early Roman Catholic Church adopted the “my way or the highway” philosophy.

It united people with common values, but would not tolerate other faiths. Freemasonry united men with common values and gave them religious freedom. Was is all really that simple? The short answer here is, Yes. All of the values embraced by Freemasonry are those of every major world religion. Freemasonry simply recognized that it is impossible to change a person’s faith, so made it a non-issue as to membership in its ranks. It retained a simple “belief in a Supreme Being” condition, but even this is no longer required in some Masonic disciplines.

It would be unfair not to mention that the Roman Catholic Church and most major world “faiths” now recognize and cooperate with each other—but that was certainly not the way in 1733. Also, Freemasonry has come a long way in achieving acceptance by world religions or religious disciplines.

There is one symbol in the 1733 artwork I will mention because it represents one of the main oppositions to Freemasonry by the Roman Catholic Church—the key.

It is of course, the jewel of the lodge treasurer; however its meaning is far deeper than a simple key to a money box. It means “confidentiality” (keep things locked up)—do not make known information you have been given in confidence. The Church held that there could be no “secrets,” as it were, withheld from clergy (priests only had this privilege). As a result, failing to reveal what one knew was an affront to the Church.

Whoever the ancient brother was who designed the artwork, he definitely knew his Freemasonry. In all likelihood the design originated with a Masonic tracing board (used to provide in-lodge instruction to new candidates).

There is no reference to the Beatitudes in current Craft Lodge Freemasonry (American work): however in concordant bodies a symbol with eight points refers to them. (CLM)



Charlemagne is seen here in an octagon, which implies the change he brought about in Christianity (the old to the new). (Germany, Issued 2000)



An octagon military stamp from Turkey (1898). The implication might be to “bring about change.”



The world’s most sought and expensive stamp is in the form of an octagon.