

Freemasonry in the Globalization Era

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Most Worshipful Grand Masters :
Dear Brethren,

This 8th World Conférence of the Regular Grand Lodges opens in an extremely discouraging world scenario. The speech given by the Most Worshipful Grand Master Jean-Charles Foellner to present this very important event is essential and absolutely clear about this. Without any doubt, he declares that our esoteric communions cannot be without appropriate conceptual tools to face the anxieties of post-modernity, nor can be defended behind the ornaments and solemnity of our rituals. Any individuals knocking at our Temple doors cannot expect definite replies on all themes that trouble them, otherwise we would become a religion or a political party. This is not our task, but those individuals have the right to find a place for critical considerations, resourceful spirituality, in short a sort of "think tank" supported by a continuous aspiration towards the search for truth.

For these reasons, the four questions asked by the Most Worshipful Grand Master Foellner must not be left unanswered, for they do not ask general questions that can be answered like a catechism answer learned by heart. These questions are vital for the identity of Freemasonry and its future. In fact, the Most Worshipful Brother Foellner, as a strict guardian of the Temple, is asking us to disclose the path we are following, to understand whether it takes us towards the light or to another direction. "What will be the task and future of traditional Freemasonry?" - He asks us. In the continuity of tradition, we are called to confirm the centrality of laicity in contemporary society. This laicity does not take the place of religions or sacralizes politics, but it defends the priority of human beings as subjects, not objects, of history. Injustice and violence characterize the pages of our daily newspapers, and upset our communities; as Brother Foellner says, our societies have ever-increasing doubts on the meaning of our destiny. Therefore, Freemasonry is again a spiritual place, where hope is fostered, based on dialogue and free exchange of ideas between wise but also courageous people; above all the courage of being interpreters of present anxieties and fears. With regard to this, Freemasonry rituals are extraordinary ways to prepare the spirit and mind of our Brethren, who enhance their work on rough stone through intellect and thinking, thereby preparing the creation of a favourable context for germination of new ideas and more active participation in social life. "How can we promote Freemasonry foundations and its values?"

This question is not a trivial one. Freemasonry cannot be folded back on itself and on its internal dynamics like a foreign body in civil society, otherwise it risks being marginalized like an incomprehensible or sterile container, or - and this would be even worse - getting involved in very profane interests, although they are cloaked in esoteric sacredness. In an increasingly globalized world, communication is crucial, and proper information is indispensable. Living and fertile Freemasonry germinates ideas and proposes peace and tolerance values, is ready to be an intercultural and multicultural meeting place that is not homologated to any profane institution, and has to speak to people to explain its reasons for being, and its ideal and concrete tasks. In other words, avoiding any proselytism, Freemasonry has to be active and testify to the identity Freemasonry has inherited and witnesses. The Italian experience over the last few years shows that, when Freemasonry is able to play a crucial role in the discussion and thinking on the most important themes, as proposed also by our dear Brother Foellner, Freemasonry does not only acquire esteem and general consideration, but it also remove most of the well-known persecutory fog, which is traditionally rooted in antidemocratic, illiberal, anti-modernist and anti-Freemasonry movements diffused even in Europe.

"How can we assert Freemasonry's role in a society affected by a crisis?"

There are no easy solutions. Assuming that the esoteric and spiritual training work for our Brothers remains the fundamental and inalienable root, the education role played by Freemasonry should be highlighted as a great training tool for laic citizenship in modern civil society. The historical greatness of Freemasonry is measured by the ability of attracting the most free and critical spirits who are not content with foregone replies, or whichever easy orthodoxy, but those who feel a strong need for meeting the others and enhancing their knowledge. Whilst the various present fundamentalisms propose closed survival solutions, sort of pre-packed kits of immovable truth in the name of which they even deny the dignity of individuals who appear as diverse to them, our Communion brings together different individuals, not only based on their wealth or religion, but mostly on their ideas and education. However, they are all united by the common desire to search for this diversity in other people, as an indispensable opportunity for growth, exchange of ideas and removal of barriers. In fact, through Enlightenment, Freemasonry has laid the foundations for the birth of modernity, teaching people how to be creative citizens and builders of rights and principles of equality and progress. Our parliamentarianism, associationism, and even the founding principles of European and American parliamentarianism find their unquestionable roots in the experience developed through Freemasonry sociability. Now that we experience the crisis of modernity, we must play a new and vigorous spiritual and educational role, which has sometimes weakened. Freemasonry can maintain its role only when the awareness of its historical role is clear. The crisis of modernity - some historians state that modernity is ending, and is now turning into another era - has also brought about a crisis in Freemasonry.

Therefore, every Freemasonry Jurisdiction is called - on the basis of its specific context - to give a foresighted reply to the fears and anxieties of daily life, knowing that its future is based upon the promotion of the ideas of laicity, democracy, protection of human rights and justice.

Finally, Brother Foellner asked: "What kind of hopeful message can we pass to our contemporaries?" First of all, let me thank the Most Worshipful Grand Master Foellner for having used the idea of "hope", not just because hope springs eternal in the human breast. Many Freemasonry denigrators say that our Institution would be the forge of relativism, obviously cynical relativism. At this Conference, the fact that hope is a laic subject for thinking and planning shows that we are not at all relativists with the negative meaning often associated to that. On the contrary - as I have often

stressed - if relativism is the opposite of absolutism, we certainly do not like the "Ancien Régime" that others have historically supported with its inequalities and injustice; and now they would like to restore the same regime by placing the blame of contemporary society on Enlightenment and democratic and critical thought. I would like to add more. Considering the lessons of 20th century philosophy, I say that relativists are those who refuse the challenge of open society, those who believe that they will always have superior, fixed, immovable and unquestionable knowledge, which cannot be subjected to the principle of falsification. In reality, these enemies of relativism are the main existing relativists, inasmuch as their thought cannot leave its unchangeable framework; they cannot even imagine other people's reasons, and above all they refuse to look at history and its changes. When we are disclaimed and others show us that our supposed truth is now obsolete, we are pleased to leave it, and avoid being trapped in any mistakes. Equally, we know that much of our current knowledge will be inadequate in the future. Between Galileo pointing his telescope to Jupiter satellites, therefore drawing his conclusions, and waving the keys of a prison as a threat against those who doubt and question themselves, relativism is certainly not on the side of Galileo and all those who have followed him over the centuries. Our laic faith is open to the awareness and challenges of post-modernity. Like our forefathers, we look with our increasingly appropriate telescopes, and we question ourselves on what we see, even when we do not like it, or when we are forced to change and become a little wiser and less intolerant. For us, this is working on rough stone. This is the traditional secular, and at the same innovative, message of universal Freemasonry: a communion working under a starry sky, because no human work can definitely complete the vault of the celestial Temple, even if an increasingly greater and complex part can be understood and appreciated.

This, dear Brethren, is our hope.