

Why are World Freemasons not all in Harmony?

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(The following short paper was authored and read at the July meeting of the Lodge)

1. Introduction:

As your designated lecturer for tonight's meeting, I must apologise at the outset for so meagre a paper. At some future time, I would hope to draw on some of the material following for one of wider scope and which may be better researched with full bibliography.

I come before you tonight in great trepidation because I will be covering ground which is an anathema to many Grand Lodges. The subject has doubtless been brought up in hundreds of papers throughout the world before by learned members of the Craft who have studied the subject of regularity and harmony in much greater depth than I ever have or am likely to.

To cover all the aspects of recognition between Grand Lodges would be a massive task. I only hope to place before you what I believe to be the essentials for all Freemasons to co-exist in Peace, Love and Harmony and ignoring all the trappings of the last two hundred and ninety years of innovation in the body of Masonry. However, I do suggest to you after reading or listening to the following that you carry out further research yourselves.

Since joining the W.H.J.Mayers Memorial Lodge of Research in 1989, I immediately regretted that I had not been a member here for the previous almost thirty years. There was so much to learn, whereas learning in the Craft Lodge had virtually ceased when all the ritual was available after passing the chair.

Like all topics however, broadening one's knowledge of the Craft immediately posed other questions not dreamed of and demanded explanation. The charges so willingly accepted to that time as 'gospel', became items for undertaking more research, instead of blindly accepting them e.g. the charge in the 2nd degree by the elected Master, who pledges '*inter cilia*' not to introduce any innovation into the body of Masonry or its customs.

2. Innovation:

One of the points stressed throughout the three degrees is the preservation of the ancient landmarks. A few years ago in September 1999, VWBro. Kevin Fitzroy presented a paper on the ancient landmarks. It appears however there are many different interpretations as to what a 'Landmark' is. In his paper, Bro. Kevin referred to that great American Dr. Albert G. Mackey. In his Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, he lists 25 landmarks and these were all set out in his paper.

I must here differ with Dr. Mackey in these Landmarks because some of them were not present at the inauguration of Grand Lodge in 1717 nor were they part of the Constitutions as drawn up by Dr Andersen a few years later. As an example, take No. 2]..

"It is a Landmark, that a "Book of the Law" shall constitute an indispensable part of the furniture of every Lodge"

In a paper reprinted by *HARASHIM* (No. 7) of July 1998, Paul Bessel refers to the G.L. of Alabama which states that the inclusion of the Bible in lodges was an innovation in the body of Freemasonry. So if modern Freemasonry innovated this, it cannot surely complain if a Grand Lodge (or Lodges) extant at the time the innovation occurred, did not so do.

He goes on to say, "In lodges, the Bible is used as a symbol, Masons are not required to believe its teachings and some other book may be substituted for it and quoting Alabama again, "the removal of the Bible and replacing it with some other symbol of Truth may surely be done without altering the essential character of the Fraternity." For example, I say, why not a book of physics or astronomy. Those surely are immutable truths.

Take the case of the Grand Orient of France (G.O.F.), which seceded from the Grand Lodge of France in 1773 and for a long time was the only recognised body of Masonry in France. In 1849, it started to mention

the GAOTU and the Bible. No one was objecting for or against this practice then and when it again abandoned the practice in 1877, de-recognition took a very long time - probably with some Grand Lodges right up to the 20th century.

Michael Segall, in a paper *"French Masonry, a General Outline"* specially commissioned for HARASHII41 (No. 8) the last of 1998, says that The G.O.F. in 1877, under pressure from its members, declared optional and left to the discretion of its Lodges, any mention of the "Grand Architect of the Universe and the presence of the Bible."

Yet U. S. State Lodges, together with English, Scottish and Irish Grand Lodges by tunnel vision eventually did not recognise the G.O.F.

It is interesting to read what the Grand Secretary of the G.O.F. said in a letter to a member of the U.G.L.E. around this period as quoted in Paul Bessel's paper,

"The Grand Orient of France has not abolished the masonic formula, 'To the glory of the Great Architect of the Universe, as you appear to believe, still less have they made profession of atheism. In their general assembly of September, 1877, they purely and simply proclaimed absolute liberty of conscience as a right belonging to every man, and out of respect for this liberty they expunged from their Constitution a dogmatic formula, which seemed to a great majority of the members to be in contradiction with liberty of conscience."

In modifying an article of its statutes the Grand Orient of France by no means intended to make profession of either atheism or materialism, as would seem to be understood. No alteration has been made either in the principles or the practice of Masonry; French Masonry remains what it has always been—a fraternal and tolerant brotherhood."

3. Time for Change:

We are all charged at every turn in our ceremonies to never change any part of the rituals which are handed down to us. As I go through life and learn more about our past and the history of the earth and its people, my personal beliefs, those which were thrust on me in childhood and puberty are changing. Much of this is due in no small part to the enormous increase in the knowledge base of the world. I, along with many others I'm sure, no longer credit the so-called facts of Jesus Christ's life as described in the gospels. Particularly is this so because the writers were never witnesses to the 'facts'.

Now there is no doubt that Christianity has inspired artists throughout the centuries. Perhaps the most wonderful paintings ever done are of the imagined Christ child, and also as an adult and his mother. Certainly the sacred music of Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven and others are never to be superseded in quality as examples of genius at work. Nevertheless, these composers also wrote other non-religious masterpieces equally inimitable for all time. The religious person would say they have received divine inspiration and this maybe so in their eyes but the power of the human mind is also to be reckoned with as a great force in nature and part of the architecture of the world.

The Muslim person would also claim that divine inspiration was received by the leaders of Moorish art and architecture and denigrated by the Christians. Who is right or who is wrong?

Most of us here and others who are well read on these matters of the early Christian church will know that since the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., Emperor Constantine's decision to destroy all reference to the Jerusalem church set Christianity on its present path and buried almost for ever, those other gnostic writings of Christ's life which showed him as a gifted and extraordinary man but not a God. It instead highlighted the writings of St Paul who today is recognised as having had an infantile outlook and strong feelings of resentment against women. He promulgated the domination of women by men in religion and (by inference, as every single subject revolved around religion) also secular life for some 1600 years.

In Judaism and Islam, women are still dominated and treated as 2nd class humans by men. Even our Freemasonry has overtones of this past and present behaviour in Christianity, with its male only brotherhood.

As children we are presented with the example of Christianity, a wonderful pattern on which to base our lives and actions. It has become well known that the indoctrination of children from birth to ages 5 or 7 has a profound effect on them throughout their lives, such that most believe the doctrine for life.

This is not confined to any particular religion or sect. It can be done to any child, most especially males, by any doctrine, be it Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Naziism or atheism as well as Christianity.

We are just starting to see the results of the evil methods of the Imams with the fundamentalist terrorists in the 21st Century. This is going on now throughout the world wherever followers of religious teachings of Mohammed emigrate and will unfortunately have to be countered by a similar fundamental movement in the dominant Christian countries using the same methods on their young.

No one can deny that religious fundamentalists throughout recorded history have caused more heartbreak than famine and disease have ever done - and to what purpose?

Here I quote from Murray Alford's paper 'Architecture as Architect' :

"Matt Ridley's book 'The Origins of Virtue', by analysing multiple choice situations in the light of game theory, comes to the conclusion that evolution also works in the field of ethics - that those who, when given a choice, act unselfishly, are more likely to survive and to pass on these codes of behaviour to their descendants, not necessarily by their genes, but by their instruction. What he is, in effect, suggesting is that morality is actually built into the operation of the Universe and is not the exclusive possession of religion."

Further modern studies since have shown this to be true, so isn't it time that we gave the children a chance to develop their character and their beliefs on their own without having religion thrust down their throats from the dawn of their cognitive learning?

As they progress through their education, it will soon become apparent to them that, in the universe, there is order and method. This is extant in all matters to do with laws of physics from the simplest example like the shape of a crystal of salt to the complicated structure of the human genome. Let them form their own conclusion as to what power has governed and shaped these laws and allow freedom of conscience to prevail.

Some will say it is God. They will use this word they heard from their parents. Others will say it is nature and laws of the universe, while still others will muse on the power of the human mind to accomplish so much. Ultimately it may mean that a book containing a history of legends and fantasies written without the knowledge of today like the Bible will be replaced by others more meaningful to life.

All the improvements to our way of life in developed economics have been brought about by change. As knowledge increased, we have been better able to control disease. Engineering and applied science have been responsible for us working only minimal hours, instead of physically toiling from daylight to dark.

These things were unknown when our forebears in Freemasonry set us on the present rituals and made their charges - "never to be changed". By continuing to insist on the whole spectrum of the ancient landmarks, we gradually become more and more out of touch with the real world and make ourselves obsolescent.

4. Recognition:

I thought I should commence the next part of this short talk with a return to the Grand Orient of France, because I believe that it alone holds the key to unification of Freemasonry in the world.

Because of the idealistic aims of the mainstream Grand Lodges, most of the masonic fraternity in France is not 'recognised'. The official web-site of the G.O.F. claims to have had in the year 2000 , a total of *"41000 members spread out over 17 regions in which there are almost 950 Lodges both in France itself and its overseas territories."* Michaël Segall in his paper in 1998, says it *"has about 27,000 actual(35, 000 claimed) members in 650 lodges"* . He says there are about 100,000 Masons of all kinds in France, 0.17% of the population far less than the U.K. or the U.S.A., percentage-wise.

[It will be recalled in my comments on Bro. Dafoe's paper "WHERE ARE WE REALLY LOSING MEMBERS" in September 2006 to this Lodge, identified a UGLQ membership of 0.5% of the male population of Queensland.]

The only 'recognised' Grand Lodge is the G.N.L.F. the so-called National G.L. with about 16,000 members (25,000 claimed)and *"claims nearly 1100 lodges"*, although the 1992 Pantagraph listing only shows 635 lodges. From this we deduce a 16% recognition. Segall goes on to say, *"The decline that currently affects English-speaking Masonry also hits most of its representatives on the continent, while indigenous Masonry is in a period of accelerated development"*. He says particularly of the GLNF, that, *"serious problems and internal dissensions often echoed by the press, are causing a marked decline in the GLNF"*.

Segall further says that, *"French and European Masons have paid an immense toll to persecution since mediaeval times, but notably during the 20Th century and particularly the Second World War, when tens of thousands of Brethren were killed by the Nazis and Communists their persecutors never asked them whether they were regular or not, recognised or not. Consequently they do not view at all kindly the claims of a few overseas Grand Lodges, who were never in danger, were never persecuted and know very little about them, to act as self-appointed judges of their regularity and Masonic quality"*.

Generally speaking, in France, visitation is open in all Grand Lodges to pretty well every Mason who can prove himself as a brother and who is in good standing. One should consult '*FREEMASONRY UNIVERSAL*' by Kent Henderson and Tony Pope for more detail on this aspect but it seems to me that the French have more in common with true universal brotherhood than most English-speaking Grand Lodges including those of Australia.

I recommend all members visit the official web-site of the G.O.F. In its page on Freedom of Conscience, it adopts its principle of "laïcité". The word is untranslatable into English, although I suspect it is the same word as our English "laxity". However, that meaning is radically changed to encompass a wide range of liberal thought. It aims to liberate children and adults from everything which alienates or corrupts their minds, particularly atavistic beliefs, prejudices, preconceived ideas, dogmas, oppressive ideology, and cultural, economic, social, political or religious pressure.

5. Towards Greater Freedom in the Lodges of the World:

The Grand Orient of France seems to be the ideal basis upon which Freemasonry could commence to create a true World brotherhood. It admits all other masonic orders because it believes all visitors are mature and adult enough not to be tarnished and corrupted by the experience of a G.O.F. ceremony. This is in contrast to the UGLE, all Australian mainstream lodges and at present all U.S. State Lodges, who will not condone their members such visitation nor admit members of the G.O.F.

Surely, it is time for us to grow up as adults and embrace our masonic brethren for their good points and not judge them on those few where we disagree.

The world needs the principles of Freemasonry to be promulgated to all the nations. While we argue about inconsequential matters, we are losing members. It is mostly the irregular Grand Lodges e.g. in South America which are growing rapidly as is the population. Brazil now has more than 150 million, possibly close to 200 while the rest of the continent is also close to 200 million. With half Spanish-speaking and half Portuguese, a close language relative, the continent will become a force to be reckoned with during the progress of the 21st century.

There are some 'recognised' Grand Lodges but the majority are not and this due to a variety of reasons all not comprehended by English-speaking Freemasonry. One has only to access the chapters of Henderson and Pope's *FREEMASONRY UNIVERSAL* to see the 'mess' made of the non-recognition process of Brazilian Lodges by Grand Lodges around the globe. Fortunately the largest number of masons in that country are allied to or members of the Grand Orient of Brasil, which has the greatest number of English-speaking Grand Lodges giving recognition.

Nevertheless, what applies today or last year, may not apply next year. It needs only for a dispute between the G.M's and/or Boards of two G.L.'s to disagree on a so-called matter of landmarks - usually 'illegal' visitation and there are suddenly frozen relations.

Such a case happened some fifteen years ago, when the Grand Lodge of Western Australia was to be the host of an Indian-Pacific Conference. It was to be a working conference to try to smooth the way for wider recognition. Suddenly, the UGLE would not talk to the Grand Lodge of India. They were followed by Scotland, Ireland and a few others. The conference was undermined before it started .

It made me question one's very membership of the Craft.

Such a wonderful Institution is still constantly being manipulated by old jealous men at the top who perhaps have power in their hands for the first time in their lives. They certainly don't observe the principles we are all taught.

6. FINALLY:

In conclusion, I refer you to a future paper being prepared by one of our newest members, who is similarly stressing that united World Freemasonry has much to offer. However, man-made institutions like our Freemasonry are subject to vagaries and whims of men who are not always unbiased.

I have only set down a few thoughts in these short notes but it is as I see the problem at present and it is all of man's making. What we and our forbears have put together as a ritual and a philosophy has been good up to the middle of the 20th century. However, it will not survive the 21st century unless we make big changes in our collective attitude and manifest to the fullest extent that tolerance we all like to think we aspire to.