

A UNIVERSAL MASONRY?

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A newly-made Mason is told about the universality of the Institution, but it cannot be said that he receives very much instruction about this concept. To the average initiate the idea of Masonic universality is a geographical impression, like the one conveyed by Mackey's poetic prose "Wherever the wandering steps of civilized men have left their footprints, there have our Temples been established."

When he first observes the globes surmounting the pillars in the Fellowcraft Degree, the initiate is told that they "denote the universality of Masonry." Haywood emphasizes the usual geographical interpretation of this phrase in commenting on the globes: "They were reminders to Masons that though the Fraternity was in England, and had originated there, it was not England's private possession, but was to become established everywhere across the terrestrial globe; it was to be universal."

(How the celestial sphere fits into this geographical explanation of Masonic universality has never been clarified. "Space Age" explorations may lead to its inclusion!)

In the ritual of the first degree, the initiate is given a more profound, a more mystical explanation of this term in the description concerning the dimensions of a Lodge. Its stupendous proportions, he is told, "signify the universality of Masonry."

From this instruction an alert and philosophical Brother may be inspired to reflect on the deeper meanings of the phrase, as it applies to Masonic customs, traditions, tenets, and ideals. Too little attention is given to it.

Yet it is this approach to the idea of universality which leads the contemplative to realize that Masonic universality is a moral ideal, the consciously pursued development of a world-wide tolerance based on knowledge, appreciation, and understanding between men, their creeds, and institutions.

Present world conditions and attitudes are not favorable to the development of confidence in such an objective. Men are dominated more by their fears than by their hopes and spiritual aspirations. Masonic universality is labelled "just a

dream." Like the phrase, "the pursuit of happiness," it is dismissed as one of those quaint rationalizations of our ancestors. A universal Masonry? "Let's not be fantastic!" say the "realists."

In the words of one Masonic encyclopedist, "We may as well admit that the progress made by the Fraternity in attaining or preserving universality has over the past two centuries been nil if, indeed, it has not been in reverse."

It must be admitted that the Fraternity has itself contributed to the difficulties which make its- laudable doctrine of universality so difficult to inculcate, to say nothing of achieving it. Differences in rules of procedure, lack of unity in the fundamental definition of what Freemasonry really is, the intrusion of religious concepts and political prejudices, the excessive size of many Lodges which has robbed the individual member of his importance as a Mason-all these have helped to erode the universality of Freemasonry which is summed up in the fraternal shibboleth, "the Brotherhood of Man."

Almost every initiate is led to believe that Freemasonry is a world-wide, a "universal" fraternity, which admits to its membership and privileges worthy men of every country, sect, and opinion. He also presumes that Masons everywhere are motivated by the same ideals and that fraternal intercourse is always and everywhere possible.

In 1935 Carl Claudy wrote, "Only occasionally does the average Mason come in contact with the absence of universality; then it is usually with something of a shock that he learns that while a Brother from a neighboring state may visit and hold Masonic intercourse with a certain foreign Lodge and Brother, he is forbidden the same privilege, or vice versa."

However, World War II and the challenges of world leadership since then have sent millions of Americans to almost every quarter of the globe. Many of them are Masons, and most of them have been bewildered by the absence of universality in Masonic recognitions of other Masonic bodies. To young men engaged in programs of international significance, the explanations given for such Masonic "non-acceptance" are "ancient prejudices." They actually believe that knowledge, good will, and brotherly love can cut such Gordian knots very quickly!

The theory of Masonic brotherhood leads a man to suppose that, if he has been regularly made a Mason, he has the "right of visitation" in any symbolic Lodge in the world. He believes that every Brother Mason must recognize and accept him as a Brother, regardless of race, nationality, or religion. One of an idealist's most serious disillusionments about the disparity between Masonic

teaching and practice is the checkered patterns of recognitions and non-recognitions between the Grand Lodges of Freemasonry.

It takes some sympathy and much knowledge of the history of the Craft to understand the reasons for such imperfection. It takes some faith in Masonic education to hope for the eventual "universality" of Masonic recognitions. An objective evaluation of the work of the Commission on Information for Recognition of the Conference of Grand Masters of Masons in North America reveals a growing appreciation and understanding of Central and South American Freemasonry by North American Grand Lodges. The Inter-American Confederation of Central and South American Grand Lodges has authorized a similar commission.

In the words of Grand Master Hipolito Marcano of Puerto Rico "...the fundamental aim of the Confederation should be to contribute to the growth and consolidation of ideal universal Freemasonry, by not only deciding on rules for recognition between groups in Latin America but also by applying those rules to all Latin American Grand Lodges."

A universal Masonry? It is still a "dream" of dedicated Masons, even though it has never existed in all the relationships which have developed between various groups of the Craft. Are "they" regular? That's a question which still suggests how lacking in universality Freemasonry is.

But this is not to suggest that such universality can be immediately achieved by merely desiring it. There are some fundamental differences in philosophy and beliefs which still stand in the way. There is real disagreement as to what Freemasonry actually is and what it stands for.

Language barriers have been a real difficulty. Doctrines like "exclusive territorial jurisdiction" have not been everywhere accepted. The proper relationships between Symbolic Lodges and other rites took a long time to be settled satisfactorily, and even today are not thoroughly understood by the average Mason.

The classic example of the differences of opinion which prevent a truly universal Masonry is the non-recognition of the Grand Orient of France by practically all English-speaking Grand Lodges.

In 1868 the Grand Orient of France, which had never acknowledged the doctrine of exclusive territorial jurisdiction, recognized in Louisiana a "Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in and for the Sovereign and Independent State of Louisiana," a body which also claimed control over the

Symbolic degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry, as well as over those of the Scottish Rite.

The Grand Lodge of Louisiana protested strongly against this invasion of its territory and prerogatives. It called on its sister Grand Lodges, especially in the United States, to support it by withdrawing recognition of the Grand Orient of France. In 1869 fifteen American Grand Lodges did so, and by 1876 all but three of the United States Grand Lodges had broken off relationships with the Grand Orient as a protest against its "invasion" of Louisiana.

When the Grand Orient amended its constitution in 1877 to remove the requirement of a belief in God and immortality and to make the use of the Bible optional with the Lodges, the result was to make the "excommunication" of the Grand Orient of France almost complete in the English-speaking Masonic world. This time, the United Lodge of England called for severance of Masonic relationships to protest the French innovations. United States Grand Lodges had, for the most part, never reestablished fraternal relations with the Grand Orient, even though that body had discontinued its invasion of Louisiana, so they merely continued their non-recognitions or issued restatements of their policy of non-intercourse and non-recognition.

English-speaking Freemasonry is in agreement in its insistence upon belief in a G.A.O.T.U. and the presence of a V.S.L. on the altar as indispensable to a Lodge at work. Even though the Grand Orient of France gave a philosophical explanation of its constitutional amendment in 1877, and showed that it was more responsive to the real situation in France vis-a-vis the Roman Church, Anglo-Saxon Freemasonry turned a deaf ear to the doctrine of "absolute freedom of conscience," especially the freedom to believe or not to believe in a Supreme Being.

As a result, the Grand Orient of France is still not "recognized" by most of the Grand Lodges of the world. Other European Grand Lodges have had difficulty in "getting recognition" from English-speaking Grand Lodges in direct proportion to the relationships they had developed with the Grand Orient or its satellites.

But such technical or "doctrinal" differences are only the surface manifestations of the absence of universality in Masonic thinking and purpose. There is a great difference between Freemasonry in England and the Craft in the United States. There are even greater differences between the practices of Freemasonry in South and North America.

In fact, there are distinct differences in Freemasonry in various regions of the United States, and these differences have very little to do with the ritual and

the ceremonies. They are differences of interpretation and definition about what Freemasonry really is and what its most important purpose should be. Some of the Ancient Charges and Constitutions are interpreted in opposite directions; some are given lip service; some are merely ignored.

A universal Masonry? One has to admit that it is still a "dream." The very human limitations of all men, including Masons, is responsible for the slow progress toward the goal of the Brotherhood of Man.

Yet every Master Builder had to dream to raise an edifice of lasting beauty. He had to envision the structure of all its glory in order to lay designs upon the trestleboard for the Craftsmen to execute. When he knew that they were well trained, true, and skillful, he could dream his dream with confidence and joy. He built well because he dared to dream well.

No Speculative Mason can deride the dream of a universal Masonry, a universal Brotherhood of Man, without undermining the one common and universal aspiration of the fraternity which has appealed to men in every age and climate. The Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God is the universal dream of men of good will everywhere who call themselves Masons.

To abandon that dream is to abandon Freemasonry. To abolish those tenets is to abolish Freemasonry. A Mason must dream if he is to continue his speculative building.

A universal Masonry? Keep dreaming and building; it's on its way!