



Annual Communication 2008

YOU ARE MY BROTHER

Rimini, Palacongressi, 4th -6th April

ADDRESS BY GRAND MASTER GUSTAVO RAFFI

Authorities,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Brethren,

According to a consolidated tradition, the Grande Oriente d'Italia assembles the Italian Freemasons in a Grand Lodge. Its *format* is extraordinarily filled with cultural and social events open to the public, and it shows a strong desire of transparency and intercultural dialogue, which have been developed by the oldest and most important Masonic Jurisdiction operating in Italy. Starting from this clear assumption, the Grand Master plays a public role in giving this address to both Brethren and society, of which Freemasons of the Grande Oriente d'Italia are an integral and active part.

The posters announcing the programme of these three days in Rimini highlight the main topic that we intend to be talking about: the subject of brotherhood.

This is a crucial subject for Freemasonry; however, it may generate ambiguity and misunderstandings. Therefore, we have chosen this topic to keep following the same process that we have developed during the last few years, in giving back clarity and importance to the values and principles of universal Freemasonry.

It was not easy.

However, this choice of style and behaviour is irreversible for the Grande Oriente d'Italia.

Freemasonry is an initiatory Order that proposes a difficult and challenging spiritual progress. It is not a religion, and it does not want to be a religion.

In fact, it is not opposed or in contrast with any religion, although some superficial denigrators say that the opposite is true. And Freemasonry does not intend to reveal any amazing secrets.

Through rituality and attention for the symbols on which we meditate, our both individual and joint progress, at the same time, teaches us how we can question ourselves.

A Freemason following the initiatory way is a man of doubt.

He is a man searching for knowledge. He is a man who continuously questions himself.

He does not deny truth, but he puts truth under careful and open criticism, for he wants to understand the temporary, partial, and unilateral aspects of his vision of the world. And when he understands all this, he is ready to bring it all up for discussion again. He is convinced that nothing can be absolute or unchangeable in his knowledge, except for his love for knowing and longing for a better and fairer world.

He does not want to take the place of the Great Architect of the Universe, but he simply wants to be a Man who is worthy of this name.

In this sense, the Masonic progress requires that every single initiate has a sort of alchemic decomposition. It puts initiates in front of a mirror, and invites them to look at themselves inside and find a dialogue with their inner themselves, by reconstructing a kind of harmony that daily life, profanity, and "metals" - in the Masonic terminology - tend to make us lose.

Freemasons have founded their brotherhood because they knew that they were imperfect.

They have done it since the beginning of the 18th century, based on several different operational and symbolic traditions, after the devastating experience of religion wars.

They have done it after they experienced the absurdity of imposing human choices to other people, which were passed as divine will, and after they realised that divine will is never supported by stakes and





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bayonets, but by love, tolerance, and equality.

They were extraordinary men with different faiths, beliefs, and ideas, and animated by profound humanity, combined with the suspicion that every rigid thought paradigm originated from a demonic will of power, more than from divine inspiration. For this reason, they created a brotherhood inspired by the background of masons' lodges and their architectural language, but it laid the foundations of modernity through free examination, democratic dialogue, and freedom of opinions.

It was the dream of a new philosophic-initiatory school, which was not influenced by political and religious action, and had the conquest of inner knowledge as its ultimate goal.

Without friendship and sense of brotherhood, this challenge would have been immediately lost.

This is the reason why brotherhood is the real cement of Freemasonry. This brotherhood is the result of free choice, support of common principles, and the will to question themselves, in spite of wealth, culture, religion, and ethnic differences.

The special *status* of "brother", for all Freemasons, gives the opportunity to develop a feeling of consonance with the other initiates, but every single Freemason has his own freedom of judgement and ideas.

This is a new and revolutionary opportunity that people who know our craft well are able to fully seize, for they discover that they share a critical and free bent for the search for truth with many other human beings: based on tolerance, respect, and caution.

This critical bent originates from doubt, not from the certainty of having a univocal and unquestionable truth.

This being said, brotherhood is not meant to be a *fratria* in the negative sense of a more or less business-oriented organisation, or a sort of sophisticated club where members wear an apron, hardly accessible, but aimed at supporting some favourites or careers in illegitimate ways.

Although, unfortunately, the word "brotherhood" can be used in different and negative contexts, for Freemasons it should mean, on the contrary, that Brethren work - independently from their unavoidable differences - to build up and consolidate not only highly social values, but also spiritual values. They support multicultural dialogue, social peace, critical search for truth, by protecting human rights and secular values of living in a society. Although there have been - and maybe there are still - people who would rather prefer to give Freemasonry less visibility, less commitment in the public context and ideas, more introflexed, private, and mostly very confidential: at the limit of secrecy. This would be on behalf of a supposed and doubtful esotericism.

On these subjects, our Grand Master activity has been inflexible and consistent, and we will keep following this direction.

Masonic brotherhood is open, it does not have a double face with a public side - where we say certain things - and a confidential side, where people do their business.

Our brotherhood starts from guiding ideas, which consider the intercultural and esoteric message of spiritual search proposed by Freemasonry as a successful educational formula, as a tool to build up civil life and contemporary society, which is increasingly troubled by problems and dramatic situations connected with the lack of contents, values, and non-conformist forms of sociability. Esotericism does not coincide with secrecy, but with a profound way of working in the lodges and the capability of transferring values developed through a common examination of symbols and rituals, in a constructive contribution and dialogue with their surrounding society.

The greatest representatives of esotericism, from Buddha to Giordano Bruno, just to mention two different representatives far in space and time, were not hidden in the shade, although they had reached





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the sublime peaks of knowledge and spiritual profoundness. Their practicing of a spiritual, religious, philosophical, and esoteric knowledge did not isolate them from the world as a foreign body that needs to hide and, at the same time, get carried away or self-celebrate with greed for omnipotence.

These wise men have practiced very rigorous forms of inner discipline and, at the same time, they have opened the hearts of millions of people with their words; they have changed people's ideas, and shifted mountains.

Esotericism is the link of our brotherhood; it is not - and it cannot be - an alibi for hiding poor ideas and contents: a lamp switched off to hide stains on the walls, or a functional curtain or carpet to cover dirt.

Our essence is being Freemasons as well as *free* Masons. This means being free citizens animated by a special mission, a spiritual and cultural identity, without being pointed at as dangerous or antisocial individuals for this reason, or as a group of plotters and criminals.

Our essence originates from a precise way of combining Freemasonry identity, an identity with an open attitude, with frankness, with our own actions and ideas without hiding behind a hood.

Being Brethren also means being open to the world, living contemporary world with our heart in suffered tuning with the dramatic events of our century, with the anxieties of our society, with no aristocratic extraneousness and superiority.

Although we do not play a political role and it should not be such, we feel the obligation of keeping a high brotherly sympathy, in order to provide a constructive contribution to the civil society, and find positive answers to new poverty, the crisis of freedom and scientific research in Italy - which is almost infibulated by a theological *diktat*, and indigence of public school and the entire Italian education system.

This is not meant to be a strong interference in politics, because we have never gone deeply into laws or solutions, but we have agitated real problems concerning our children, our life, including our spiritual life. On the contrary, we would like to remind that the "pseudo-freemasonry" - for it was not certainly real Freemasonry - that never agitated social matters or dealt with any subject connected with the main problems of contemporary society, was the same organisation that asked for and promised political support.

That kind of freemasonry boasted about and aped the role of government agencies to obtain credit in business contexts, or even worse.

However, if someone approaches the Grande Oriente d'Italia, hoping that he can find that pseudo-freemasonry, he will certainly be upset.

We can just hope that they change or leave Freemasonry.

As far as we are concerned, we will be vigilant and intransigent.

Our brotherhood has obtained full citizenship within civil society for its style and language.

It is not by accident that our lodges are attracting so many young men and that the average age of our Brethren is decreasing, in counter-trend as compared with the other Freemasonries in the western world. When we become a reference point for young men, at least for part of them, this means that we have found the appropriate languages and contents that make it possible for us to highlight the educational role played by our lodges.

We will never stop insisting on this point.

As an esoteric brotherhood, Freemasonry plays a profound educational role, thanks to the ritual and symbolic instruments which structure and harmonise its work. However, rituals with no content, no ideas, values, or spirit risk becoming an empty liturgy and leave space to non-values: to conformism (or even worse).

This means the death of esotericism and brotherhood.





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For the sake of clarity, I would like to remind everyone that in Freemasonry it is not allowed to exchange mutual support with favouritism and that no Brother can or should ask another Brother something that he is not allowed to ask: what is in contrast with laws, ethics, common sense, and honesty.

A real Freemason is as clear as water, and this transparency is the key for greatness of our Craft. This has been taught to us by the example of many Brethren who have showed this transparency in their professional, family, and political life. We are sincerely and profoundly grateful to them.

Through their example, their rigour, their courage, Freemasonry has become a real School for life, one of the few in the western countries, where free and tolerant men and citizens, who are faithful to their State and Constitution, are educated.

I would like to finish my address by presenting one last point to your thinking. The Founding Fathers of Freemasonry, our Fathers, knew that one century of horrors had preceded them, but they were strongly convinced that they needed a spiritual, esoteric, ritual, and symbolic-philosophical instrument to reverse the course of history. They were convinced that a Great Idea was necessary to unify them in a fraternal chain, different but free men in the heart and soul: hence they were not conformists, or copies of other men.

Now, it is not so different than in the past.

Now, probably more than in the 18th century, there is the need for a Great Idea, an institution that educates to dialogue, that makes it possible for men from different cultures and religions to speak to each other, that opposes fundamentalisms without becoming fundamentalist, that keeps the doors open to doubt, and that it is never ready to withdraw into dogmatism. This Great Idea is still Freemasonry.

In this century of anguish, disorientation, uncertainties, doubts, and identity catastrophes, where even the fundamental archetypes of masculine and feminine are in a profound crisis, our Brotherhood appears as the real, unique, fundamental Temple of man.

It appears as a union context, as a crucible of new ideas and a source of new, profound, and sincere friendship, on behalf and by virtue of freedom and tolerance, but especially on behalf and by virtue of trust in the greatest gift that a human being may have and give: speaking to another man he has never seen before and telling him, in the same way, with the same spirit, and with the same feeling of our rituals:

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