

CORN, WINE AND OIL THE WAGES OF A FELLOWCRAFT

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My search for the meaning and significance of the phrase "corn, wine, and oil" began as a response to my puzzlement over the fellowcraft lecture reference to "corn, wine, and oil as the wages of a fellowcraft. I wondered why those three particular items. Why not, "bread, beer, and bologna?" My search involved reviewing the use of symbolism, looking at the meaning of each item separately, and looking at the meaning of the comprehensive phrase.

Throughout history symbols have been utilized by the people as a means of facilitating communication. Before the advent of an alphabet symbols were the only means available to convey written messages. The invention of the first alphabet was, in fact, the development of a set of symbols designed to make it possible to communicate easily in writing. However, it was many years before books were available for all but a very few persons. Consequently, most people could not read and were dependent upon symbols as one of the important ways to learn the lessons of religion and life. For example in medieval times churches were designed to teach religious lessons. Churches and especially cathedrals utilized symbols extensively to teach the people the stories found in the Bible. The use of the word "story" for the floor of a building dates back to medieval times when it was not uncommon to adorn the windows of buildings with pictures telling stories. the buildings came to be designated as "one story", two stories", etc., depending upon the number of stories they illustrated.

As the builders of the medieval churches and cathedrals, the operative stone masons were, of necessity, knowledgeable about many religious symbols. With the advent of the printed word which resulted in the increased availability of books and increased literacy, the importance of religious architecture as a teacher of people decreased. This resulted in a diminution of the importance of the operative stone mason's craft and set the stage for the development of "speculative" or "accepted" Masons, who continued to make extensive use of symbols to teach their lessons.

A further look at symbolism reveals that the meaning and significance of symbols changes with time and usage. The symbols we are discussing - corn, wine, and oil - are no exceptions to this as we shall see.

The word corn is used as a noun and as a verb. As a noun corn means 1) a small hard particle: grain, 2) a small hard seed, 3) the seeds of a cereal grass and especially of the important cereal crop of a particular region (as in Britain wheat, in Scotland and Ireland oats, and in the New World and Australia Indian corn or maize). Used as a verb corn means 1) to form into

grains: granulate, 2) a: to preserve or season with salt in grains; b: to salt lightly in brine containing preservatives (as to corn beef).

Corn is commonly used as a symbol of nourishment, resurrection, and plenty. Its use as a symbol of nourishment comes obviously from the fact that corn refers to the principal cereal crop of an area. Since corn must be consumed to provide nourishment, it may be regarded by some as a symbol of sacrifice. Others see it as transformed into a higher form of life as it is consumed. The fact that a grain seed seems to die in the ground during the winter but emerges as a new life in the springtime gives rise to the use of corn as a symbol of resurrection. Corn derives its use as a symbol of plenty from the observation that when corn is scattered upon the ground it grows and develops producing more. The use of corn as a symbol of plenty also embodies its use as a symbol of nourishment and of resurrection, the germ of life which survives all destructive forces of nature and emerges into newness of life.

The word wine is also used as a noun and a verb. As a noun wine refers to 1) the fruit of the vine which may be fermented or unfermented, 2) something which invigorates or intoxicates, 3) a variable color, usually a dark red. As a verb wine means to treat to wine or to refresh.

From the earliest times the usage of wine has made it symbolic of hospitality and festive times. In Genesis 14: 18 wine appears as a symbol of hospitality, "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine." (KJ) The use of wine at festive times is referred to in Job 1: 13, "Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house." (RSV) and in John 2: 1-11, the well known story of Jesus' first miracle performed at the wedding in Cana. The use of wine on such occasions led to the association of wine with refreshment. Symbolically wine as refreshment came to mean the restoration of vigor or liveliness to the soul or spiritual being as well as the body. For some wine was not regarded as a symbol of refreshment, but rather it was considered to be symbolic of agricultural life not nomadic life. Thus we read in Jeremiah 35: 1-11 of the refusal of the Rechabites to drink wine in keeping with orders of their ancestors to lead a nomadic life, "Never drinking wine ... nor building houses to live in, owning neither vineyard or field to sow, living in tents." (JB)

Since the juice of grapes ordinarily planted was red, the juice of the grape was referred to as the blood of grapes as in Genesis 49: 11, "He washes his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes," (RSV) This association of wine with blood took on a new significance with the institution of the Lord's supper by Jesus when he ate with the disciples in the upper room on the first day of Passover before his betrayal.

The word oil like corn and wine is also used as a noun and as a verb. As a noun oil refers to a vital commodity which may be used in cooking, lighting, cleaning, and medicating. In Biblical times olive oil was the oil used primarily

for all of these purposes. As a verb, oil means 1) to lubricate with oil, 2) to rub over or smear with oil. The effect of lubrication was to make smooth, to lessen friction and thus improve the workings of that to which it was applied. In addition to reducing friction rubbing with oil also had a protecting and healing effect when applied to parts of the body.

As well as using oil for cooking, lighting, cleaning, and medicating ancient people used oil for the sacred rite of consecration referred to as anointing. The first Biblical reference to anointing is found in Exodus 30:22-33, "Moreover, the Lord said to Moses, . . . and you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil ... a holy anointing oil it shall be. And you shall anoint with it the tabernacle and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all its utensils, and the lamp stand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils and the laver and its base; you shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy. And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may serve as priests." (RSV) Further reference to the anointing of Aaron, his sons, the tabernacle in the wilderness and its holy vessels may be found in Leviticus 8:10-12.

As time passed the Israelites asked for a king to rule over them as the other nations around them were ruled. When God granted their request, he instructed Samuel to anoint Saul as "prince over my people Israel," (RSV - I Samuel 9:15-16). Thus was established the custom of anointing Israelite kings (I Samuel 10:1, 16:12-13, I Kings 1:39, 19:15-16).

The act of anointing was not limited to priests and kings, but was also extended to prophets as illustrated when God commanded Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor to the prophetic office (I Kings 19:16). In the well-known twenty third psalm anointing is spoken of as a blessing; the psalmist is blessed with bountiful providence and prosperity and joy is bestowed upon the recipient.

The intertwining of the symbolic meaning with the literal meaning of an act is well illustrated by the act of consecration of Aaron and his sons for the priesthood as described in Leviticus 8:1-30. On this occasion the use of water is included along with oil as part of the ceremony, " ... and Moses took the anointing oil ... and he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head, and anointed him, to consecrate him." (RVS) In this type of situation water was used as a cleansing agent to remove evil while oil was used to impart virtue. That is, water was used to remove soil and was thus considered curative, while oil was used to render the body immune to soil and was thus considered protective. This is why in some cases of baptism both water and oil are used.

In addition to using oil to decrease friction and thereby increase harmony, oil has come to be regarded as having the ability to soothe as implied in the statement, "to pour oil on troubled waters." Thus oil has become associated with efforts to bring about peace.

Oil thus emerges as a symbol of joy, of prosperity, of peace, and of protection. Since oil overcomes friction, the spirit may joyfully pass smoothly over the rough places of life and work more effectively at its appointed task. Since oil was essential for so many things - cooking, lighting, cleaning, and medicating. Its possession was indeed a sign of prosperity. The ability of oil to soothe and protect and eliminate friction made it an appropriate symbol of peace. Use of oil as a symbol of protection grew out of a regard for its healing power and the belief that oil was the medium whereby good spirits passed into the person anointed. Another interesting custom or superstition is linked to this last symbolic use. It was believed that if the anointing were done at high tide, it would be more effective since high tide was a symbol of abundance and low tide was a symbol of failure, weakness, and death. (This same superstition is related to the practice of burying a criminal "at the low water mark".)

Corn, wine, and oil are mentioned comprehensively as such eighteen times in all in the Bible. They represent the fruits of the ground, God's good gifts, and are representative of the fertility of the country, ". . . that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil." (RSV Deut. 11:14) The psalmist David enumerates them among the great blessings bestowed by God, "and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart." (RSV Psalm 104: 15) Jeremiah, the prophet, refers to them as, "the goodness of the Lord ... the grain, the wine, and the oil" (RSV Jeremiah 31:12)

In Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry it states that corn, wine, and oil "were most important productions of Eastern countries, constituted the wealth of the people, and were esteemed as the supports of life and the means of refreshment."

Since corn, wine, and oil represented God's good gifts to man and man's wealth, it is not surprising that they are frequently mentioned as a part of the required tithes representative of the first fruits. References for these tithes are found in Exodus 29:40, Numbers 15:10, Deut. 12:17, Nehemiah 10:39, 13:5,12.

As symbols of obedience corn, wine, and oil are mentioned first in Deut. 7:13, "Listen to these ordinances, be true to them and observe them and in return Yahweh, your God, will be true to the covenant ... He will bless ... the produce of your soil, your corn, your wine, your oil." (JB) Reference is made to this again in Deut. 11:14 as part of the law, and the prophets Hosea, Joel, and Micah warn that disobedience will cause loss. (Hosea 2:8- 28, Joel 1:10, 2:19-24, and Micah 6:15).

Corn, wine, and oil may be considered as wages in three senses. The first sense is expressed in Deut. 7:13 when God promises the people corn, wine, and oil in return for obedience to his commandments. The second sense is

expressed in Numbers 18:12 when God gives to the priests as their share of the offerings, "all the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the first fruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee." (KJ) The third sense is expressed in II Chronicles 2:10 when Solomon agrees to pay the builders of the temple, "And, behold, I will give to thy servants, the hewers that cut the timber, twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat, and twenty thousand measures of barley, and twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil." (KJ)

Freemasonry today refers to corn, wine, and oil in the Fellowcraft degree and uses corn, wine, and oil in three of its rituals: the consecration of a lodge, the dedication of a Masonic Temple or hall, and the laying of a cornerstone.

In the Fellowcraft degree, the wages of corn, wine, and oil as those of a fellowcraft symbolizes the fact that the laborer is worthy of his hire. As a fellowcraft bears the responsibilities and does the work of a man he is entitled to a just reward physically and spiritually.

Corn, wine, and oil are used in the rituals of consecrating a lodge, dedicating a Masonic Temple, and the laying of a cornerstone as elements of consecration. That is they are used as symbols of setting apart of the Lodge, the Temple, or the building for a special purpose. Since Masonic symbolism is so closely associated with the Bible, wheat the corn of Biblical lands is used as corn in Masonic ceremonies. In the ceremonies the corn is carried in a golden pitcher while the wine and oil are carried in silver vessels to serve as reminders that the first is essential as the staff of life while the others are but comforts.

In the ceremony of consecrating a Lodge upon its constitution the following words which accompany the pouring of the corn, wine, and oil upon the "Lodge", the emblem of the Holy Ark, indicate the symbolism associated with their use, "I pour this corn, the emblem of nourishment, and consecrate this Lodge to charity ... I pour this wine, the emblem of refreshment, and consecrate this Lodge to hope. . . . I pour this oil, the emblem of joy, and consecrate this Lodge to faith." In Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry this statement is made about the consecration of a Lodge, "Thus does this mystic ceremony instruct us to be nourished with the hidden manna of righteousness, to be refreshed with the word of the Lord and rejoice with joy unspeakable in the riches of divine grace." In the same volume Harris is quoted as follows, "Wherefore, my brethren, ... do you carry corn, wine, and oil in your processions, but to remind you that in your pilgrimage of human life you are to impart a portion of your bread to feed the hungry, to send a cup of wine to cheer the sorrowful, and to pour the healing oil of your consolation into the wounds which sickness hath made in the bodies, or affliction rent in the hearts of your fellow travellers?"

When a Masonic Temple or hall is dedicated as a place to be used for Masonic purposes, the statements made as the corn, wine, and oil are presented and

poured upon the "Lodge", indicate the same symbolism of nourishment, refreshment, and joy as in the ceremony of consecration of a Lodge.

The Masonic ceremony for the laying of a cornerstone is used only if the building is intended to serve mankind by contributing to his development and growth in character, since the use of corn, wine, and oil would be meaningless as consecrating elements otherwise.

The symbolism in the laying of a cornerstone is set forth in the words of consecration used as each element is poured upon the cornerstone. "I scatter this corn as an emblem of plenty. May the blessings of heaven be showered upon us ... I pour this wine as an emblem of joy and gladness ... I pour this oil as an emblem of peace." The concluding prayer adds the symbolism associated with consecration and dedication, "grant to us all a supply of the corn of nourishment, the wine of refreshment and the oil of joy."

The symbolism related to corn, wine and oil is some of the oldest in Masonic use. As God's gifts, these fruits of the ground have been used as elements of consecration since the days of Aaron and as wages since the establishments of the Levites as priests. Corn the symbol of nourishment and plenty, wine the symbol of refreshment and gladness, and oil the symbol of joy and peace together represent the Masonic elements of consecration when a Lodge is consecrated, a Masonic Temple is dedicated, or a cornerstone is laid. And finally corn, wine, and oil seem to be most appropriate as the wages of a Fellowcraft.

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Quotations from the scriptures are taken from the Authorized or King James Version (KJ), The Revised Standard Version (RSV), or the Jerusalem Bible (1B).

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