

# HIRAM

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GRAND ORIENT OF ITALY

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## To Be, Not to Seem

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.*

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

The continuing evolution of communications media has shaped human history over the last two centuries, changing people's habits; more recently, with the internet 'revolution', a global communications network has emerged, serving as the basis for the development of a 'new digital world', a kind of virtual stage open to all and extending to every corner of the globe. As people have sought to play a part on the 'global stage', partly in pursuit of the so-called 'sense of freedom', territorial boundaries linked to a sense of belonging have increasingly been effaced, and the identity-forming characteristics of traditional local groups, which helped define human beings as individuals, have been weakened. If we bear in mind that people's identities are closely interconnected and are shaped not only by each person's nature but also by their environment, what is being lost in the process just described is the normal, vital bond between a given population and the place to which it belongs – a place characterised not only by its physical features but also by the history, culture and ideologies that develop among its people.

Even though certain processes may appear to occur suddenly, in reality they are always preceded by developments of varying duration,

during which all the conditions required for subsequent change are gradually established. Without dwelling on historical, cultural and political analyses of the local context, the preparatory phase of the events now under way may have begun with the idea of linking 'progress' to 'modernity', a process that favoured the migration of local communities towards large urban centres that arose from technological progress and the pursuit of 'material well-being' alone. The traditional values that bound individuals to their territory gave way to a 'solidified' society, in which men were for the most part reduced to 'productive units', bound to one another by predominantly material interests. The transition from the modern age to the contemporary age was marked by the breaking down of the boundaries that had defined the identity of the urban environment, as new anonymous spaces extending along transport routes and around infrastructure hubs were incorporated into it, devoid of meaning and shaped by a consumer society centred on the 'product' rather than on relationships between individuals and their living environment. Subsequently, with the digital age, a process of increasing social fluidity was set in motion, leading towards global uniformity: as individuals gained the ability to feel present everywhere while in fact being nowhere, the world of appearance increasingly took shape in a virtual environment where individuals lead a peculiar existence, presenting themselves through new images and narratives shared with the 'general public'. Although at first this way of life made the individual feel as though he were an active part of an expanded reality, in the long run it increasingly exposed him to the influence of a globalised mindset, while confining him ever more tightly within the 'net' which, by definition, both unites and captures.

This 'dissolution' of genuine boundaries of identity has affected not only the places where we live but also those through which we travel. While rapid means of transport have brought 'destinations' closer to one another – reducing the traveller's experience to a superficial view of the landscape passing by outside the window – the internet has compressed the journey into the immediacy of the present moment, replacing real places with disconnected virtual spaces containing only a few fragments of real life. Since the experience of the journey

itself – including the encounters made along the way – is also lost, the internet user finds himself immersed in a 'non-place', communicating with individuals who have very little in common beyond the pursuit of approval at all costs; at the same time, he presents himself as someone he is not, merely to assert an identity that no longer reflects who he really is.

In this 'distorted reality', even time seems to flow differently, becoming increasingly disconnected from real phenomena: to live in a present severed from its past and deprived of any future does not mean 'seizing the moment', but rather living through an indefinite, impoverished time – in short, an 'unreal' one. After all, an individual is defined by his real presence at a particular moment and in a specific place, not at just any time and place, just as an event occurring at a given moment cannot take place everywhere or at any other time. It is clear that what has been said so far concerns only man's outward behaviour, the relationships he establishes with the world and with the society around him. For the sake of completeness, it should be added that an individual is defined not only by the external environment that surrounds and shapes him, but above all by his inner nature. Nevertheless, in the absence of a solid basis of identity, it may prove problematic to find within oneself the determination necessary to embark on a genuine initiatic path, aimed at overcoming the limits arising from individual nature. This point of view is very different from that of those who choose to enter the 'digital world' exclusively in order to live an 'augmented reality', a concept which is, moreover, distorted, since in order to discover reality it is necessary to withdraw as much as possible from illusion.

In spite of this efficient network, through which the individual believes he can freely project a more appealing identity, the risk is that the individual may lose himself behind reassuring 'masks', without even remotely realising that he is increasingly trapped in a fictitious reality, with all the consequences that such a process may entail. To be more precise, it may be said that if an individual identifies with a certain image that is not his own, under the illusion of constructing his own identity, he actually tends gradually to erode the human dimension that defines him

as such, reducing himself to a sort of unit devoid of qualities.

Within such a deceptive collective mindset – which favours everything that is tangible and therefore immediately demonstrable – it is easy to find oneself leading a futile life like the one described by Shakespeare in the passage quoted above, living solely to ‘put on a show’ by adopting and changing, at will, identities fabricated by consumer culture, superimposed on one another in a mental stratification of convictions and prejudices reinforced by collective approval. The fact is that certain ‘mental models’, tailored to please others and wholly unrelated to the nature of the person who adopts them, are all equally devoid of ‘personality’, like empty containers artfully arranged for prominent display. Moreover, although seeking self-affirmation through others’ approval – with the aim of concealing one’s individual limitations, or of seeking short-lived results out of an instinct for self-preservation – may yield satisfactory results in the short term, it ultimately leads to a stalemate that makes it impossible to call one’s own convictions into question and to discern the true from the false, with the risk of compromising a genuine initiatic path.

It must be said that it would be a grave error to place the blame for such a process of degeneration exclusively on the development of modern means of communication. Although the external environment is increasingly hostile, the underlying cause lies instead in a widespread tendency to look no further than the surface of things, without even viewing the apparent multiplicity of social, cultural and artistic forms, developed in different places and times, as an expression of a deeper reality. When the normal order of human possibilities is reversed, so that the emotional component prevails over the rational one, it is understandable that excessive attention to aesthetics precludes any search for beauty, seen as the expression of the idea that inspired the work: it is no accident that certain works of art, increasingly placed on prominent display, are appreciated solely for the pleasure afforded by superficial judgements shaped by passing fancies. When one perceives only what is accessible to the senses and takes pleasure only in appearances, one runs the risk of levelling down the highest human capacities and confining the understanding of everyday reality to considerations of

immediate circumstances. After all, the excessive concern with one’s image may be a plausible explanation for this tendency, although such a tendency is hardly justifiable for anyone who has decided to follow an initiatic path such as the Masonic one, directed towards ‘inward self-perfection’.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, it should be added that it is natural for the initiate to begin with an outward view of the things that surround him; the problem is that this starting point, instead of being taken as a basis for overcoming individual limitations, is frequently mistaken for the goal and exalted beyond measure, to the point of believing that appearance is the only possible reality. From this perspective, for anyone who is truly disposed to call his own mental forms into question, the vastness of the external world becomes no more than the starting point of the initiatic journey and appearance may accordingly be considered a ‘shell’ one must move beyond in order gradually to attain knowledge of ever deeper realities.

In summary, in order to reverse course and embark on the initiatic path – an exclusively inner work – one must adopt an active attitude towards the many influences arising not only from the environment but above all from one’s own individual nature. Instead of worrying about defending the image one presents to others, one must turn one’s attention towards a sincere evaluation of what one really is, continually putting oneself to the test, with an open heart, in order to bring to light, and subsequently correct, the vices hidden behind what may even seem to be one’s best qualities. If the individual disposition is pure – free from any practical aim – and oriented towards Knowledge, the masks will gradually dissolve one by one, allowing one to know what one really is, no matter where and no matter when, because the search for the truth that potentially resides within each person has no limits, except those inherent in individual nature.

It is natural that doubts should arise about the direction taken by contemporary civilisation, and it seems strange that the severity of the crisis of traditional values, now affecting the entire planet, has not received the attention it deserves, especially from an initiatic institution such as Freemasonry, probably distracted by issues that ought to fall

outside its remit. In this sense, at a time when everything is expected to be sustainable, no one has been alarmed by the ‘unsustainability of appearance’: once emptied of the deeper reality that sustains it, appearance risks crumbling under the slightest strain like an empty shell. It would be a mistake to speculate about the future development of humanity, even though Freemasonry could play an important role, since it is still in possession of the ritual and symbolic heritage handed down by earlier generations of Freemasons. If the Freemasons of today do not lower their guard against external influences and continue to turn their attention towards the traditional teachings, carrying out authentic initiatic work, inside and outside the Temples, as individuals of different natures come increasingly into accord with the principles, their actions will be more effective than activism shaped by the external world and directed towards profane ends: the greater the unity in the intellectual order, the greater the understanding among distant peoples and civilisations, ‘for the good and progress of Humanity’. The result will not be immediate and may even be imperceptible to those who see action as something exterior and directed towards material ends – which is how some seek to portray the Masonic institution. Yet such an outcome should be clearly understood within a ‘Universal Initiatic Order of a traditional and symbolic character’, which is what Freemasonry truly is.

**Antonio Seminario**

*Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy*

## **A. K. Coomaraswamy: A ‘Builder’ of the Twentieth Century**

**Art, Myths and Legends  
in Relation to Masonic Symbolism**



Part I

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) is certainly a little-known author among Masonic readers, probably because he never joined Freemasonry, although he had absorbed its spirit through his numerous studies of art and the crafts. He may be regarded as one of the greatest metaphysicians of the twentieth century and as an interpreter of the ancient wisdom which he saw expressed in the works of certain Masters of the past such as Plato, Philo of Alexandria, Saint Thomas, Meister Eckhart, Dante and Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī.

The universal character of his work is certainly one of the most significant features of his intellectual outlook, namely his capacity to discern, beneath the differences among the various traditional teachings, a common ground: a single truth accessible to anyone able to recognise

the existence of 'many paths to one summit'<sup>1</sup>.

One of his autobiographical notes reveals that not a day passed without his reading the Scriptures and the works of the great philosophers of all ages, insofar as they were accessible to him in modern languages, in Latin, in Greek and in Sanskrit; he was convinced of the existence of a truth that shines through all traditions in different forms: *Una veritas in variis signis varie resplendet*<sup>2</sup>, more precisely 'a truth greater in glory by far than can be circumscribed by any creed or confined by the walls of any church or temple'<sup>3</sup>.

Given his inclination towards the universal, every biographical detail recedes into the background. On the other hand, replying to a friend who wished to write his biography, Coomaraswamy expressed a wish to remain in the background and asked him to consider only his books, in the belief that every biography was of little account compared with the value and destiny of a man<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, we can only heed his invitation, since we believe that his studies may still offer a valuable opportunity to rediscover the profound meaning of 'art', to which Masonic myths and legends allude.

On this point Coomaraswamy's intellectual contribution is particularly significant: his studies, in fact, clarify the real nature of *folklore*, myths and legends, contesting the modern interpretation that tends to regard them as mere products of the culture or imagination of ordinary

people<sup>5</sup>.

According to Coomaraswamy, they are instead vehicles through which teachings and doctrines belonging to more ancient traditions have been preserved and transmitted, often in symbolic form. The only genuinely popular element lies in the ways in which they survive and are preserved, since a people essentially functions as a repository of collective memory, preserving and transmitting such content in the form of legends, fairy tales, ballads, games and every other symbolic vesture capable of revealing its 'secret' to anyone able to understand it. Moreover, as Lord Raglan stated in *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama*, a people's literature is never of its own making, but comes to it from above.

It is therefore worth observing that, from this perspective, even the legends of the different Masonic degrees are not simple allegorical constructions or human inventions devised for didactic purposes. From the traditional point of view, they are symbolic narratives intended to preserve and transmit a teaching of more remote origin, concealed beneath a narrative veil. Moreover, when such legends are enacted, they cease to be simple narratives and become, to all intents and purposes, rites capable of transmitting the spiritual influence of which Freemasonry has been the custodian *from time immemorial*.

A distinction must, however, be made: if Masonic legends are to be understood as vehicles of a traditional doctrine, one must also avoid equating their content with that of a religion properly so called, both because of their more intellectual and less moralistic character, and because of the particular adaptation required for transmission in the vernacular.

From Coomaraswamy's perspective, the opposition between religion and *folklore* often arises when an older tradition is reorganised into

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Paths That Lead to the Same Summit: Some Observations on Comparative Religion', *Motive*, May 1944.

<sup>2</sup> 'One Truth shines, in different ways, through different signs.'

<sup>3</sup> A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Religious Basis of the Forms of Indian Society: An Address to the Student's Religious Association, Ann Arbor, January 1946* (New York: Orientalia, 1946), pp. 3–4. Coomaraswamy's words call to mind those of Ibn 'Arabī: 'Beware of being bound by a particular creed while rejecting all the rest, for you would lose an immense good; indeed, you would lose the science of the Truth as it is in itself. Let your soul be the substance of the forms of all beliefs, for God Most High is too vast and too immense to be enclosed within one creed to the exclusion of the others' (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 'Word of Hūd', ed. A. 'A. 'Afiṭī, Beirut n.d., p. 113).

<sup>4</sup> 'What you should deal with is the nature and tendency of my work, and your book should be 95 per cent on this. I wish to remain in the background [...] "portraiture of human beings is *asvargya*." All this is not a matter of modesty, but of principle' (A. K. Coomaraswamy, letter to S. Durai Raja Singam, May 1946, in *Selected Letters of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, ed. Alvin Moore Jr. and Rama P. Coomaraswamy, Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 25).

<sup>5</sup> Coomaraswamy, citing some honourable exceptions among modern scholars who had shown little understanding of *folklore*, affirmed that C. G. Jung was 'put out of court by his interpretation of symbols as psychological phenomena, an avowed and deliberate exclusion of all metaphysical significance' ('Primitive Mentality', originally published in *Études Traditionnelles* XLVI (1939), subsequently in *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* XX (1990), and included in *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, 1946).

a new form, so that the gods of the preceding cult become the evil spirits of the succeeding one<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, when a people's mentality becomes excessively rationalistic and scientific, it becomes increasingly difficult to recognise the reality of what eludes investigation by the senses. The consequence is a growing distrust of everything that cannot be accounted for in terms of empirical experience, to the point that myths, legends and symbols are often reduced to simple fantasies or superstitions.

Moreover, this is a phenomenon that can be observed even within Masonic temples, where initiatic legends are sometimes in danger of being dismissed as mere ritual inventions, whereas, in reality, they constitute a powerful means of gaining knowledge that can broaden the Mason's intellectual horizon and orient him towards meanings that transcend the purely rational plane. In these cases, when they cease to be regarded as vehicles of a doctrine, Masonic legends are judged according to criteria foreign to their nature, such as conformity to the dominant values of a given epoch or adherence to a purely factual conception of truth.

This tendency, however, does not originate in Freemasonry itself: it reflects a more general difficulty experienced by the contemporary mind in understanding the language of symbols and the value of traditional narratives. It is therefore unsurprising that many of the currents within profane culture that have given rise to so-called cancel culture stem precisely from an inability to grasp the symbolic and initiatic meaning of myths, legends and fairy tales; this inability leads to the perceived need to rewrite the literary texts inherited from the past so that they may conform to the sensibilities and dominant values of modern society.

Such an attitude, moreover, is not an entirely new phenomenon either: Coomaraswamy had already pointed out in his own time what he described as a singular alliance between religion and science, united by the attempt to deprive children of fairy tales because they are not

'true', as though the value of a traditional narrative had to be measured exclusively by its correspondence with facts rather than by the symbolic and doctrinal truth of which it is the bearer<sup>7</sup>.

In 1935, L. de Gaigneron published a rather interesting work entitled *Vers la connaissance interdite* (Towards the Forbidden Knowledge), reviewed by Coomaraswamy himself<sup>8</sup>. The work tells the story of three 'characters': Atman (*spiritus*), Mentalié (reason), and a Catholic priest. The forbidden knowledge referred to in the title is initiatic knowledge, specifically gnosis. The modern Church rejects this knowledge because it cannot acknowledge the existence of a primordial knowledge from which all religions derive, since that would reduce Christianity to one religion among others; rationalists reject it because it cannot be grounded in empirical experience and therefore has no value for them.

The meaning is quite clear: when man is unable to perceive the deeper reality of things, limiting himself to their most superficial aspect – that is, to what appears rather than to what is – the true principle that sustains the life of all things is lost from view. It is for this reason that Coomaraswamy considers the denial of the presence of an ancient wisdom in *folklore* and in legends to be the possible cause of the premature death of a community, or in any case of the impoverishment of community life<sup>9</sup>, as happens when only the literal meaning of a legend is grasped, or when only the utilitarian or practical aspect of an invention or a work is grasped.

Inventions, for example, are almost always applications of known metaphysical principles to practical ends, which explains why the most fundamental of them have always been attributed to a hero of the ancestral tradition, that is, to a primordial revelation: indeed, however utilitarian their purposes may be, they never lose the symbolic meaning

<sup>7</sup> Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Primitive Mentality', in *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought? The Traditional View of Art*, rev. ed., Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Eastern Wisdom and Western Knowledge', *Isis* 34, no. 4 (Spring 1943): 359–363; repr. in *Am I My Brother's Keeper?*, New York: The John Day Company, 1947, 54–65.

<sup>9</sup> A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Primitive Mentality', in *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought? The Traditional View of Art*, rev. ed., Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Primitive Mentality', in *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought? The Traditional View of Art*, rev. ed., Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007.

through which one may reconnect with the celestial archetype of which they are an expression.

A particular case, which calls to mind a well-known Masonic symbol, is Coomaraswamy's example of the so-called safety pin<sup>10</sup>, an adaptation of a more ancient invention: that is, the pin or needle, with a head, ring or eye at one end and a point at the other; a form which, as a 'pin', penetrates and unites materials, while as a 'needle' it binds them, leaving behind it as a 'trace' a thread that emerges from the eye. The safety pin is distinguished by the fact that the shank, originally straight, is folded back on itself, so that the point passes through the 'eye' and is held there, fastening the material through which it passes.

Anyone familiar with the initiatic meaning of this symbolism will readily recognise the function of the pin or needle as an expression of the motto '*to gather together that which is scattered*'. The metal pin and the thread left by the needle – whether or not fixed to a button corresponding to the eye of the needle – carry the same meaning: the 'spirit-thread' with which the Sun links all things to itself and orders them; the same thread that, in Masonic symbolism, is reflected vertically in the plumb line and horizontally in the Chain of Union, by means of which the Brethren are united like pearls on a necklace.

This idea is expressed by Coomaraswamy in these terms: '*he is the primordial embroiderer and tailor, by whom the tissue of the universe, to which our garments are analogous, is woven on a living thread*'<sup>11</sup>, so that the fact that today a safety pin or a button is considered solely in terms of its utility provides significant evidence of the progressive loss of the symbolic meaning originally associated with the arts, crafts and objects of everyday life.

In traditional societies, both natural realities and artefacts have in fact always been considered actual manifestations of a metaphysical reality. Coomaraswamy, for example, observes that the eagle and the lion are not simply symbols or images of the Sun, but the Sun in con-

sonance<sup>12</sup>, since form – understood in the sense of the scholastic philosophers, that is, as 'essence' – is held to be more fundamental than the nature in which it may manifest itself.

The same principle also applies to architecture: every house is the world in miniature and every altar is placed at the centre of the earth. In this sense, the very centre of the Lodge<sup>13</sup> may be likened to an altar or a hearth. Moreover, the word 'altar', from late Latin *altāre*, is not unrelated to the verb *adolēre*, that is, 'to cause to burn'; the word 'altar' properly designates the table intended to receive burnt offerings to God, namely the place in which the passions are sacrificed; this sacrifice must necessarily precede the raising of Master Hiram.

Such conceptions, however, may also be extended to the study of traditions that are not properly Masonic, which, from a modern perspective, are often reduced to superstitions or simple expressions of popular *folklore*. Such forms too – far from being mere residues of naive beliefs – may, when considered in relation to those same Masonic symbols, prove to be expressions of universal principles capable of bringing to light meanings deeper than those yielded by customary and expedient interpretations.

Coomaraswamy, for example, observes that in traditional societies, as in rural communities of the past, mothers, whose sensibility was very far removed from the exhibitionism and ostentation of the modern age, avoided excessive praise of the beauty of their children.

The reason for this attitude lies in the fact that an excess of praise would be equivalent to 'tempting Providence', that is, to exposing the object of praise to the risk of ruin. What appears to the modern mentality to be a simple superstition in fact embodies knowledge of a metaphysical principle according to which 'perfection' is synonymous with 'death'. Everything that is perfect is by definition complete and lacking in nothing; and when a thing has exhausted all its possibilities, passing

<sup>12</sup> From late Latin *consonantia*, derived from *consonare*: 'to sound together', 'to resound together'.

<sup>13</sup> The word 'Lodge' may be related to the Sanskrit word *loka* (world), both in a symbolic sense, as a representation of the cosmos, and in an etymological sense, through the mediation of the Latin *locus*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

definitively from potency to act, it must come to an end<sup>14</sup>. The cyclical rhythm of nature itself expresses this principle: every reality that has fully developed its possibilities tends to return, along a downward arc, to the unmanifest state in which everything has its origin and in which everything is contained in the 'eternal present'.

The same thing holds for the primitive craftsman: the craftsman always leaves something unfinished in his work, since the word 'finished' may mean that the work cannot be perfected, but also that it must die; and this is not what the craftsman wants for his work, nor the mother for her children.

In this sense, the association between this principle and the unfinished wall found in Masonic temples is by no means devoid of meaning. It may be explained by the Divine Craftsman's need to leave something unfinished or imperfect in the temple, thereby ensuring its preservation and vitality. Given the many attacks that Freemasonry has historically endured from both without and within, this may indicate the origin of the self-preserving impulse that has enabled it to survive to the present day. At the same time, it serves as a reminder of the need to work on oneself rather than project one's limitations outwards by attributing to this initiatic organisation imperfections whose true rationale is not always understood<sup>15</sup>.

In this regard, however, a clarification is needed: it is important not to confuse a law of cosmological order – whose efficacy, provided certain precautions are observed, does not depend on possessing the corresponding knowledge – with the specifically initiatic duty to undertake inner work of self-perfection. It may happen, in fact, that the craftsman or the peasant mother is not at all aware of the meaning of a precaution

which, over time, has become a simple superstition; nevertheless, continued observance may still provide real protection against a specific danger.

The Mason, however, cannot limit himself to recognising the existence of a law of cosmological order or to ascertaining its efficacy on the plane of subtle influences, but is bound to recognise the specifically inward and initiatic meaning of the principle from which such laws derive, understanding that the symbolism of perfection does not refer simply to an indefinite improvement or to a process destined never to end, but to the realisation of a determinate state, which constitutes the ultimate end of his path.

Contrary to this traditional view, it is often said, in fact, that the work of the Mason 'never ends', as though the purpose of the path were precisely the search for moral perfectibility rather than perfection in the initiatic sense. This attitude may be traced back to that curious resistance of the contemporary mind to the idea of an immutable Supreme Being; and, in this case, Coomaraswamy wrote: *'The most striking aspect of this resistance is the fact that it is almost always based on feelings: the question of the truth or falsity of a traditional doctrine is hardly ever raised, and all that seems to matter is whether one likes the doctrine or not. This is the sentimentality of those who would rather than arrive at any goal, keep on going not merely until it is reached, but "throughout all time", and who confuse their activity, which is only an unfinished procedure from potentiality to act, with a being in act. [...] The answer to what men "feel" when they shrink from "eternity", just as they shrink from the "self-naughting" that shocks them only because they have not, in themselves, distinguished between the Self that "never became anyone" from the inconstant Ego of "this man, so and so"'*<sup>16</sup>.

In this sense, it may be said that the central issue is precisely this: the inability to believe – and therefore to recognise – the existence of an Absolute Reality that is certain, immutable and not empirically demonstrable. Although a Mason *who rightly understands the Art 'will never be a*

<sup>14</sup> Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Primitive Mentality', in *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought? The Traditional View of Art*, rev. ed., Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> One example is the question of admission to Freemasonry, since if on the one hand one may see in this phenomenon a decisive impulse towards the decline which, in the wake of Protestantism, led to the transition from operative to speculative Masonry, on the other hand one may see in such acceptance a way of allowing access to qualified persons from outside the craft who, because of the destruction of the Templar Orders, would otherwise not have had the possibility of obtaining a Western initiation.

<sup>16</sup> A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Time and Eternity* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1947); later issued by Princeton University Press, 1952.

*stupid Atheist, nor an irreligious Libertine*<sup>17</sup>, the Art is not always understood in its full significance; as a result, it may be difficult to recognise, for example, that faith is not incompatible with either reason or the other faculties of the being and constitutes a preliminary condition for the development of possibilities of a higher order<sup>18</sup>.

Contrary to what is all too often assumed, faith '*is something profoundly different from a simple "belief"*'<sup>19</sup>, being a traditional element that '*entails a firm and invariable adherence of the whole being*'<sup>20</sup>. Although faith is commonly invoked in relation to truths of a theological order – a domain in which secondary considerations, including moral and sentimental ones, may also be involved – faith already implies, albeit in reflected form, a degree of certainty, since it is a form of knowledge that transcends the rational domain.

Coomaraswamy, adopting the scholastic definition of *fides* as '*the assent of the intellect to a credible proposition, for which no empirical proof is available*', speaks of the necessity of believing in order to understand (*crede ut intelligas*) and of understanding in order to believe (*intellige ut credas*), that is, of a joint activity of the will and the intellect.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons* (London: William Hunter, 1723), 'I. Concerning God and Religion', p. 50. With reference to the GOI one may also consult the sections *I principi fondamentali per i riconoscimenti* ('The Grand Lodge must admit as members only men of good morals who express a belief in the Supreme Being') and *Identità del Grande Oriente d'Italia* ('[...] no one may be admitted into Freemasonry unless he has first explicitly declared that he believes in the Supreme Being'), while on the meaning of such belief, as a form of adherence not reducible to a mere intellectual opinion, but akin to an act of faith, see also A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'The Bugbear of Literacy', in *What Is Civilization? and Other Essays*, Lindisfarne Press, Hudson (N.Y.), 1989.

<sup>18</sup> Faith is considered fundamental not only in the Abrahamic traditions but also in the Vedic tradition, where the term that designates it is *shraddhā*.

<sup>19</sup> René Guénon, *Studies in Hinduism*, trans. Henry D. Fohr and Samuel D. Fohr, Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001, review of Shri Aurobindo, *Bases of Yoga*, Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1936.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* When, in a religious form, the sentimental point of view unduly prevails over the intellectual one, beliefs arise. Unlike certainty, which is entirely intellectual, beliefs constitute a phenomenon in which sentimentality plays an essential part: a kind of inclination or sympathy for an idea (cf. René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, trans. Marco Pallis, London: Luzac & Co., 1945, chapter 'Tradition and Religion').

On the other hand, as he himself observes, if one lacks sufficient trust to believe that the words of sacred texts conceal more than they can express, that their 'authors' may have set down on paper what they had personally realised, or that such texts were not merely given literary form but were rather 'in-formed'<sup>21</sup>, one cannot hope to understand their true intention – what Dante calls the *vera sentenza*<sup>22</sup>.

When, during Lodge work, the possibility of a sapiential origin for the legends is rejected, or the presence of a higher-order truth behind certain dogmatic formulations is denied, this reflects a deeper difficulty: a lack of symbolic 'covering', caused by the intrusion of the modern mentality, which makes it increasingly difficult to recognise dogma as the vesture of a properly esoteric doctrine.

If, in fact, there are truths that can be understood both exoterically and esoterically, other truths belong exclusively to esoterism and have no correspondence outside it; when transposed into the religious sphere, they become wholly incomprehensible and can therefore only be set forth in the form of dogmatic formulations, that is, without ever attempting to give the slightest explanation of them<sup>23</sup>.

This does not, however, prevent the Mason, in either case, from freeing himself from the influence of the extra-intellectual and sentimental elements that constitute the foundation of dogmatic formulations and from restoring every doctrine to its properly intellectual aspect. On the basis of this distinction, the symbolism of progression through the degrees may be understood as indicating successive stages in a transformation in the mode of knowing, so that truth is no longer

<sup>21</sup> 'In-formed': to receive a form from 'within'.

<sup>22</sup> A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Manas', in *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers*, vol. 2, Metaphysics, ed. Roger Lipsey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 217–18, n. 18. In note 18, Coomaraswamy observes that the same exegetical method, accepted for a long time, was founded on the presupposition that in every scriptural text at least four valid meanings were concealed: literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical (cf. René Guénon, *The Esoterism of Dante*, Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2005, chapter 'Apparent and Hidden Meaning'). Consequently, whoever stops at the first two meanings can describe myth or legend only from without, that is, he is limited to the more exterior meanings.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. René Guénon, *Insights into Christian Esoterism*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001, chapter 'Christianity and Initiation'.

merely believed but inwardly realised.

In this sense, the fact that the wages of the Entered Apprentice and of the Fellow Craft are received respectively at the pillars 'Boaz' and 'Jachin' is particularly significant: if, in fact, the wage represents the reward of the work accomplished, it also expresses the degree of knowledge attained, so that the two sacred words may refer to two distinct modalities through which truth may be known.

'Boaz' (יָבֹז), generally interpreted as meaning 'in strength' or 'my strength is in Him [God]', in fact contains the Hebrew noun 'oz' (יָז), derived from the root י-ז-ז ('-z-z'), whose semantic field includes the ideas of strength, vigour and support. Considered from the symbolic point of view, this word seems to refer to a form of knowledge founded above all on assent<sup>24</sup> and trust. It expresses the disposition of one who recognises a truth without yet possessing inner certainty of it but nevertheless adheres to it because he trusts in its strength and perceives its reflected trace in his own heart.

'Jachin', corresponding to the Hebrew *yākhîn* (יָכִין) – with the sense of 'He will establish' or 'He will make firm' – derives instead from the trilateral root י-כ-נ (k-w-n), whose semantic field refers to the ideas of stability, firmness, foundation and security. If 'Boaz' refers to assent to a truth, 'Jachin' designates its consolidation as inner certainty. It is no longer a matter of participating, by reflection, in a truth not yet inwardly realised, but of possessing it with a certainty that is stable and real.

Moreover, the same idea is found in the Arabic *yaqīn* (يَقِين), a term traced back to the root Y-Q-N (ي-ق-ن), whose semantic core refers to the ideas of fixity, stability and certainty. In Islamic esoterism, in fact,

*yaqīn* designates precisely spiritual certainty, that is, a form of knowledge that has gone beyond the domain of simple opinion and belief and become an inner reality. Although no established etymological relation exists, the phonetic and semantic convergence with the Hebrew *yākhîn* appears particularly significant, since both terms evoke the idea of a truth made firm and certain.

On the basis of this distinction, one may therefore say that dogma can be transcended, not because it is deemed false or incompatible with an individual's own opinions, but because the truth it expresses can be known 'from within', in a more direct and complete way than its doctrinal formulations allow. Although it initially requires an act of trust, from the initiatic point of view such trust is by no means an end, but only a preliminary condition which, once the conditions for access to that truth have been fulfilled, makes the realisation of the truth itself possible.

This is, after all, a natural consequence of the universal principles on which initiatic traditions are founded: manifestation, in all its degrees and modalities, is indeed the expression of a single Reality.

From this point of view, one cannot speak of separate sacred and profane worlds, but only of two different ways of considering one and the same reality, according to whether or not one is able to recognise Unity in multiplicity, that is, the one Truth which, being outside time and space, can always and everywhere be recognised, as suggested by the saying attributed to Hermes Trismegistus and taken up by Saint Bonaventure<sup>25</sup>, according to which 'God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere'<sup>26</sup>.

The secret of the art, on the other hand, has a geometrical character: it consists in the capacity to assign to every doctrine, as well as to every other thing, its proper place in the universal order, according to its own nature and without denying its reality within its own sphere. Ultimately, this capacity is the very presupposition of the science of measure and makes it possible to develop the 'gift of tongues', that is,

<sup>24</sup> From Latin *assentire*, supine *assensum*, composed of *ad* and *sentire* – the word 'assent' can mean agreeing with, or identifying with, what others affirm; one may also discern a cognitive element, since it ultimately involves a preliminary identification with, or assimilation of, what is proposed, and also, albeit only as a consequence, the stilling of the mind, an indispensable condition, in the final analysis, for the development of any possibility of a higher order. If we then examine the etymology of the word 'sentire', we find that it derives from Latin *sentire* – past participle *sensus* – 'to meditate', 'to reflect', and from Irish *seil* 'direction', 'way', properly 'to direct towards', 'to intend' and 'to know'.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (The Journey of the Mind into God), chap. V.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Time and Eternity*.

the ability to address each person according to his degree of understanding. It is through this art, moreover, that one can truly understand why Freemasonry has been defined as a ‘*Centre of Union*’, namely the means of fostering sincere friendship among people who would otherwise have remained perpetually distant<sup>27</sup>.

[*To be continued*]  
M.B.

## Luigi Pietracqua and Don Pipeta l’Asilè: The Popular Representation of Freemasonry

Luigi Pietracqua, who was born in Voghera on 23 January 1832 and died in Turin on 28 October 1901, was a printer, journalist and novelist; he is considered one of the foremost prose writers in Piedmontese and an author of historical novels containing frequent Masonic references. A member of the Cavour Lodge of Turin and Deputy Grand Orator of the Grand Orient of Italy, as recorded at the extraordinary meeting of the Grand Council held on 7 March 1862, he belonged to the post-unification generation that gave public discourse a civic and educational function. His writing is characterised by the way it places the Masonic tradition within Turin’s urban memory, through everyday language and a plot rooted in popular milieus.

Beginning on 15 June 1867, Pietracqua published in the *Gasëta d’Gianduja* – a Turin newspaper he had founded and edited – *Don Pipeta l’Asilè*, a popular historical novel in Piedmontese whose protagonist is a Freemason working as an itinerant vinegar seller. In 1951 *l’Unità*, the official organ of the Italian Communist Party, republished it in instalments, as a supplement to its Turin edition, in an Italian translation by Augusto Monti under the title *Il figlio della Vedova* (The Widow’s Son). Post-war Turin provided a particularly significant context for this revival: the memory of the Resistance, the central role of the working class in the city and the political debate of those years made the rereading of a popular novel from the past a vehicle for bringing a vocabulary of civic emancipation into the present.

Monti’s choice reflected a conception of translation as historical and political mediation. The translation from Piedmontese into Italian involved a reworking that rendered the tension between the people, religious authority and civil power intelligible to a new readership through

<sup>27</sup> [...] whereby Masonry becomes the Center of Union, and the Means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must have remain’d at a perpetual Distance’ (Old Charges, I, Concerning God and Religion, ed. 1723).

language shaped by the sensibility of Turin's anti-Fascist milieu. Although unsupported by conclusive documentary evidence, the hypothesis that Italo Calvino supported the editorial choice belongs to the text's reception history rather than to the established factual record; it remains, however, indicative of the cultural climate in which the text was revived.

### **DON PIPETA L'ASILÈ**

The widow Caterina, mother of Genovieffa and of the nineteen-year-old protagonist, Battista, runs a small tavern, which she keeps open and in which, thanks to the tolerance of the civil authority represented by the Vicario, she serves wine on holy days of obligation. The Roman Catholic Church – then dominant within the institutional framework – requires all establishments to close on those days in order to encourage attendance at services, although such attendance is not always voluntary. On the eve of Corpus Christi, two men appear and order her to keep the tavern closed, as all the other establishments are to be closed, since the day is to be devoted to religious observance; for Caterina, however, closing the tavern would mean destitution. The threat posed by the Holy Office was by no means negligible, all the more so since one of the two men is recognised by Battista as a Dominican preacher.

Caterina does not comply with the order, keeps the shop open, is arrested and dies while being held by the Holy Office; Genovieffa survives, but is irreversibly scarred by the torture inflicted by the defenders of the faith. Battista later discovers that Caterina had been denounced to the Holy Office by Don Bastian, a Dominican friar and her half-brother.

### **TEN YEARS LATER**

The narrative resumes some ten years later, when Battista, under the name of Don Pipeta l'Asilè (the vinegar-seller), makes a living selling vinegar and is a Freemason. Freemasonry is presented as a moral force opposed to the commingling of ecclesiastical and civil power and to the Holy Office's recurrent abuses of power. The narrative depicts him

during the Masonic initiation of the dyer Stefano Borello, a man of proven integrity, originally from Valsesia, who has established a flourishing business in Turin, where he lives with his mother, Lucia – the girls' grandmother – his two daughters, Maria and Adele, and their faithful housekeeper, Marianna. Luigi Pietracqua gives a detailed account of the initiation; the notary Roggero also takes part in it.

A new character is introduced, Professor Parodi from Mondovì, an upright man whose principles were well ahead of his time; he alludes to the case of Pietro Giannone, a Neapolitan, who died in the dungeons of the citadel for having upheld the separation between civil and religious power. Professor Parodi reappears at the Christmas dinner at Stefano Borello's house, which the Asilè also attends. The notary Roggero has a dissolute son who, being infatuated with Maria, enters her room at night. Battista and Stefano rush there and, unable to recognise the intruder in the dark, the Asilè strikes him with his iron-tipped stick, leaving him partially disfigured. We also learn that, as a secondary occupation, the notary Roggero practises usury in socially prominent, well-protected circles, where he is able to act with impunity.

Stefano proposes to Battista that he leave his mother's old tavern and move in with him, a move that would have pleased Adele, who is revealed to be in love with the Asilè; Battista refuses, however, because he has a secret: his sister Genovieffa is in the old house, still alive, but in a severely impaired state of mind because of the torture she suffered at the hands of the Inquisition.

### **THE BETRAYAL AND THE FLIGHT**

Casa Borello receives an unexpected visit from three people who search the dwelling, concentrating in particular on the shelves of the library, where they find a 'Masonic Catechism', the apron and the sash that Freemasons customarily wear at Lodge meetings; they are accompanied by a detachment of soldiers stationed outside the door. Meanwhile, the theologian Brondel is with the painter Olivero and Professor Parodi, who, having learnt of the suspicions surrounding Stefano, tries to warn him by bringing him a note; having arrived at Casa Borello, however, he is arrested by the soldiers, who mistake him for the master

of the house, and is taken to the prisons of the Holy Office.

While this is happening, Stefano and Battista are again in the old house of Caterina, the Asilè's mother, where Genovieffa now lies dead; having returned to Casa Borello by way of a secret door, they recover the note that Parodi had managed to leave, understand that there is a traitor among the Masons, and take flight. When Professor Parodi fails to return, the painter Olivero receives a further visit from the theologian Brondel, from whom he learns that the professor is being held in the prisons of the Holy Office; he therefore sets to work to have him released and, thanks to the renown he enjoys at court, succeeds in obtaining an audience with the Grand Minister, Count Giovanni Battista Lorenzo Bogino, who promises to attend to the case.

Meanwhile the women of Casa Borello are contacted by a mysterious ricotta-seller who shows Grandmother Lucia a cross that she immediately recognises as having belonged to Stefano's wife, then declares that he has come to help them flee; a carter and a friar of imposing appearance, wearing the habit of the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus, then come to fetch them: in reality these are two Freemasons in disguise. Hidden in the cart and aided by the friar, they pass the checkpoint and reach the mansion of a nobleman, Count Ferdinando, whose surname Pietracqua leaves unstated, where they are reunited with Stefano and Battista.

## THE KING AND THE INQUISITOR

Olivero, meanwhile, has obtained from the Grand Minister Bogino an order for Professor Parodi's release in the name of the King and takes it to the Inquisitor. Here Augusto Monti's version differs from Pietracqua's, since in the translation Professor Parodi commits suicide in prison, whereas in the original it is the King himself who summons the Inquisitor, with whom he has a fast-paced exchange.

*Is contentroma mach 'd riportè la conclusion del dialogo, che per soa fôrssa incisiva e për soa curiosità stòrica a merita 'd nen esse ignorà.*

*Inssoma, cost meschin professor, i veni ch'a sia immediatament liberà, halo capi?*

*Ma a l'è un eretich, Maestà!*

*Eretich ò nen eretich, a va liberà!*

*Ma le sacre Institussion?...*

*A va liberà!*

*I dover 'd mia carica...*

*A va liberà, liberà, liberà, halo capime, sì ò nò?*

*L caparbi Inquisitor s'è inchinasse promëtend a bassa vos ch'a l'avrà nen mancà d'esegui j'ordin reaj, e s'è ritirasse con la coa tra le gambe, parei d'un can bastonà.*

*Ma coma ch'a s'è ubidisse a coi ordin?*

Translation:

*We shall confine ourselves to reporting the conclusion of the dialogue, which, for its incisiveness and historical interest, deserves attention.*

*In short, this poor professor, I want him to be released immediately, do you understand?*

*But he is a heretic, Your Majesty!*

*Heretic or not, he is to be released!*

*But the sacred Institutions?...*

*He is to be released!*

*The duties of my office...*

*He is to be released, released, released, do you understand me, yes or no?*

*The stubborn Inquisitor bows, promises in a low voice to carry out the King's order, and withdraws with his tail between his legs, like a beaten dog.*

*The manner in which the order is carried out reveals the tragic outcome of the episode.*

In the original version the Inquisitor hands over the body of the professor, who died as a result of the torture inflicted on him. Meanwhile Don Pipeta confronts the notary Roggero, a Masonic traitor, and informs him that the Freemasons consider him dead.

## STEFANO IN VALSESIA AND BATTISTA'S ARREST

The second part of the book begins with Stefano Borello and his daughters, Adele and Maria, fair-haired and dark-haired respectively, at Crevola, a village near Varallo Sesia, where they receive news from Turin. Luigi Pietracqua reports the scene in which a mysterious traveller knocks at the door and speaks with Stefano:

— *Who is it? I do not open the door to people I do not know.*

— *A traveller seeking shelter.*

- *Shelter you will find at the inn.*
- *At the inn there is no Light.*
- *What Light do you want?*
- *That which comes from the East.*

The stranger's replies reveal that he is a Freemason: he is the very Freemason who, four months earlier, had saved the women of Casa Borello, and has now come with news: some of it is intended for everyone, while more troubling information is reserved for Stefano alone. The messenger says that the leading Brethren have been subjected to searches and that Count Ferdinando had been summoned by the King and by Count Bogino, who, knowing everything about Freemasonry, had advised him to act prudently; the King had signed a decree abolishing torture. There is also news of Battista's arrest by the civil authority rather than by the Inquisition, for reasons unknown: Stefano decides to leave at once for Turin to help him. In the meantime Vincenzo Roggero, the notary's son, has become Abbé Roggero, but the ecclesiastical habit has not changed his nature: Monti describes him, in deliberately contemptuous terms, as 'an old pig', insisting on his predatory conduct and on his repeated demands for money from his father, since he is incapable of living on the income from his benefice; he will eventually turn to the usurer Papone, described in the text as a Jew, in order to obtain a sum to be repaid once he receives his inheritance, under a post-obit loan arrangement.

It all begins with Battista's visit to his uncle Bastian, the Dominican friar who had denounced Caterina, and with whom he hopes to be reconciled: the friar, who invites him to return the following morning on the pretext of unavoidable commitments, goes to report him to the police; the following morning Battista turns up for the appointment, but is arrested. Stefano sets out with Riccardo, the messenger, on a three-day carriage journey to Turin to meet Count Ferdinando and to learn the circumstances of the Asilè's arrest, which followed a report by his uncle Bastian, secretary to His Eminence the Grand Almoner of the Court, Cardinal delle Lanze. The narrative then returns to Vincenzo, who confronts his father in order to secure the money needed to repay the debt or at least his father's signature as guarantor,

but the notary rejects both requests, provoking his son's anger.

Meanwhile Battista is locked in a cell under the false name of Cerutti; a week after his arrest, the Count manages to visit him and inform him that the 'Widow', that is, Freemasonry, is looking after him. Stefano, meanwhile, goes to the city's main market, the Balôn, where he meets Vincenzo Roggero, who asks him about Adele, the blonde daughter; this question provokes a violent reaction from Stefano, who remembers Vincenzo's night-time intrusion into his daughter's room and attacks him fiercely. The people around them, however, side with the abbé, considering Stefano a 'barbet', a nickname given to Protestants. The situation is resolved only thanks to the intervention of Father Angelico, an upright and honest friar: in Pietracqua's book, the portrayal of the characters avoids any schematic attribution of moral virtue to either the clergy or Freemasonry. Vincenzo flees home and, shut in his room and shaken by what has just happened, would like to ask Borello's forgiveness when Ghita, a young and beautiful widow and his lover, knocks; she embraces him, but Battistone, a butcher of imposing build, catches the two together.

### THE 'WIDOW' FREES BATTISTA

The narrative shifts back to Count Ferdinando: Cardinal delle Lanze tells him that Battista's release depends on the intervention of his secretary, Father Bastian; Battista's uncle is preaching and, during the homily, loses consciousness and dies. The Rector is prepared to claim that Father Bastian had previously been presumed dead and had returned to life. Among the crowd there is talk of two angels who had come to fetch him and people hail the event as a miracle. Incited by Count Ferdinando's men, the crowd goes to the prisons, demanding the release of the Saint's nephew; in the confusion and in order to avoid riots, the Vicario issues an order of release and Battista is free once again.

While Abbé Roggero, that is, Vincenzo, contemplates a reconciliation with Stefano and above all with his daughter Maria, Battistone, the butcher, approaches him to demand the release of his brother Carlo, arrested, in his view, because Vincenzo had reported him to the

authorities. Meanwhile Stefano receives a letter sent from Valsesia by his mother, Lucia, informing him of Maria's illness, and decides to leave to join her, accompanied by Battista and Father Angelico; along the way they encounter a major flood of the Sesia, with landslides and flooded roads. They nevertheless manage to reach Crevola, the small village where the Borellos live, but learn that the funeral of Maria, Stefano's daughter, is taking place.

### THE EPILOGUE

In the epilogue, Adele marries Battista; after Maria's death, grandmother Lucia also dies and, eventually, Stefano passes away, symbolically rejoining his loved ones. When Adele too leaves this earth, the Asilè, widowed and alone, finds comfort in visiting Father Angelico at the Sacro Monte of Varallo. He then disappears from Crevola, reappearing in Turin two years later.

In those same years, the notary Roggero, the Masonic traitor, dies of colic; Vincenzo is mortally wounded by the butcher Battistone; and his lover Ghita appears to have become a nun in an unspecified convent; the manuscript that Pietracqua claims to have found, however, says nothing further about her. Battista therefore reappears in Turin in the dual guise of Pipeta l'Asilè and the wealthy monsù Battista, sole heir to the Borello family estate.

He becomes a legendary figure: the nephew of a saint, a helper of the poor, a peacemaker who breaks up brawls and the rescuer of an infant in a cradle from a burning house. Battista, in the dual role of Don Pipeta, the friend of the poor, and of monsù Battista, counsellor and agent of enlightened gentlemen, lives to see the French Revolution, the arrival of the French in Turin and, shortly afterwards, the return of the Austro-Russians to drive them out.

Battista dies in 1799 of pneumonia contracted while escorting two French soldiers to Montgenèvre; a Brother from Turin had entrusted them to Battista, who was to bring them to safety. Thus the Asilè symbolically rejoins his loved ones and leaves his entire estate to the poor, who will nevertheless receive very little because of the greed of the ecclesiastics entrusted with distributing the estate. On his tomb in San

Pietro in Vincoli (San Pe' di cò, San Pietro dei Cavoli) an anonymous hand carved an inscription which, translated from Piedmontese, read:

*Here rests  
Don Pipeta the Vinegar-Seller  
A Freemason  
But  
A just man*

### LANGUAGE AND POPULAR MEDIATION

The original work was written in Piedmontese and subsequently translated into Italian and reworked by Augusto Monti, who revised some passages in order to make the plot transitions more explicit and to adapt the text for publication in the Turin edition of *l'Unità*. Monti's reworking drew a parallel between Pietracqua's portrayal of the conflict between Freemasonry and the Holy Office and the historical experience of the anti-Fascist movements in their confrontation with the regime. This analogy lies chiefly in the civic function attributed to the novel, read as a narrative of moral resistance rather than as a simple antiquarian revival.

Both in the eighteenth century depicted in the novel and in Pietracqua's own nineteenth century, Piedmontese was used throughout Turin society, across all social strata. It was the language of the court, the street, shops and workplaces, and allowed the narrative to reach a broad public within a shared urban horizon. Even the anecdotes attributed to Vittorio Emanuele II, such as 'Anca custa balussada am fan fa (they are making me do this piece of roguery too)' and 'Finalment ij suma (at last, here we are)', testify to the vitality of that linguistic register in public life, later fossilised, in Italianised forms, in the collective memory transmitted through schooling.

When Monti translated and reworked the novel, Turin's sociolinguistic framework was changing. In those same years, the presence of Venetian refugees displaced by the flooding of the Polesine and the early signs of the great migration from southern Italy contributed to transforming the city's composition. In this transition, *Il figlio della Vedova* rendered Piedmontese narrative heritage in Italian, preserving the

popular memory it embodied and making it available to a new community of readers.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND MASONIC PRESENCE

The novel's internal chronology is established through historical references distributed throughout the narrative. The first pages recall the battle of the Assietta, fought on 19 July 1747, and the siege of Mirandola, concluded with the surrender to the Piedmontese in February 1742. Charles Emmanuel III of Savoy, sovereign from 1730 to 1773, sat on the throne of the Kingdom of Sardinia; the same period saw the reforms of Giovanni Battista Lorenzo Bogino, Minister of State from 1750 to 1773, which curtailed ecclesiastical power and feudal privileges.

The most precise reference is the great flood of the Sesia, attested by numerous documents and discussed in a study by ARPA Piemonte. The chapel of Valmaggia, near Varallo, and the Valsesian house of the Borellos, at Crevola, commemorate the event and record the date 14 October 1755. By linking this event to the novel's narrative, the date of Maria Borello's death can be established. The chronology of the novel, despite the artistic licence typical of the popular historical genre, is therefore structured around a recognisable core of Savoyard references.

In the novel, the references to Freemasonry remain somewhat vague. Pietracqua refers to the constitution of an English Lodge, aligned with the Hanoverian faction, in Florence, and a Lodge operating in secret in Rome after the excommunication of the Freemasons in 1738. The available historical evidence nevertheless supports the plausibility of the narrative framework, especially if *Don Pipeta* is situated within a Savoyard milieu marked by aristocratic figures, military networks and discreet forms of sociability.

The de Bellegarde family played a significant role in the birth of Freemasonry in the Kingdom of Sardinia. The Marquis Joseph François Noyel de Bellegarde, connected with the English milieu and recorded in the documents of the Grand Lodge of England in 1723, received letters patent in 1739 appointing him Provincial Grand Master

of the Duchy of Savoy and of the Principality of Piedmont. From this foundation emerged the Lodge Saint Jean des Trois Mortiers at Chambéry. Founded in 1749, it became the Mother Grand Lodge in 1752 under an English charter and conducted its work in French.

The Mother Lodge of Chambéry gave rise to further Lodges, among them the Constante Amitié, constituted on 20 January 1765 à la suite du Régiment de Savoie-Infanterie, the Vraie Amitié at Rumilly in 1763 and the Saint-Jean de la Mystérieuse in Turin on 27 December 1765. Les Trois Pins and the Sincère Union were subsequently established at Pinerolo; both were connected with the *Piémont-Cavalerie* regiment. The esoteric interests of the Saint-Jean de la Mystérieuse led to a gradual separation from Chambéry and ultimately to London's granting a provincial patent to the Subalpine Brethren.

In 1771 Count Gabriele Asinari di Bernezzo was elected Worshipful Master; in 1773 he obtained the title of Provincial Grand Master for Piedmont, independently of Chambéry. The available sources record regular Lodges in Turin from 1765, whereas the narrative chronology places Battista's Masonic membership at an earlier date. The narrative's internal coherence may be explained by discreet forms of affiliation, military contacts or links to bodies of uncertain regularity. In any case, the presence of the Savoyard nobility in Freemasonry, represented in the narrative by Count Ferdinando, is historically substantiated.

### CONCLUSION

Reading *Don Pipeta l'Asilè* reveals, within a single narrative construction, the linguistic value of Piedmontese as an instrument of popular expression and the civic function attributed to the historical novel. Pietracqua's work is of interest from an interpretative standpoint because it intertwines urban memory, Masonic imagery, the conflict between religious authority and civil power, and the portrayal of the people of Turin. The plausibility of the Masonic framework is supported by its consistency with a Savoyard environment in which Freemasonry was historically active, in both documented and more discreet forms.

The novel serves as a site of mediation among literature, history and

civic symbolism. It draws a portrait of popular Turin shaped by dialect, memory and institutional conflicts, and projects onto the figure of the *Asilè* the image of a just man capable of acting within the groups to which he belongs while transcending their outward forms. His practical morality combines freedom of conscience with responsibility towards the poor and vulnerable, making Masonic fraternity first and foremost a principle of action, rather than merely a marker of identity.

It is precisely this double nature that gives the character his strength. Don Pipeta is a pivotal character, a polemical emblem and a figure of reconciliation; his significance lies in his ability to transform the persecution he suffered into a mission of protection, relief and peacemaking. For this reason his character transcends the simple antagonism between Freemasonry and the Holy Office and embodies a form of popular justice, rooted in lived experience and sustained by a recognisable symbolic framework.

This also explains the significance of Monti's 1951 revival. In transferring the work from Piedmontese into Italian and placing it in the Turin context of the post-war period, Monti transformed Pietracqua's literary legacy into a text capable of speaking to the generation that had emerged from the experience of Fascism and war. The fictional struggle against abuses by religious authorities could be read in that period as an allegory of civic resistance to tyranny and as a reaffirmation of popular dignity in the face of powers that seek to subsume it.

The interest of *Don Pipeta l'Asilè* therefore lies in its capacity to preserve, in the form of the popular historical novel, a nucleus of civic memory. The Piedmontese language serves as a repository of urban experience; Freemasonry functions within it as a symbolic universe of fraternity and freedom; the figure of the *Asilè* becomes a tangible embodiment of justice. In his apparent simplicity, the character embodies a moral lesson that remains linked to the popular tradition of Turin and, at the same time, opens that tradition to a broader dimension of human responsibility.

The epitaph attributed to his tomb condenses the novel's entire trajectory: the apparent opposition between Masonic membership and personal rectitude is transformed, when the work is read as a whole,

into a deeper correspondence. *Don Pipeta* is 'a Freemason' and 'a just man' because his membership, understood through the lens of active charity, becomes a form of service. In this conjunction of symbolism, popular life and civic virtue lies the enduring relevance of Pietracqua's novel.

A.M.

# **The Qualifications of the Prospective Initiate**

## **On the Dispositions Required to Receive Initiatic Investiture**

### **THE THRESHOLD AND THE CANDIDATE**

In the traditional order of initiations – from the Eleusinian Mysteries to the mediaeval forms of the operative guilds and, from there, to the initiatic fraternities that have inherited their symbolic heritage – the first and most radical doctrinal issue concerns the person of the candidate. Even before considering the methods and rites of investiture, it is necessary to ask who is duly qualified to receive initiation, that is to say what dispositions are required in order that initiation may produce its real effects in a given being. The formula that designates the candidate as ‘free and of good report’ is not, upon careful reflection, a mere ceremonial clause. The formula encapsulates, in a few words, a rigorous and coherent doctrine that deserves to be expounded with the care its doctrinal weight demands.

It must first of all be made clear that the qualifications in question are neither arbitrary nor conventional: they depend upon the very nature of the initiatic act and upon the laws that govern it. Initiation, understood in its authentic sense and not reduced to a merely sociological ceremony, is the actual transmission of a spiritual influence proceeding from a supra-individual centre, through the mediation of an unbroken chain of transmission. For such communication to occur, the recipient must meet certain minimum conditions of receptivity, comparable to those that soil must possess for a seed to take root and bear fruit. Not every soil, in fact, is equally fertile: the Synoptic Gospels recall this with the precision of those who know the laws of universal analogy – ‘But other [seeds] fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold’ (Mt 13:8).

The qualifications of the prospective initiate are therefore not external requirements imposed by a human institution, but structural conditions rooted in the nature of the being and in his relation to the transcendent principle.

### INTELLECTUAL ASPIRATION

The first and most fundamental qualification consists in what may be called ‘intellectual aspiration’: an ardent, profound, and irresistible desire to know not the peripheral and manifold things of the phenomenal world, but rather the one immutable reality that sustains and pervades them. Aristotle opened his *Metaphysics* with the saying that has become proverbial: ‘All men by nature desire to know’ (*Metaphysics*, A, 980a); but the aspiration at issue here is something more specific and far rarer – not the simple cognitive impulse common to all humanity, but rather that thirst for absolute knowledge which Plato in the *Symposium* described as the impulse of Eros towards Beauty itself, towards that which is absolutely beautiful, pure, unmixed, untainted by human flesh, colours or any mortal vanity (*Symposium*, 211e). It is the desire to know not the shadows projected upon the wall of the cave, but the Sun itself that generates them and without which they would not subsist for a single instant.

Such aspiration manifests itself in the interior life of the being in different and sometimes indirect ways: there are those who experience it as a profound nostalgia for something spiritual and eternal that they cannot yet name with precision; those who sense in the innermost part of their own being the presence of a reality that infinitely transcends ordinary existence and powerfully calls the individual to itself; those who feel the impelling need to consecrate their lives to something that makes life worth living. In all these cases – however varied the colours and forms in which that aspiration is expressed – what is involved is the same underlying reality: the perception, still obscure and confused but genuinely felt, of the bond that unites the interior centre of every being with the Centre of the world.

The Christian tradition has expressed this reality in a formulation of incomparable doctrinal density: ‘You have made us for yourself’, Au-

gustine wrote at the opening of the *Confessions*, ‘and our heart is restless until it rests in you’ (*Confessions*, I, 1). The restlessness of which the Bishop of Hippo spoke is not an accidental psychological disturbance: it is the affective and vital transposition of a constitutive ontological orientation, the expression of the aspiration implanted in the depths of the being by virtue of creation itself. For that very reason, whoever experiences such restlessness in its most authentic and intense form already possesses the first and indispensable qualification.

It is necessary, however – and this distinction is of capital importance – carefully to distinguish this genuine aspiration from what resembles it outwardly without, however, sharing its substance. Some are attracted to the outward forms of esoterism not by a hunger for authentic knowledge but by mere intellectual curiosity, by the desire to appear exceptional, or by pride seeking new ornaments through which to display itself. As the dust upon a prism is not the light that passes through it, so these substitutes for aspiration do not possess the operative capacity of genuine aspiration; and to confuse them with it is one of the most dangerous misunderstandings that can arise on the initiatic path.

### VOCATION: THE ECHO OF THE ESSENTIAL NAME

Closely connected with aspiration, and yet distinguishable from it because it moves in the opposite direction, is *vocation*. The Latin term *vocatio*, derived from *vox*, designates a call: and traditional doctrine teaches that this call is not primarily the cry of the soul towards the principle, but is the call that radiates from the Centre towards each being in his irreducible uniqueness. ‘My sheep hear my voice’, says the Gospel of John (10:27), and this voice calls them by name (10:3) – by the name proper to each of them and possessed by no other, a name as different from all others as each being’s own essence is from every other possible essence.

Every being bears within himself, in the deepest and most sheltered recess of his inner forum – in what the Hindu tradition designates as *hrdaya*, the spiritual heart, while the Islamic tradition calls it ‘*ayn al-qalb*, the eye of the heart – a reality that is at once the smallest and the greatest of all things: the smallest because it is invisible from without

and inaccessible to the senses, the greatest because it is in reality the infinite Principle that contains all and of which everything is only a limited manifestation. This constitutive presence is always alive; and yet the interior senses that would allow the individual to perceive it are, in the ordinary condition of contemporary humanity, as though asleep or narcotised by the accumulated conditioning produced by cyclical descent.

The awakening, even partial, of this faculty of perception produces an interior resonance that manifests itself as a call that draws one towards the transcendent: the marvellous experience of nostalgia – which etymologically is the pain of *nostos*, of the return to one's original home – for a homeland that the being has never truly abandoned, but whose existence he has forgotten beneath the successive stratifications of worldly oblivion. Pico della Mirandola, in the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, described the protean and perfectible character of man in terms that may be read as an allusion to this ever-open possibility of return to one's own centre: unlike all other beings, to which the Creator has assigned a fixed nature and a fixed place in the hierarchy of the universe, man is left free to choose his own form, to turn towards lower things or to raise himself towards divine things. This indeterminacy is not a lack, but the very condition of freedom and vocation.

The capacity to hear this call – even through the din of the modern world, which drowns it out and obscures it amid an ever-increasing multiplicity of noises and distractions – constitutes an essential qualification. It presupposes a certain degree of interior silence, without which the subtle voice – the voice that the prophet Elijah heard in the desert, not in the wind, the earthquake or the fire, but as 'a still small voice' (1 Kings 19:12) – can in no way be heard in the individual's inner forum.

### PURITY OF INTENTION AND RIGHT ORIENTATION

Beyond aspiration and vocation, which belong in some measure to the affective dimension of spiritual life, another qualification pertains to the intellectual and volitional dimension: 'purity of intention', or the rectitude of one's orientation. The principal preparatory act in initiatic work is precisely to orient one's intention correctly towards the centre.

This act may seem purely preliminary and ancillary, yet it already has extraordinary operative significance, since the correct orientation of the intention – which directs the being towards the spiritual pole, functioning analogously to the Islamic *qiblah* in orienting prayer – coincides with placing oneself in effective spiritual communication with the supreme centre, activating that 'law of harmonic resonance' by which like calls to like.

The Gospel expresses this truth with disarming simplicity: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you' (*Mt* 7:7). An authentic search, a sincere request, and persistent knocking – all this presupposes an intention oriented towards an end that one truly intends to reach and not towards a self-serving caricature of it. 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God' (*Mt* 5:8): purity of heart here is not a moralistic or sentimental virtue, but rather a condition for vision; and the causal connection expressed by the beatitude is precisely that between the quality of interior orientation and the possibility of direct metaphysical knowledge.

Plotinus, in the treatise *On the Beautiful*, taught that the soul must make itself similar to that which it wishes to know: one cannot see the beautiful unless one becomes beautiful, and one cannot know the good unless one becomes good (*Ennead* 1.6.9). Pure intention is already a form of this preliminary assimilation; it is the disposition of one who, like an echo, responds to the call in the same key in which it was sounded. It is in this sense that the orientation of intention, an act that merely appears to be preparatory, already has an operative significance that goes infinitely beyond what a superficial reading might suggest.

### DETACHMENT FROM WORLDLY ATTACHMENTS

Every initiatic tradition recognises the symbolism of the divestment of the 'metals' before crossing the threshold of the temple: the metals represent the preoccupations, attachments, prejudices and worldly identifications that keep the being chained to his peripheral condition and prevent him from gaining access to more central realities. No properly initiatic work can take place until this preliminary emptying has occurred, at least to a degree sufficient to render the heart receptive.

Plato taught, in the *Phaedo*, that authentic philosophy is a *meléte thanátou*, an exercise in death: not physical death, of course, but rather that interior death which consists in progressively freeing oneself from the dominion of the sensible, of the passions, of bodily attachments, so as to allow the soul to withdraw into itself and to turn towards intelligible realities (*Phaedo*, 67c–d). What Plato described as the philosophical practice par excellence corresponds exactly to what the initiatic traditions require of the candidate as a preliminary disposition: a measure of freedom from worldly attachments, not in the sense of their sudden and brutal severance, but rather in the sense that one is no longer dominated by them and has placed them in their proper perspective in relation to the ultimate end of existence.

Such freedom is, moreover, the freedom named first in the initiatic formula ‘free and of good report’ – freedom, precisely, from that which would prevent the candidate from responding to the call of the centre. Plotinus expressed it in one of his most striking images: ‘Let us flee then to the beloved Fatherland’ (φεύγωμεν δὴ φίλην ἐς πατρίδα; *Enneads*, I, 6, 8), that fatherland which is not reached by feet or by horses, but rather through interior transformation, the same journey that Odysseus undertook when he abandoned the enchanted island where everything invited him to stop and to forget the path.

The analogy of breathing is particularly illuminating here: just as one must first exhale in order to inhale deeply, expelling the stale air from the lungs, so in order to receive the breath of the principle it is first necessary to have emptied oneself, at least in part, of the contents that occupied the heart. *Genesis* describes the creation of man precisely in terms of the human body becoming a ‘container’ that receives the divine breath: ‘And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul’ (*Gen* 2:7). Becoming a container – this emptying – constitutes the very condition of spiritual life.

## HUMILITY AGAINST PRIDE

The necessary corollary of detachment is humility – not as a merely moralistic or sentimental virtue but as a disposition metaphysically grounded in a correct understanding of the hierarchy of beings. Pride, the inflation of the individual self, represents the disease par excellence of the ill-qualified initiate: there are those who, initially attracted by the centre, end up feeding upon the traditional forms themselves in order to nourish their own vainglory – puffing themselves up with the number of works they have read, with the dialectical skill they have acquired and with the sheer amount of ritual activity they perform – without such an approach bringing them any closer to the principle. On the contrary, those who proceed under this banner necessarily find themselves orbiting at a great distance from the transcendent principle towards which they profess to aspire: their relationship to it resembles that of a person bound to a heavenly body by a thread equal in length to the distance between the two – the bond exists, but the distance does not diminish.

Dante understood this law well, devoting the first terrace of Purgatory to the proud (*Purgatorio*, X–XII) and, among all the examples carved upon the rock, giving absolute pre-eminence to the Annunciation to Mary as an example of humility. The *fiat* of the Annunciation represents the paradigm of the candidate’s proper disposition in the face of the call from the centre: complete receptiveness, an abandonment of one’s individual will in favour of a higher will that includes and transcends it. ‘To greater force and to a better nature, / Though free, ye subject are’, as Dante, the ‘Supreme Poet’, teaches (*Purgatorio*, XVI, 79–80): true freedom does not reside in affirming one’s individual will against everything and everyone, but rather in consciously subordinating it to what is higher, recognising in this act not a diminution but the highest expression of one’s own profound nature.

## INTERIOR SILENCE AS A CONDITION OF RECEPTION

No less essential is the disposition that may be called ‘*interior silence*’: the capacity to still the agitations of the mind and the passions, both of which, by continually disturbing the mirror-like surface of the water,

prevent the sun from being faithfully reflected in it. As the sun can be reflected in the water only when the water is calm, so only a heart at peace, no longer conditioned by the restlessness of the world, can be receptive to the spiritual influences awaiting the opportunity to communicate themselves to it.

The various traditions have always recognised and valued this principle, embodying it in practical disciplines. From the silence of the Entered Apprentice in the mediaeval operative Lodges – to which the later Masonic tradition also explicitly referred – to the *hesychia* of the Desert Fathers, from the recollection of the Christian contemplative orders to the practices of quietude in the Eastern traditions, interior composure has been universally recognised as the preliminary condition for the reception of the spiritual. ‘Be still, and know that I am God’ (Psalm 46:10; *Vulgate* Psalm 45:11: ‘Vacate et videte quoniam ego sum Deus’): ‘standing still’ – ceasing from the agitation of worldly doing and thinking – is the condition of ‘knowing’, not in the sense of a discursive intellectual acquisition but in the sense of a direct perception that only silence makes possible.

It is, moreover, by no means accidental that the anti-traditional character of contemporary reality constantly fosters mental dispersion and noise: objectively, it works against what would enable beings to hear their own inner call and respond to it. The discipline of silence is therefore not merely a psychological exercise; it is a necessary ascetic act of spiritual resistance: the creation of that interior space without which no reception is possible.

### THE WILL: FREE WILL AND CONFORMITY TO THE DIVINE

All the qualifications previously enumerated, however necessary, may remain incomplete if they are not sustained by a genuine and steadfast will. Free will, which Dante Alighieri defined as ‘The greatest gift that in his largess God / Creating made, and unto his own goodness / Nearest conformed, and that which he doth prize’ (*Paradiso*, V, 19–21), is precisely the faculty by which the human being can direct his own will towards the universal or towards the world – can choose, moment by moment, whether to respond to the call of the centre or to

yield to the innumerable centrifugal attractions that characterise profane existence.

This choice is not made once and for all: it is renewed at every instant; and its constancy requires a continuous vigilance that knows no rest. The twenty-four-inch gauge of the Masonic tradition points precisely to the need never to interrupt the work upon oneself, never to allow time to pass in a wholly mechanical and inert manner: time is not a neutral entity to be consumed indifferently, but a series of instants, each of which constitutes a real opportunity to renew the orientation or to abandon it.

The practice of regular devotion – in any of its traditionally sanctioned forms – provides the means to ritualise this vigilance, to turn the act of intention from an exceptional occurrence into a rhythmic structure of the interior life. Faith, understood not merely as trusting surrender and unconditional assent but as a unifying disposition of all the energies of the being towards the supreme end, plays a crucial role here: it strengthens the will, allowing it to free itself, at least partially, from the tyranny of the environment and of its dispersive attractions. The individual will, by orienting itself correctly even for an instant, is reflected, still fleetingly and as though through a veil, in its origin, and this gives rise to the still embryonic but already living desire to return to one’s true homeland.

One must also note, in this regard, the particular danger faced by those who, after having been drawn into this virtuous vortex and having been attached to an initiatic chain, fail to honour their pledge and change their orientation. In such a circumstance, the initial attractive force, once deflected tangentially, is converted into a dispersive force all the more powerful the more intense the original call was: this constitutes a severe warning as to the seriousness of the commitments that entry into an initiatic order entails.

### GOOD REPORT AS AN ETHICAL FOUNDATION

The formula ‘of good report’ is not to be understood in a merely moralistic sense, as the slavish observance of socially approved behavioural norms, nor as outward bourgeois respectability. The Italian ex-

pression *di buoni costumi* ('of good conduct') is built around the noun *costume*, derived from Latin *consuetudo*. The noun designates the second nature that the being acquires through the constant repetition of acts conforming to an order: what Aristotle called *ethos*, the virtuous disposition that is formed through the repeated practice of the virtues until they become natural and spontaneous, no longer external constraints but rather genuine expressions of the being (*Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 1). The 'man of good report' is one in whom the outward life is already sufficiently ordered not to constitute a permanent obstacle to interior ascesis; he is one who is not enslaved to his own passions to the point of being unable to exercise any discernment or any control over his own life and who, therefore, can meet the commitments entailed by the initiatic path.

In a more profound sense, nonetheless, 'good report' is to be understood as the expression of the proper alignment of one's being with one's essential vocation: the capacity to perform one's own function in the universal order with a naturalness that marks a stage already attained rather than a point of departure. Whoever has effectively assimilated this level of reality will perform the prescribed acts and abstain from the forbidden ones with joy and naturalness, regarding every action contrary to his own vocation as a violation of his most profound nature. Dante expressed this very concept in the verses already cited but deliberately recalled here: 'To greater force and to a better nature, / Though free, ye subject are' (*Purgatorio*, XVI, 79–80). Far beyond the specifically esoteric level, authentic freedom consists in freely fulfilling one's own inner law, not in the arbitrary licence to ignore it.

### THE CONVERGENCE OF THE QUALIFICATIONS

The qualifications enumerated here are not separate and independent requirements to be added mechanically, nor conditions to be satisfied one at a time in rigid sequence: they converge upon a single underlying reality and support one another in an organic structure, each feeding and strengthening the others in a virtuous circle. Authentic aspiration creates the conditions for hearing the call of one's vocation; vocation clarifies the purity of intention; purity of intention frees the

heart from the attachments that obscure it; freedom from attachments allows humility to take root; humility creates the interior silence necessary for reception; and a steadfast will sustains the entire disposition in a state of fruitful tension, preventing it from slackening and dispersing under the constant pressure of ordinary existence.

At the centre of all this is the transcendent presence which inhabits the inner forum of every being and which, when it is perceived in its living reality – even if only partially, even if only for an instant – arouses and nourishes all the qualifications described, as though they were the petals of a single flower blossoming from one and the same centre. The parable of the prodigal son (*Lk* 15:11–32) may be read, on a level that transcends its immediate ethical meaning, as the archetypal description of such a process: the recognition of one's true origin (*in se autem reversus*, as the *Vulgate* has it, *Lk* 15:17), the decision to return, the journey that presupposes all the qualifications enumerated and, finally, the father's welcome as he runs to meet the son while he is still far off. The response of the centre to the being's sincere aspiration precedes and surpasses that aspiration: it is not the being that rediscovers the principle, but the principle that, having never ceased to seek the being, reaches him when he has become sufficiently receptive to be reached.

It is precisely in this convergence – and in its practical embodiment in a coherent and steadfast orientation in life – that the authentic meaning of the formula 'free and of good report' resides: not a sociological designation, not a requirement of worldly respectability, but rather the concise description of that interior state in which the being, through patient and constant work upon himself, has become capable of receiving and guarding the fire transmitted to him and of feeding it within himself until it has entirely transformed him into its own light.

P.Z.

## Henry A. Wallace: Freemasonry and Civic Engagement in Twentieth-Century America



Henry Agard Wallace (1888–1965), an agronomist from Iowa and a Freemason, entered the Roosevelt administration in 1933 as Secretary of Agriculture and, in 1941, became Vice-President of the United States<sup>1</sup>. Wallace, in many respects a unique figure in the political landscape of twentieth-century America, cannot be understood without taking account of the moral and civic education he received within his family: for the Wallaces, indeed, agriculture was not merely an economic activity, but a discipline connected with care for the soil, responsibility towards the rural community, confidence in improvement

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<sup>1</sup> Henry A. Wallace (1888–1965) was Secretary of Agriculture from 1933 to 1940, Vice-President of the United States from 1941 to 1945, Secretary of Commerce from 1945 to 1946 and Progressive Party candidate for the Presidency in 1948. Cf. John C. Culver and John Hyde, *American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry A. Wallace*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2000.

through experimentation and attention to the common good.

This orientation first expressed itself through the *Wallaces' Farmer*, the family journal, which served as a vehicle for civic education in rural America. Thanks to the work of his uncle Henry Wallace and of his father Henry Cantwell Wallace, the newspaper did not confine itself to providing technical advice to farmers, but helped shape a public discourse of agrarian responsibility. The protection of the soil, seed selection, the organisation of rural labour and the moral dignity of the farmer were presented as different aspects of one and the same task: to make rural America more productive, more self-aware and better able to govern itself.

George Washington Carver, an African-American botanist associated with Iowa State Agricultural College and the Wallace family, also played a significant role in his education. The youthful excursions undertaken with Carver taught the young Henry Agard to regard the observation of nature as a discipline of attention: to look at a plant, an ear of maize, a patch of soil, or a variation in growth meant learning to read a concrete order made up of relations and proportions.

The 1904 experiment on the relationship between the symmetry of the ear and the yield of maize turned this inner disposition into an empirical method: at the age of fifteen, Wallace tested the idea, then reinforced by the prestige of agricultural competitions, that the most regular, uniform and well-proportioned ears were also the most productive, sowing kernels from each ear separately and then comparing their actual yields. The discovery that the ear's outward beauty did not necessarily correspond to its productivity showed him the limitations of that criterion: from that moment onwards, agriculture had to be freed from the primacy of appearances and grounded in the experimental verification of results<sup>2</sup>.

This is also the context in which the *Hi-Bred Corn Company*, founded by Wallace in 1926 and later to become *Pioneer Hi-Bred*, should be un-

derstood. It was not merely a commercial initiative, but the most tangible outcome of his experimental training. Wallace applied the same criterion he had developed at an early age to the selection of hybrid maize: not to trust the appearance of the plant or the ear, but to measure, compare and verify results. The new enterprise therefore applied statistical methods to the day-to-day realities of farming, collecting yield data, comparing varieties and crosses, observing the behaviour of seeds in different soils and maintaining a direct relationship with farmers. The selection of hybrid maize thus became an empirical and co-operative practice, tested in the field rather than confined to the laboratory<sup>3</sup>.

### THE AGRARIAN NEW DEAL

The transition from work in the fields to government service took shape in the context of the agricultural crisis following 1929, when the collapse of prices and the instability of rural credit transformed the agrarian question into a national problem. Wallace recognised that crisis as an institutional test: preserving agriculture meant safeguarding one of the moral foundations of the American Republic<sup>4</sup>. His appointment as Secretary of Agriculture on 4 March 1933 placed him at the centre of the Rooseveltian programme of economic and institutional reconstruction. Wallace, then forty-four years old, led a Department called upon to turn the rural crisis into a programme of reform; under his direction, it became a permanent body for coordination and intervention, capable of supporting agricultural communities through federal programmes and measures<sup>5</sup>.

In 1934 alone, Wallace travelled more than forty thousand miles,

<sup>3</sup> On the *Hi-Bred Corn Company*, later *Pioneer Hi-Bred*, and Wallace's experimentation with hybrid maize, cf. Culver and Hyde, *American Dreamer*; National Agricultural Library, 'Henry Agard Wallace Collection', <https://www.nal.usda.gov/collections/special-collections/henry-agard-wallace-collection>.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. University of Iowa Libraries, *Biographical Dictionary of Iowa: Henry Agard Wallace*, Miller Center, University of Virginia, *Henry A. Wallace (1933–1940)*.

<sup>5</sup> For data on the expansion of the USDA and on the *Agricultural Adjustment Act*, cf. Miller Center, University of Virginia, *Henry A. Wallace (1933–1940)*; Culver and Hyde, *American Dreamer*.

<sup>2</sup> On the influence of George Washington Carver, Wallace's botanical training and the 1904 experiment, cf. Mark L. Kleinman, 'Searching for the Inner Light: The Development of Henry A. Wallace's Experimental Spiritualism', *The Annals of Iowa* 53, no. 3 (1994): 195–218.

visiting the countryside and speaking to both representatives of rural communities and government officials. These journeys ensured that his reform programme remained closely connected with conditions on the ground and with the practical foundations of reconstruction. In Wallace's project, administrative reform acquired value when it placed technical expertise at the service of social justice through stewardship of the soil and responsibility towards future generations. The *Agricultural Adjustment Act* of 1933 provided a statutory framework for regulating production, so as to restore stability to farms and continuity in rural life. The *Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act* of 1936 linked public incentives to the regeneration of the soil, transforming the response to the crisis into a programme of agrarian education and support for conservation practices; the promotion of the Ever-Normal Granary completed this vision by establishing reserves capable of regulating the agricultural market in periods of scarcity and overproduction<sup>6</sup>.

### THE MASONIC PATH

Henry Agard's father, Henry Cantwell Wallace, was a member of *Pioneer Lodge* No. 22 of Des Moines, Iowa, and, in 1927, the future Vice-President received the Symbolic degrees in *Capital Lodge* No. 110 of the same city, before receiving, on 23 November 1928, the 32nd degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction<sup>7</sup>. His subsequent demit from the Lodge, linked to his assumption of federal political responsibilities, reduced Wallace's participation in ritual work without erasing the symbolic heritage he had received. Even during the years spent in Washington, Freemasonry remained, for Wallace, the core of a symbolic discipline centred on the moral edification of man and society. In a conversation with Truman after the *Democratic Convention* of 1944, the reference to their shared Masonic membership provided common ground during a period of intense political tension<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. National Agricultural Library, USDA, *Henry Agard Wallace Collection*; Farm Credit Administration, *Historical Highlights of FCA and the FCS*.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Grand Lodge of Washington, D.C., *The Voice of Freemasonry*, 2019; University of Iowa Libraries, *Papers of Henry A. Wallace, Speeches by Wallace, 1923–1933*.

<sup>8</sup> Graham J. White and John Maze, *Henry A. Wallace: His Search for a New World Order*, Chapel

In 1934, while leafing through *The History of the Seal of the United States* as he waited to meet Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Wallace was struck by the reverse of the Great Seal, which bears the now-celebrated design comprising the unfinished pyramid, the Eye of Providence and the mottos *Annuity Capitis* and *Novus Ordo Seclorum*; it seemed to him an emblem of Rooseveltian renewal<sup>9</sup>.

Wallace therefore proposed to Roosevelt that the reverse of the Great Seal, which had remained little known since its adoption by Congress on 20 June 1782, should appear on a form of currency in everyday use. The initial proposal was for a coin, but Roosevelt chose the one-dollar bill, on which both sides of the Seal appeared from 1935 onwards: the President, himself a Freemason who had received the 32nd degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, recognised the Eye of Providence as a sign of the Great Architect of the Universe and wished that image to become part of the everyday life of the American people<sup>10</sup>.

### ROERICH AND SPIRITUALIST CHARISMA

Between 1925 and 1935 Wallace drew close to theosophical circles unconnected with either his religious background or his Masonic affiliation. From 1927, through the mediation of the Soviet agronomist Dmitry Borodin, he also established links with the Russian painter and mystic Nicholas Roerich and with his museum in New York, where artistic work was presented as part of a broader mission of religious and cultural renewal<sup>11</sup>.

Against this background, Roerich's so-called 'Asian mission' took

Hill–London, The University of North Carolina Press, 1995, ch. 5.

<sup>9</sup> On the process of formation of the Great Seal and on the role of Charles Thomson in the final design of 1782, cf. National Archives, *Original Design of the Great Seal of the United States (1782)*; Richard S. Patterson and Richardson Dougall, *The Eagle and the Shield: A History of the Great Seal of the United States*, Washington, Department of State, 1976.

<sup>10</sup> For Wallace's recollection of the episode of 1934, cf. Henry A. Wallace, letters of 1951 and 1955 reproduced by GreatSeal.com, *How the Great Seal's Pyramid and Eye Got on the One-Dollar Bill in 1935*; cf. also Patterson and Dougall, *The Eagle and the Shield*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kleinman, 'Searching for the Inner Light'.

shape: at the administrative level, it was limited to an expedition conducted in connection with the United States Department of Agriculture, aimed at gathering useful information on the plant resources of Inner Asia; Roerich, however, tended to view the places visited by the mission as sites of spiritual regeneration and as the possible centre of a new world cultural order. This created an ambiguity: Roerich progressively invested the official assignment, originally justified on agricultural and administrative grounds, with symbolic, diplomatic and geopolitical aims which the Department could not recognise as its own<sup>12</sup>. This overlap soon had embarrassing consequences. When the press began to speak of an alleged 'Siberian Masonic kingdom' linked to Roerich, it was not reporting on a Masonic project, nor a political programme formally sponsored by Wallace; rather, it used Masonic terminology as an evocative device, turning an international affair into a conspiracy narrative. In this sense, the expression reveals more about the polemical climate and the suspicion aroused by the initiative than about its real institutional nature<sup>13</sup>.

The so-called 'Guru Letters' belong to the same context, but on a different plane. When, during the 1948 presidential campaign, Westbrook Pegler made public the private correspondence dating from the previous decade between Wallace, Roerich and his circle and used it as a polemical weapon against Wallace, the affair revealed the fundamental divide: what Roerich could regard as spiritual research had, for Wallace as a statesman, to meet the requirements of institutional transparency, administrative accountability and public scrutiny<sup>14</sup>.

## THE HAUDENOSAUNEE AND THE WISDOM OF THE LAND

The Haudenosaunee, also referred to in historiographical literature as the Iroquois Confederacy or the Six Nations, aroused Wallace's interest because they offered an early model in which agriculture, community council and territorial authority combined to form a single civil order. In that framework, Wallace recognised a wisdom of the land consistent with his search for spiritual roots on the American continent<sup>15</sup>. The agricultural system of the Three Sisters, namely maize, beans and squash, struck Wallace because it exemplified companion planting fully consonant with his experimental outlook: together, the three crops formed a balanced agricultural arrangement in which maize offered support, legumes enriched the soil and squash helped the soil retain moisture; the three functions worked together in a mutually reinforcing way.

Charles O. Roos, a minister serving a Native American community, a maize grower and one of Wallace's interlocutors on spiritual matters, played a significant mediating role. Their meeting, held at Taylors Falls in October 1931, paved the way for Wallace's journey in the summer of 1932 to an Onondaga village near Syracuse. In Wallace's eyes, the experience was particularly formative for his political thinking: the Great Law of Peace of the Haudenosaunee was important because it grounded authority in the community council and entrusted the clan mothers with a role in safeguarding the common order. He therefore discerned in it a model predating the modern system of government in the United States, yet capable of expressing a profound political wisdom rooted in the land<sup>16</sup>.

The subsequent reception of the Great Law of Peace confirmed

<sup>12</sup> John McCannon, *Nicholas Roerich: The Artist Who Would Be King*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022, introduction and chs. 11–14; Benn Steil, *The World That Wasn't: Henry Wallace and the Fate of the American Century*, New York: Avid Reader Press/Simon & Schuster, 2024, chs. 3–4.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Culver and Hyde, *American Dreamer*; Kleinman, 'Searching for the Inner Light'.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Culver and Hyde, *American Dreamer*; Peter Orvetti, 'The Theosophist Who Was Nearly President: "The Heart Trust" of Henry A. Wallace', *Quest* 112:4, pp. 34–36; Bruce M. Swain, 'Henry A. Wallace and the "Guru Letters": A Case of Successful Stonewalling', *Mid-America* 69 (1987), pp. 5–19.

<sup>15</sup> On the Three Sisters, the Haudenosaunee, William H. Dower, Charles O. Roos and Wallace's encounter with the Onondaga milieu, cf. Kleinman, 'Searching for the Inner Light'; Joy Porter, *Native American Freemasonry: Associationalism and Performance in America*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Hieronimus, with Laura E. Cortner, *Founding Fathers, Secret Societies: Freemasons, Illuminati, Rosicrucians, and the Decoding of the Great Seal*, Rochester, Destiny Books, 2005, ch. 1; Graham J. White and John Maze, *Henry A. Wallace*, cited above, ch. 2. Cf. also Paul A. W. Wallace, *The White Roots of Peace*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1946.

Wallace's vision. In 1988 the United States Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 331, recognising the contribution of the Iroquois Confederacy and other Native nations to the formation and political development of the United States, and thus the Confederacy's influence on the American Constitution. At the international level, the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognised the right of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions. From this perspective, the Great Law is not merely an antiquarian reference: it remains a living normative legacy capable of linking land, community, collective identity and the federative principle<sup>17</sup>.

### THE HEART TRUST

The *Brain Trust* was the group of advisers, economists, jurists and academics that helped Franklin D. Roosevelt in the presidential campaign of 1932 and in the formulation of the first policies of the *New Deal*. The three principal members were Raymond Moley, Rexford G. Tugwell and Adolph A. Berle Jr., all connected with Columbia University. They helped Roosevelt develop economic and social policy options and also contributed to the drafting of campaign speeches.

Wallace accepted the necessity of that technical competence, but judged it insufficient unless guided by a moral purpose. In his 1934 book *Statesmanship and Religion*, Wallace wrote that alongside the *Brain Trust* there was a need for a *Heart Trust*, that is, trust in the innate goodness of the human heart when it is not distorted by the cult of money and by egoism. This *Heart Trust* was for him the ideal complement to the *Brain Trust* because it evoked the idea of a leadership capable not only of knowing what was right, but of willing it. The *Brain Trust* addressed questions concerning the technical, economic and legal instru-

<sup>17</sup> Hieronimus, *Founding Fathers, Secret Societies*, cited above, ch. 1; Bruce E. Johansen, *Forgotten Founders: How the American Indian Helped Shape Democracy*, Boston, Harvard Common Press, 1982; Historical Society of the New York Courts, *How the Great Law of Peace Helped Shape New York and American Democracy*, 2023; U.S. Congress, H.Con.Res.331, 100th Congress, 1988; United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, A/RES/61/295, 13 September 2007, art. 5.

ments needed to overcome the crisis; the Heart Trust, by contrast, addressed questions concerning the human, moral and communal purpose that those instruments were intended to serve.

This explains his bond with the common man. Economic policy, international order, democracy, agriculture, industry, peace and social justice had to be conceived from the point of view of the common man, not from that of oligarchies, cartels, financial elites or imperial powers. Wallace's Masonic universalism did not take the form of an abstraction, but of a moral discipline governing the exercise of public expertise: knowing, governing and reforming were meaningful only if directed towards giving concrete effect to the dignity of all people and fraternity among peoples.

### THE CENTURY OF THE COMMON MAN

Wallace's Vice-Presidency, from 20 January 1941 to 20 January 1945, placed him at the highest level of American government. Roosevelt chose him in 1940, amid a wartime emergency that was already international in scope, recognising in his intellectual and moral profile a figure capable of representing the American project for the post-war period. On 8 May 1942 Wallace delivered *The Century of the Common Man* as an implicit response to Henry Luce's *The American Century*: he set the prospect of a century governed by United States economic and military power against an alternative conception of the post-war order in which peace would have to rest upon institutions capable of guaranteeing social security and the political recognition of peoples. In that speech he affirmed that the new century had to be the century of the common man and that the United States would have to avoid repeating the Nazis' errors by proclaiming itself to the world as a new 'master race'<sup>18</sup>.

The speech gave public expression to the same moral imperative embodied in the *Heart Trust*: technical expertise, economic power and military victory would not be sufficient to guarantee peace if the post-war period did not usher in an era of social justice, international co-

<sup>18</sup> Henry A. Wallace, *The Century of the Common Man*, address delivered on 8 May 1942; cf. also John C. Culver and John Hyde, *American Dreamer*, cited above.

operation and mutual recognition among peoples. Freedom, for Wallace, could not remain a national or class privilege; it had to take concrete form in material security, civic dignity and political participation for all. His public stance was particularly clear on the question of civil rights: Wallace spoke before racially integrated audiences in the segregated South, affirmed the full dignity of African-American citizens and saw in brotherhood the moral foundation of full legal and social recognition. Fraternity was not for him a rhetorical ornament, but the principle that obliged American democracy to confront its own internal contradictions.

At the Democratic Convention of July 1944, Claude Pepper sought to use the crowd's support to secure Wallace's renomination, but the party's internal procedures finally led to the nomination of Harry S. Truman. Roosevelt's death in April 1945 gave that choice immediate significance for the conclusion of the war and the initial shaping of post-war foreign policy.

In 1948 the *Progressive Party* translated Wallace's democratic and social universalism into a programme centred on justice in public life, oriented towards material security and international cooperation. That programme anticipated themes that would re-emerge in American politics after the Second World War, especially in the relationship between civil rights, social security and multilateral institutions, but, in the Cold War framework that was taking shape, Wallace received only 2.4 per cent of the popular vote. After the break with the *Progressive Party* in 1950, Wallace withdrew to South Salem, returned to agricultural studies and devoted himself to the selection of strains of laying hens and varieties of gladioli until his death in Danbury in 1965.

In Wallace's intellectual outlook, Masonic initiation, scientific expertise and democratic responsibility converged. Wallace's symbolic understanding informed his public life, not as a substitute for practical and rational administration, but as a principle orienting economic policy and government towards human dignity and the fruitfulness of the land. In Wallace's vision, the hope for worldwide fraternity rested on the conviction that American democracy and the economic success of the *New Deal* could offer a model of social cooperation to the whole

world. The Iowa agronomist who became a statesman recognised in the land the first temple entrusted to man's stewardship, in justice the principle of civic edification and in brotherhood the bond capable of transforming social reform into a moral undertaking.

Thus the *Heart Trust*, justice for the common man and the aspiration to an international order founded upon cooperation were not separate themes for Wallace, but different aspects of a single symbolic architecture capable of linking inward self-perfection with the patient yet unremitting work of building fraternal coexistence among peoples.

P.M.

## The Historical Lesson of Domizio Torrigiani



*All ash is seed  
all stumps are saplings,  
the whole desert is springtime*

G. D'Annunzio, *Notturmo*

### SUMMARY

I. Through the constitutional reform of 1922, Domizio Torrigiani, martyred Grand Master of the GOI, placed the GOI firmly among the regular Masonic jurisdictions worldwide; the enduring relevance of his teaching on the independence of the Order from the Rites. II. The March on Rome and the GOI's favourable attitude, albeit with substantial reservations. III. Grand Master Torrigiani's cautiously favourable stance towards the nascent regime lasted no more than a single morn-

ing. IV. The resolution of the Fascist Grand Council of 14 February 1923 on the incompatibility between membership of the PNF and Freemasonry as a measure aimed exclusively at the GOI. V. Francesco Saverio Nitti's letter to Vittorio Emanuele III of 5 March 1925, predicting that the persecution of Freemasonry in Italy would lead to the end of the Monarchy. VI. Domizio Torrigiani and the signing of Croce's Manifesto of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals of 1 May 1925 as an act of moral steadfastness by the Grand Master of the GOI. VII. The sacrifice of Grand Master Torrigiani laid the foundations for the rebirth of the GOI in Italy after the Second World War; conclusions.

## I

Domizio Torrigiani was Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy during the persecution instigated by the Fascist regime, which, through the infamous Law No. 2029 of 26 November 1925, went so far as to suppress Freemasonry.

That law, the first of the so-called *leggi fascistiche*, marks the end of the liberal State and the beginning of the totalitarian regime that would lead Italy to the tragedy of defeat in the Second World War.

Domizio Torrigiani may rightly be considered the supreme example of a Grand Master who served the cause through both his words and his example, to the point of ultimate self-sacrifice. His work has been widely discussed<sup>1</sup>, but there is an equally essential aspect that should be further explored: the reform of the relationship between the Order and the Rites<sup>2</sup>, which he implemented within the Grand Orient of Italy, thereby placing it fully among the regular Masonic jurisdictions worldwide. He died in solitude, aged only 56, on 31 August 1932, in San Baronto, in the municipality of Lamporecchio (now in the province of Pistoia), where he had been born on 19 July 1876<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See in particular the volume edited by F. Conti, *La massoneria italiana da Giolitti a Mussolini. Il Gran Maestro Domizio Torrigiani*, Rome, Viella, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> On this subject, the essay by G. Capruzzi, 'La lezione storica di Domizio Torrigiani', *Rivista massonica* (1979): 227–230, remains fundamental.

<sup>3</sup> On the biography of Domizio Torrigiani, the essential book is M. Francini and G. P. Balli, *Il "Gran Maestro" Domizio Torrigiani (1876–1932)*, Pistoia, CRT, 2003.

The reform he introduced into the GOI culminated in Decree No. 227 of 18 December 1922, issued in implementation of the General Constitutions of the GOI of 1920, which he had championed. Its highest expression today, at international level, is found in Principle 5 of the United Grand Lodge of England's Basic Principles for Grand Lodge Recognition, adopted on 4 September 1929: *'That the Grand Lodge shall have sovereign jurisdiction over the Lodges under its control; i.e. that it shall be a responsible, independent, self-governing organization, with sole and undisputed authority over the Craft or Symbolic Degrees (Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason) within its Jurisdiction; and shall not in any way be subject to, or divide such authority with a Supreme Council or other Power claiming any control or supervision over those degrees.'*

These principles may seem obvious, but events, including recent ones, have shown that they are often seriously violated: one need only think of the recent schism within the GOI, brought about by a faction of the Supreme Council of the AASR, based at 47 Piazza del Gesù in Rome – an affair which, moreover, calls to mind Vico's idea of historical cycles and recurrences.

Hence, in this essential respect too, the continuing relevance of Domizio Torrigiani's teaching is clear: it conferred on the GOI the full status of a regular jurisdiction, which it had previously lacked.

Moreover, Benedetto Croce taught us that all history is contemporary history.

Domizio Torrigiani was elected Grand Master of the GOI on 23 June 1919, aged only 43, succeeding Grand Master Ernesto Nathan.

As one authoritative account records, Domizio Torrigiani *'recounted the simple but unforgettable words that the great old man (Ernesto Nathan, editor's note) had addressed to him: "You will have many difficulties to overcome, the task is arduous. I give you one piece of advice that will be enough to see you through the trial. When dissensions are most bitter and dangers greatest, do this: question your conscience seriously and calmly, and then obey what your conscience has suggested to you, without regard for yourself or others. With head held high, let what must happen, happen. I have always done so and, you see, I shall probably not rise from my bed*

again, but I assure you that I feel infinitely serene and tranquil”<sup>4</sup>.

At that time the Fascist movement had only just been formed and failed to win a single seat in the general election of 18 November 1919.

It is, therefore, highly probable that Nathan’s references to dissensions that might become more bitter and to the need for the Grand Master to keep his head held high did not concern political problems alone. Italy had just emerged victorious from the First World War<sup>5</sup>, in which the GOI had received public thanks from Vittorio Emanuele Orlando for the decisive contribution made to Italy’s victory. The true problem, unresolved for decades, was the complicated relationship between the GOI and the Rites.

Indeed, the Constitution of 1874, following the merger of the Grand Orient of Palermo into our Order in 1872, had marked the clear ascendancy of the AASR, which controlled most of the Italian Lodges.

To be sure, there was also the Italian Symbolic Rite; but, since it had a smaller membership (although before Fascism came to power it had come to represent about a quarter of the members of the jurisdiction), it had been obliged to settle for the office of Deputy Grand Master, on the basis of the so-called Gentlemen’s Agreement, which provided that the Grand Master should always belong to the AASR.

As Ottorino Maggiore, later Deputy Grand Master under Ugo Lenzi, would write: ‘... the Grand Orient, although formally governing the Lodges of the first three degrees, appeared, in its organic composition, as the delegate of the Rite Bodies’<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover, affiliation to one Rite or the other was not the result of a free choice by the individual Brother, to be made after being raised to the degree of Master Mason, but arose *ipso iure* from membership of a Lodge affiliated with the AASR or the ISR.

It followed that membership of one Rite or the other was often a matter of mere chance, depending on whether the applicant happened to be a friend of the Brother who had proposed him for admission.

Moreover, if a Lodge decided to change its Rite affiliation, as happened repeatedly over the course of those decades, it had to be dissolved and reconstituted under the new Rite of affiliation.

This state of affairs entailed constant interference by holders of the High Degrees of the AASR in most Italian Lodges which, indeed, in the case of a Masonic offence, could not even conduct disciplinary proceedings against the Brother concerned, who, if he had been invested with High Degrees, had to be brought before the Tribunals of the Rite to which he belonged.

This arrangement, as Domizio Torrigiani came to realise shortly after his installation as Grand Master, isolated the GOI from the English-speaking Masonic jurisdictions, which were the most prestigious.

Thus it was that, in 1920, the GOI’s application for recognition was rejected by the Grand Lodge of Alabama, which deemed the GOI irregular precisely because of its lack of independence from the Rites and, in particular, from the AASR.

Domizio Torrigiani, at the time of his election as Grand Master, held the 31st Degree in the AASR. Immediately after the election, the Supreme Council of the AASR of Palazzo Giustiniani invested him with the 33rd Degree, recognising his status as an active member of the Supreme Council<sup>7</sup>.

Despite this, Domizio Torrigiani did not hesitate to reform the Constitution of 1874 in order to place the GOI among the regular jurisdictions, thereby setting our Institution on an irreversible course.

In fact, what at the time appeared to many Brethren belonging to the AASR to be a revolutionary innovation was instead a return to the purest Tradition of the three degrees of the Order. As F. Pessoa would write: ‘The spirit of the rituals, and above all of the symbolic degrees (in which,

<sup>4</sup> See V. Gaito, *Le gran maestranze di Ernesto Nathan*, now in V. Gaito, *Massoneria, un amore. Etica, cultura, libertà*, Florence, Angelo Pontecorvoli Editore, 2017, appendix, p. 368.

<sup>5</sup> On this subject, the monograph by M. Cuzzi, *Dal Risorgimento al Mondo nuovo. La massoneria italiana nella Prima guerra mondiale*, Milan, Le Monnier, 2017, is fundamental.

<sup>6</sup> See O. Maggiore, ‘Il Rito Simbolico nella Comunione italiana’, in *Lumen Vitae*, year I, no. 5, May 1954, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> The list of members of the Supreme Council of the AASR of Palazzo Giustiniani in 1920 was published by A. Mola, *Storia della Massoneria italiana*, 3rd ed., Milan, Bompiani, 1993, appendix IX, doc. no. 4.

*particularly in the Degree of Master, for whoever knows how to see or feel, the whole of Freemasonry is already present), is nevertheless the same...<sup>8</sup>.*

That fundamental choice was undoubtedly driven, first and foremost, by the need to secure recognition from the Grand Lodges of the United States – recognition which, especially after large-scale Italian emigration to the United States, had become essential to our Institution.

A critical examination of the events that led to the 1908 schism<sup>9</sup> would in itself have shown the reform to be necessary, especially since, on that occasion, part of the Supreme Council, led by the Protestant pastor Saverio Fera, left the GOI to establish the Grand Lodge of Piazza del Gesù. The schism, therefore, originated within the Supreme Council of Palazzo Giustiniani and spread through the Italian Lodges.

Domizio Torrigiani must have reflected on the devastating consequences of the schism for the relationship between Freemasonry and politics in Italy before and, above all, after the First World War.

The only way to prevent such a state of affairs from recurring was to free the GOI once and for all from the control of the Supreme Council of the AASR, thereby strengthening the charismatic authority of the Grand Master of the Order.

By Decree No. 227 dated 18 December 1922, Grand Master Domizio Torrigiani prohibited GOI Lodges from formally declaring affiliation with a Rite, while allowing individual Brethren who had been raised to the degree of Master Mason to apply independently for admission to any Rite recognised by the GOI.

In particular, that fundamental decree<sup>10</sup> contained the following provisions: 1) the Representatives of the Rites declared that they renounced all the privileges they had until then exercised within the Order; 2) after being raised to the degree of Master Mason, the

Brethren acquired full freedom to request admission to one Rite or the other; 3) affiliation with Rites that adopted a hostile stance towards the GOI was prohibited; 4) provision was made for the study of a ‘single Ritual’ for all the Lodges of the GOI, as a manifestation of the Order’s complete emancipation from the Rites.

At that time, however, as noted above, the only Rites recognised by the GOI were the AASR and the Italian Symbolic Rite.

It was not until the adoption of Article 10 of the GOI Constitution, approved on 24 May 1949 following a proposal by Grand Master Ugo Lenzi, that this reform was effectively implemented. The article introduced a provision under which the York Rite could subsequently be recognised alongside the two Rites traditionally recognised by the GOI (the AASR and the Italian Symbolic Rite).

This recognition too was fully consistent with the teaching of Domizio Torrigiani, who, shortly after reforming the Constitution of the GOI by Decree No. 227 of 18 December 1922, travelled to the United States in 1923 and, before the Grand Lodge of the State of New York, delivered his memorable address on the universality of Freemasonry.

As we have seen, however, the Fascist repression, which intensified after the Matteotti assassination, prevented the reform of the Constitution introduced by Decree No. 227 of 18 December 1922 from being fully realised. The seed, however, had been sown and would bear fruit, as we shall see below.

We must now examine the central role that Grand Master Domizio Torrigiani played in the resistance to the Fascist campaign to suppress the GOI.

## II

It has often been claimed that Italian Freemasonry favoured Mussolini’s rise to power at the time of the March on Rome.

This interpretation is entirely valid with regard to the National Grand Lodge of Italy of Piazza del Gesù, particularly the actions of its Grand Master Raul Palmeri, but is wholly unfounded with regard to the GOI, which, as an institution, took a very different position.

<sup>8</sup> Fernando Pessoa, ‘Secret Associations,’ in *Prose—Minimal Anthology*, Lisbon: Tinta-da-china, 2025, pp. 183–186.

<sup>9</sup> On the schism of 1908, the celebrated monograph by F. Cordova, *Massoneria e politica in Italia, 1892–1908*, Milan, Carte Scoperte – Excelsior 1881, 2011, especially pp. 271–277, remains fundamental.

<sup>10</sup> In this regard, the pages by G. Capruzzi, ‘La lezione storica di Domizio Torrigiani’, op. cit., *Rivista massonica*, 1979, p. 229, remain fundamental.

There were certainly Freemasons belonging to it who took part in the March on Rome, the most prominent of whom was General Luigi Capello, who, besides being a senior dignitary of Palazzo Giustiniani, was also the founder of the Corps of the Arditi. As is well known, the Arditi decisively influenced the development of the Fascist movement, its symbolism and the ritualisation of mass politics: the black shirt, the dagger, and the anthem *Giovinezza* itself were borrowed from the Arditi, many of whom were among the founders of the Fasci di Combattimento on 23 March 1919 (the so-called Sansepolcristi).

Many of them were Freemasons: some belonged to the GOI, others to Piazza del Gesù.

Freemasons affiliated with Palazzo Giustiniani, initially numerous within the Fasci, had declined sharply in number after the Fasci progressively abandoned their original democratic-republican and radical-socialist orientation following the electoral defeat of 18 November 1919, in which Mussolini himself failed to win a seat. Beginning with the squadrist attacks on striking agricultural workers in spring 1920, the movement assumed an unequivocally reactionary character that became increasingly pronounced.

At that point, as the role of the Sansepolcristi diminished, a number of them – including several prominent figures, such as Pietro Nenni and the brothers Guido and Mario Bergamo (Freemasons of the GOI, both members of the Republican Party) – abandoned the Fasci and moved decisively into opposition.

In this second phase, which marks the transformation of the original movement into a political party, the power of the local *ras* – that is, the squad leaders, almost all of whom were Freemasons of Piazza del Gesù – increased.

In short, whereas Palermo enthusiastically supported Mussolini before, during, and after the March on Rome, the GOI initially adopted an attitude of cautious, conditional support, and its stance then evolved into clear opposition which, as time passed, became ever more intransigent.

One need only consider the position taken on the eve of the March on Rome by Grand Master Domizio Torrigiani, who, in Circular No. 28

of 19 October 1922<sup>11</sup>, had written: ‘... *no one enters Freemasonry except with a soul devoted to the Fatherland and to liberty ...*’.

And again: ‘*In Italian Freemasonry one is not admitted unless one swears devotion to the Fatherland, to the point of giving one’s life for it should that be necessary ... nor is one admitted unless one is devoted to liberty ...*’.

At this point Torrigiani concludes unequivocally: ‘*Our democracy consists in fidelity to our trinomial. For if (mark this well) liberty were overpowered, or liberties (all of them essential) were violated, if a dictatorship, an oligarchy, were imposed, ALL FREEMASONS KNOW WHAT THEIR DUTY WOULD BE: they know that these are sacred things for which our glorious and heroic tradition teaches us that one may live and one may die.*’

It may therefore be said that Grand Master Torrigiani had understood, from the beginning, the authoritarian nature of Fascism and was led, under pressure from certain Brethren who were, moreover, acting in good faith, to offer Mussolini cautious, conditional support<sup>12</sup>.

In a letter of 9 November 1922 the Milanese Freemason Federico Cerasola informed Torrigiani that he had paid the sum of 700,000 lire to the PNF, specifying that he expected the total to reach two million lire.

This letter undoubtedly shows that there was considerable support for the new Fascist government within Milanese Freemasonry immediately after the March on Rome.

It must be said, however, that the Grand Master had to mediate between that position and uncompromising opposition to the nascent regime, vigorously supported by his Deputy Grand Master Giuseppe Meoni, then President of the ISR.

### III

In any case, Grand Master Torrigiani’s cautiously favourable stance towards Benito Mussolini lasted no more than a single morning.

<sup>11</sup> This fundamental document is reproduced by U. Cipollone, *La lotta tra la Massoneria e il Fascismo per la difesa della libertà*, Rome, 1951, pp. 9–10.

<sup>12</sup> On this point, several letters addressed to Torrigiani by the Milanese Freemason Federico Cerasola have recently been discovered (cf. F. Conti, *La massoneria italiana da Giolitti a Mussolini*, op. cit., pp. 89–90).

As Renzo De Felice has authoritatively observed, *What is certain is that, on 7–8 October (1922, editor's note), during a meeting of the leading representatives of Palazzo Giustiniani, the basis was laid for a circular issued by Torrigiani on the 19th and reproduced on 25 October by the "Giornale d'Italia". In it the Grand Master, after having outlined, as has been seen, the relations with Fascism, went on to examine the concrete reality of Fascism, in order to arrive at a conclusion that we might define as qualified support ...*<sup>13</sup>.

This interpretation of Domizio Torrigiani's position towards Mussolini finds explicit confirmation in the lucid testimony of Michele Terzaghi. That testimony appears all the more credible because he, a Fascist deputy, held the 33rd Degree in the Grand Lodge of Piazza del Gesù.

Terzaghi writes, in fact: *Palazzo Giustiniani became ever more distrustful and reserved. I happened to meet Domizio Torrigiani who, with an air of condescension, as though delivering pronouncements from on high, said to me: "Our position is clear and well defined; we shall see how Mussolini behaves. If he remains within the bounds of democratic and parliamentary liberties, we shall support him; otherwise we shall fight him." The Freemasons affiliated with Palazzo Giustiniani in Parliament joined the opposition ...*<sup>14</sup>.

The Fascist Grand Council's declaration that Fascism and Freemasonry were incompatible was precisely the consequence of the cautious, heavily qualified stance adopted by Palazzo Giustiniani shortly after Mussolini's rise to power.

This emerges unequivocally from the testimony of Michele Terzaghi just cited. That testimony is also particularly significant because of his close ties to Mussolini precisely at the time when the resolution of the Fascist Grand Council of 14 February 1923 was adopted, declaring the incompatibility between Fascism and Freemasonry.

Terzaghi did not join the opposition until the Matteotti assassination in 1924.

Although the resolution made no formal distinction between the

two Masonic obediences then existing in Italy, it should be understood that the Grand Council intended at that time to target only Palazzo Giustiniani, since Mussolini's contacts with Piazza del Gesù continued throughout 1925 and were not confined to unofficial channels; the open break came only with Law No. 2029 of 26 November 1925 against Freemasonry.

Indeed, again according to Michele Terzaghi's testimony<sup>15</sup>, Mussolini was invested by Palmeri with the 33rd Degree *ad honorem* in the AASR of Piazza del Gesù.

The resolution of the Grand Council, however, deserves a more thorough analysis.

It came less than a month after the secret meeting between Mussolini and Cardinal Gasparri, then Pius XI's Secretary of State, and at the same time as the merger between Fascists and Nationalists.

The merger is particularly significant for our purposes. Indeed, whereas until then the Fascist Party had never declared Freemasonry incompatible with party membership, the Nationalist Party had been avowedly anti-Masonic since its foundation in 1910 and had played a leading role in the famous 1913 inquiry into Freemasonry, an inquiry that marked the beginning of the radical anti-Masonry later adopted and carried to its extreme consequences by Mussolini.

It is well established that the Nationalists pressed strongly during negotiations with the PNF for a declaration of incompatibility between Fascism and Freemasonry.

What may legitimately be doubted is whether the Nationalist demand decisively influenced Mussolini's decision.

In other words, while the Nationalists may have had, within the right-wing culture of the time, sufficient authority to advocate such incompatibility, they certainly lacked the political strength to impose it on the much larger Fascist Party, and on a leader such as Mussolini, who at

<sup>13</sup> See R. De Felice, *Mussolini e il fascismo. Vol. 2: La conquista del potere 1921–1925*, Cles (TN), Einaudi Editore, 2018, p. 351.

<sup>14</sup> See M. Terzaghi, *Fascismo e Massoneria* (1950), Carmagnola, Arktos-Oggero Editore, 2000, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> M. Terzaghi, *Fascismo e Massoneria*, cited above, pp. 59–60, writes that Raul Palmeri, Grand Master of Piazza del Gesù, 'presented Mussolini with the patent of the 33rd degree *ad honorem*, showed him the declaration of principles contained in the apprentice manual, and upon it Mussolini wrote in his own hand: "Seen and approved, B. Mussolini". Palmeri rubbed his hands: he too considered himself the man of destiny'.

that moment was already firmly in power and, in practice, already controlled all the levers of government.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that there was a convergence of interests strong enough to lead Mussolini to take this step, which could have alienated some of his supporters.

In the first Mussolini government, still in office during the period with which we are concerned, the only Fascist Minister affiliated with Palazzo Giustiniani was the Minister of Justice, Aldo Oviglio<sup>16</sup> of Bologna, an excellent lawyer entirely unconnected with the squadrist movement.

The truth is that the stakes were very high. The reasons that led Mussolini to change his mind, adopting a hard line against Palazzo Giustiniani, were, on the one hand, Domizio Torrigiani's strong reservations about him and, on the other, the meeting with Gasparri.

That meeting opened the way to subsequent developments in relations first between the Vatican and Fascism and later between the State and the Church.

The meeting, according to the testimony of Count Carlo Santucci, then President of the Banco di Roma, took place at his residence, which had two entrances on different streets and therefore allowed the two men to meet without being seen together.

The meeting was scheduled for the afternoon of 19 January 1923<sup>17</sup>.

Mussolini was accompanied by Giacomo Acerbo, the Under-Secretary to the Presidency, who was from Abruzzo and belonged to the Grand Lodge of Piazza del Gesù.

The meeting was prompted by a request for financial assistance made by the Vatican to the Italian Government in order to save the Banco di Roma from bankruptcy.

Mussolini, however, shrewdly exacted a very high political price for

helping the Vatican in this respect. He demanded that the Holy See remove Don Luigi Sturzo from his post as party secretary; Sturzo, the leader of the PPI, was already proving to be one of the fiercest opponents of the Fascist Government, even though the Italian People's Party was represented in it by two ministers.

The purpose was to neutralise, at Montecitorio, the opposition of the Italian People's Party (PPI) parliamentary group to the Government's electoral reform bill presented, on Mussolini's behalf, by Acerbo himself.

It was a plainly fraudulent law, which would have allowed a coalition winning one third of the votes to secure 65 per cent of the seats.

That is what occurred in the general election of 6 April 1924, whose result allowed Mussolini to remain in power even after the Matteotti assassination, for which he himself, in the speech of 3 January 1925, would claim political, though not criminal, responsibility.

Faced with so onerous a demand, there are strong reasons to believe that the Vatican asked the nascent regime for a decisive gesture against Palazzo Giustiniani, although, unsurprisingly, no minutes of that secret meeting were drawn up<sup>18</sup>.

It is clear that no direct proof of such a request exists, but there is sufficient circumstantial evidence to make that hypothesis more than plausible.

In fact, Cardinal Gasparri's letter to the Jesuit Pietro Tacchi Venturi of 5 July 1923 states: *For reasons which it is useless to set out here, the Holy Father allowed Don Sturzo to delay his reply... Now, all things well weighed before God, the Holy Father considers that in the present circumstances in Italy a priest cannot, without grave damage to the Church, remain at the head of a party, indeed of the opposition of all the parties hostile to the Government, under the auspices of Freemasonry, as is by now well known.*'

A straightforward reading of this important document shows that Gasparri, speaking to Father Tacchi Venturi, S.J., who served as his in-

<sup>16</sup> As V. Gnecchini specifies, *L'Italia dei liberi muratori*, Rome, Erasmo Editore, 2005, pp. 201–202, Aldo Giuseppe Oviglio was initiated into the GOI in the 'Ca. Ira' Lodge of Bologna on 27 September 1909.

<sup>17</sup> On this meeting between Mussolini and Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, cf. David I. Kertzer, *The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe*, New York: Random House, 2014, pp. 60–63.

<sup>18</sup> See also, to the same effect, the recent monograph by F. Conti, *Massoneria e fascismo. Dalla grande guerra alla messa al bando delle Logge*, Rome, Carocci Editore, 2025, p. 193, who significantly writes: 'As the new materials found in the Vatican archives now document, on that occasion Cardinal Gasparri explicitly expressed the need for Mussolini to defeat Freemasonry and those political groups that referred to it...'

termediary in dealings with Mussolini, harshly criticised Don Sturzo, saying that he should step down as secretary of the PPI because he had allied himself with all the other liberal-democratic opposition groups in Parliament, which the Cardinal himself identified with parliamentary Freemasonry.

It is clear that, by 'Freemasonry', the Cardinal could only have been referring to Palazzo Giustiniani, since the parliamentarians belonging to Piazza del Gesù were all Fascists or, at least, pro-Fascist.

Moreover, Amendola's group was clearly, even then, the ally of the members of the Italian People's Party who opposed the Acerbo Law, and would later become the soul of the Aventine.

Amendola's membership<sup>19</sup> of the GOI, as well as that of his followers – first and foremost Raffaele de Caro, a parliamentarian from Benevento<sup>20</sup> – is, as is well known, firmly established.

#### IV

The resolution of the Grand Council of 14 February 1923 which declared, as we have seen, the incompatibility between membership of the PNF and membership of Freemasonry, although directed primarily at Palazzo Giustiniani, did not immediately hinder the GOI's activities, which continued undisturbed, with further initiations. Fascist squad assaults on Lodges began only in January 1924, notably at Prato, at San Severo, where the premises were seriously damaged, and at Termoli, where the Nathan Lodge was attacked and its rich library was entirely burned.

This state of affairs was further aggravated after Mussolini's famous speech of 3 January 1925, which marks the transition from the Fascist government to the dictatorship proper.

It is no accident that the speech was immediately followed by the presentation of the bill against Freemasonry drafted by the new Minister of Justice, Alfredo Rocco.

In the Chamber of Deputies, however, the bill was promptly approved on 19 May 1925, and the only significant challenge came in the form of the remarkably lucid and noble speech delivered by Antonio Gramsci<sup>21</sup> during the sitting of 16 May 1925. It is a speech that remains deeply moving today. Gramsci said, in fact: *'Freemasonry was the only real and effective party that the bourgeois class had for a long time ... in reality, it is fighting against the only effectively organised force that the bourgeoisie had in Italy, in order to supplant it in occupying the posts that the State assigns to its officials. The Fascist revolution is merely the replacement of one administrative cadre by another.'*

As the former Grand Master of the GOI Virgilio Gaito recalls: *'Later, in the "Prison Notebooks", Gramsci recognised in Freemasonry "the role of a linchpin of democracy and the role of one of the most efficient forces of the State in civil society", and credited it with having achieved national unity and with having integrated Italy into the process of formation of the European bourgeoisie'*<sup>22</sup>.

Gramsci therefore perceptively concluded that Mussolini sought to suppress Freemasonry precisely because he intended to dismantle the liberal State and replace it with an authoritarian regime.

The bill followed a very different course in the Senate. It reached Palazzo Madama in May 1925 after approval by the Chamber, but was not approved until November, after a debate lasting about six months. During that debate, the defence of our Institution was nobly undertaken by two leading figures in public law and, more broadly, in Italian culture at the time: Francesco Ruffini<sup>23</sup>, author, significantly, of the celebrated book on religious freedom, and Gaetano Mosca, the renowned scholar of constitutional law and liberal theorist of the circulation of elites.

Neither of them belonged to Freemasonry, but they denounced,

<sup>21</sup> This fundamental speech by Gramsci has recently been reissued in the volume *Gramsci e la massoneria. L'intervento del leader comunista nel dibattito alla Camera sulla legge contro la massoneria*, preface by Stefano Bisi, introduction by Santi Fedele, Acireale-Rome, Tipheret, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> See V. Gaito, *La massoneria e la società italiana*, unpublished address delivered at Monopoli, Lions Club, 20 January 1989.

<sup>23</sup> The reference is to the fundamental monograph by F. Ruffini, *La libertà religiosa. Storia dell'idea*, introduction by Arturo Carlo Jemolo, afterword by Francesco Margiotta Broglio, Milan, Feltrinelli Editore, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> On this point, see V. Gnocchini, *L'Italia dei liberi muratori*, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> On Raffaele de Caro, initiated in the Manfredi Lodge of Benevento on 18 October 1911, cf. V. Gnocchini, *L'Italia dei liberi muratori*, op. cit., p. 94.

with unforgettable moral steadfastness, Mussolini's assault on liberty in Italy through that bill, in the clear awareness that such a law would mark the end of the liberal State.

The full and enduring relevance of these authoritative teachings is as clear today as it was then.

It was only the regime's ignoble frame-up surrounding Tito Zaniboni's failed assassination attempt on Mussolini that finally induced the Senate to approve that repressive law. General Luigi Capello was accused, for political purposes, of masterminding that attack and then, without evidence, sentenced by the Special Tribunal to thirty years' imprisonment.

That sentence was imposed for purely political reasons, despite the courageous defence mounted by Bro. Ottorino Petroni<sup>24</sup>, nephew of Grand Master Giuseppe Petroni (1880–1885).

That affair was exploited by the regime to subject the non-aligned senators to moral blackmail, effectively coercing them into approving the bill against Freemasonry.

That bill, therefore, approved by the Senate and sanctioned by the King, became Law No. 2029 of 26 November 1925.

## V

*Medio tempore*, such ignoble persecution had been courageously denounced by Francesco Saverio Nitti in his first letter from exile to King Vittorio Emanuele III, sent from Zurich on 5 March 1925<sup>25</sup>, which contains the following significant passage: *'And what is the recent persecution of Freemasonry if not another proof of criminal folly? I have never been a Freemason and Your Majesty has told me several times that you are not one. But your Father and your Grandfather were zealous Freemasons, and Mazzini and Garibaldi were*

*Freemasons. The heads of Freemasonry are, in Sweden and Denmark, the two sovereigns: in England it is the Duke of Connaught; in France, in America, in Belgium, in Switzerland, in Germany, in Holland almost all the leading political figures belong to Freemasonry. In Italy, things have reached the point where, in effect, it is proposed to abolish Freemasonry and to persecute officials who belong to it. If this mad measure is absurd in practical terms, it shows the depths of the baseness to which things have come. In practice, under persecution, Freemasonry will be transformed into a truly secret association and will have to oppose the monarchical institutions. If the monarchy forbids it to live and to function, it will be against the monarchy. Purified by persecution, ennobled by danger, it will become an immense force. The republican tendency is already very strong throughout Europe; the dreamed-of monarchical restorations are not taking place. Is it really necessary to develop the republican movement in Italy and to form it artificially?'*<sup>26</sup>

This letter from the great statesman and leading authority on the Southern Question, Francesco Saverio Nitti, is a document of exceptional importance that has, strangely, hitherto been overlooked.

On the one hand, this document provides an important piece of information – based on remarks the King himself had previously made to Nitti in confidence – namely, that Vittorio Emanuele II and Umberto I were Freemasons: the King had told Nitti *'... of his ancestors ... that they had been Freemasons'*<sup>27</sup>.

There is also strong circumstantial evidence supporting the conclusion that Vittorio Emanuele III too was a member of the GOI.

This is suggested by the testimony of Alcide Garosi, who was Grand Master Domizio Torrigiani's physician during Torrigiani's final years: *'Domizio, at times, had impulses of rebellion; at other moments he seemed resigned. In those moments he often repeated this question to me, which seemed rather to be addressed to himself: "Why does the King not intervene in my favour?" or: "I am astonished that the King does nothing for me." The true meaning and motive of these questions seem easy to understand; my impression is that the King himself was affiliated to Freemasonry (obviously to Palazzo Giustiniani, editor's note).'*<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> As Vittorio Gnocchini informs us (*L'Italia dei liberi muratori*, p. 217), Ottorino Petroni, son of Raffaele and nephew of Giuseppe, was born in Rome on 3 January 1882. Defence counsel for General Luigi Capello before the Special Tribunal, he had been initiated in the 'Rienzi' Lodge of Rome on 14 January 1910. He died in Rome on 30 March 1974.

<sup>25</sup> The letter is published in F. S. Nitti, *Lettere dall'esilio al Re Vittorio Emanuele III. Prima lettera al Re*, in F. S. Nitti, *Rivelazioni. Dramatis personae*, Naples, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1948, pp. 592–593.

<sup>26</sup> See the prophetic passage in F. S. Nitti, *Rivelazioni. Dramatis personae*, op. cit., pp. 592–593.

<sup>27</sup> See the significant passage in F. S. Nitti, *Rivelazioni. Dramatis personae*, op. cit., p. 429.

<sup>28</sup> See A. Garosi, *Il Dottore e il Maestro. Al confino di Polizia con Domizio Torrigiani*, preface by G. Raffi, Florence, 2008, p. 70.

On the other hand, as regards the effects of the regime's anti-Masonic persecution, the letter is clearly prophetic.

It must be said, first of all, that the King was not entirely unmoved by Nitti's letter.

It is reasonable to suppose that the former Prime Minister's evocation of the King's family memories, which the King regarded as sacred, made a strong impression on him.

Moreover, although he believed he could not openly challenge Mussolini, who still had, notwithstanding the Matteotti assassination, a large majority in the Chamber, he certainly sought to challenge him indirectly in the Senate, advising the many senators who had remained loyal to him to oppose the bill against Freemasonry.

Only covert intervention by the King would explain why the bill, unlike in the Chamber, took a full six months to pass the Senate and, as noted above, was approved only after General Capello's arrest. In any case, the fact that the King ultimately sanctioned the law<sup>29</sup> had consequences for subsequent events, and here too Francesco Saverio Nitti proved prophetic.

In conclusion, on this point, we may say that the King's passivity towards Mussolini, in this respect too, would ultimately cost Vittorio Emanuele III the Crown, as subsequent events would amply demonstrate.

<sup>29</sup> Of great interest is the comment found in the 'apocryphal' memoirs of Vittorio Emanuele III on Mussolini's speech of 3 January 1925 and on the subsequent affair of the bill against Freemasonry: 'Someone has defined the speech of 3 January 1925 as the 18 Brumaire of Benito Mussolini. In reality, allowing for due proportions, the two events have certain points of resemblance ... Mussolini did not inform me in advance of the tenor of his speech, which was equivalent to a coup d'état. This caused the first rift between the Crown and the Government, and more precisely between me and Mussolini. Three former Presidents of the Council – Salandra, Orlando, and Giolitti – raised a protest in Parliament against the violation of the constitutional order. The Liberal Ministers left the Government. But this did not prevent Mussolini from applying severe restrictions to the press, from limiting the activity of political parties, and from presenting the law against secret associations, which the Chamber of Deputies approved unanimously with 304 votes. The same law was then approved by the Senate (which voted by roll-call) with 208 votes in favour, 6 against, and 21 abstentions, out of 235 present.' The 'apocryphal' memoirs of Vittorio Emanuele III may be read in F. Perfetti, *Parola di Re. Il diario segreto di Vittorio Emanuele*, Florence, Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 2006, p. 123.

## VI

Meanwhile, Bro. Giovanni Amendola, in agreement with Grand Master Domizio Torrigiani, entrusted Benedetto Croce with drafting the *Manifesto of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals*, published in *Il Mondo* on 1 May 1925<sup>30</sup>, in response to Giovanni Gentile's *Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals*, which had appeared shortly before.

It is highly significant that the Croce manifesto bore, among others, the signatures of Domizio Torrigiani, Grand Master of the GOI; Giuseppe Meoni, Deputy Grand Master of the GOI and President of the ISR; and Ettore Ferrari, former Grand Master of the GOI and then Sovereign Grand Commander of the AASR.

Their endorsement of the Croce manifesto, an act of moral steadfastness, soon led to the suppression of Italian Freemasonry; for its members, it meant exile, imprisonment and, in some cases – including Giovanni Becciolini and, later, Martini and the Brethren who followed him – death. That stance gave the GOI credibility that would prove decisive in the new Italy that would emerge after the catastrophe.

As Grand Master Giordano Gamberini wrote: '*A commission from the Masonic Service Association came to Europe by air in the summer of 1945 with the authorisation and support of President Truman, a former Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Missouri; it was composed of distinguished Brethren: R. V. Denslow, himself a Past Grand Master of Missouri, General Grand High Priest of the General Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons and a most authoritative author of Masonic works; C. H. Johnson, Past Grand Master of New York; G. E. Bushnell, Lieutenant Grand Commander and future Sovereign Grand Commander of the Northern Supreme Council of the United States; and C. J. McAllister, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Montana.*'

We shall transcribe only one passage of the report of that commission: '*We limited our inquiries to the Grand Orient of Italy. We made investiga-*

<sup>30</sup> On the Croce Manifesto, see most recently Ernesto Galli della Loggia, *Credere, tradire, vivere: Un viaggio negli anni della Repubblica* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016), p. 33, who writes: '*Croce's public battle against Fascism, though heralded by several significant signs, has a precise official starting date: 1 May 1925, when the Manifesto of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals, which he had written at Amendola's invitation in response to a corresponding manifesto of Fascist intellectuals by Giovanni Gentile, published a week earlier, appeared in Il Mondo.*'

tions into the old National Grand Lodge (of *Piazza del Gesù* [editor's note]), but this had totally disqualified itself under the direction of Palermi, and only a few American Grand Lodges, if any, regarded it favourably'<sup>31</sup>.

In this respect too, as we have seen, the seed sown by Torrigiani during his famous journey to the United States, the first ever undertaken by a Grand Master of the GOI, had borne fruit despite all the tragedies endured in the meantime.

As Gabriele D'Annunzio wrote in an unforgettable passage from his *Notturmo*: 'All ash is seed, / all stumps are saplings, / the whole desert is spring-time'<sup>32</sup>.

## VII

As Grand Master Ugo Lenzi said in Milan on 16 June 1949: 'Your Orator recalled Domizio Torrigiani, in whom, I might say, the entire martyrdom of Italian Freemasonry is epitomised, a martyrdom which then continued at the Fosse Ardeatine among the victims that you too lost here...'<sup>33</sup>.

Significantly, Bro. M. Terzaghi<sup>34</sup> writes: 'Freemasonry is the rock. It has weathered many malevolent and violent waves, even from Freemasons. But it has always emerged, and will continue to emerge, victorious.'

As Terzaghi himself wrote in 1950, commenting on the revival of Italian Freemasonry after Fascism: 'It has passed – and how tragically! – but Freemasonry has risen again: it was natural. Freemasonry is an idea, it is a philosophy, it is a system of life, of education, and of discipline. It is individual liberty that resists and tenaciously defends itself, inasmuch as it is irrepressible ... Whoever has the religion of liberty is a priest of the immortal spirit. The eclipse presupposes the star: what is transitory cannot destroy what is permanent.'<sup>35</sup>

N.D.M.

<sup>31</sup> Giordano Gamberini, *Attualità della Massoneria. Contenti gli operai?*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1978, pp. 64–65.

<sup>32</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Notturmo*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012], p. 190.

<sup>33</sup> Grand Master Ugo Lenzi in *Riunione Massonica Lombarda (Milan, 16 June 1949). Il discorso del Gran Maestro*, in *L'Acacia Massonica*, year 1949, anastatic reprint, Foggia, Bastogi Editore, 1986, p. 168.

<sup>34</sup> Michele Terzaghi, *Fascismo e massoneria*, Carmagnola, Arktos-Oggero Editore, 2000, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Michele Terzaghi, *Fascismo e massoneria*.

## The World as a Grand Lodge

In the contemporary world, a space is taking shape with increasing clarity in which the historical memories of diverse civilisations are re-emerging, thereby endowing political sovereignty with a function that transcends the mere administration of material interests. Within this framework, over recent decades, the notion of the civilisational state<sup>1</sup> has gained currency as a category for describing a polity in which historical space, political form and cultural continuity combine in varying configurations that root the legitimacy of temporal power in collective memory.

This notion, now firmly established in the political and theoretical vocabulary of world order, presents the Masonic tradition with the task of restoring to the universal its proper meaning: that of a principle capable of accommodating manifold forms without reducing them to uniformity. Freemasonry, formed in the West over a long history of tensions and reconfigurations, has developed a specific grammar of relations, by virtue of which men from diverse and distant cultures can communicate through symbolism and initiatic discipline. Similarly, the image of the world as a Grand Lodge prefigures, for the civilisational

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press / Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008; Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World*, London: Allen Lane, 2009; Zhang Weiwei, *The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State*, Hackensack, NJ: World Century Publishing Corporation, 2012; Christopher Coker, *The Rise of the Civilizational State*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019; S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World*, New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2020; Kishore Mahbubani, *The Asian 21st Century*, Singapore: Springer, 2022; Dario Fabbri, *Geopolitica umana. Capire il mondo dalle civiltà antiche alle potenze odierne*, Milan: Gribaudo, 2023.

states, the possibility of defining their own identity through mutual recognition: each polity preserves its own historical and cultural depth and recognises, at the same time, that traditions other than its own are contingent expressions of a single human nature and are therefore worthy of consideration and respect.

The transition from Operative to Speculative Freemasonry has demonstrated how a building practice, situated within a cosmopolitan horizon, can become a transmissible symbolic language capable of extending beyond its original context<sup>2</sup>. In the symbolism of Speculative Freemasonry, the Temple alludes, in a single image, to inner edification and to the order of the community. The Lodge is the setting in which each Brother contributes to the common Work while simultaneously preserving and perfecting his own identity, finding, in dialogue with Brethren belonging to different traditions, an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the beauty of his own culture and of the cultures of others.

Roscoe Pound (1870–1964) was an American jurist and Dean of Harvard Law School. As a legal philosopher attentive to the relationship between institutions, social order and historical development, he brought into Masonic thought the language of jurisprudence and civilisational theory. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Freemasonry* he outlined a Masonic philosophy in which the Order is conceived as an institution charged with preserving, developing and transmitting the principles of a universal human civilisation. From this perspective, the Masonic function does not consist in imposing a uniform content upon the world, but in organising human effort along common lines, bringing forth the elements that make possible the development of culture, civilisation and solidarity.

In the light of Pound's thought, universalism is not exhausted by its legal, economic or technical expressions in Western modernity. Freemasonry preserves a symbolic form of universalism, capable of combining local rootedness with a universal horizon without confusing the

<sup>2</sup> David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590–1710*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

one with the other. In the contemporary framework, in which relations between distant places and cultures are intensifying, Freemasonry appears as one of the few long-established organisations capable of offering civilisational states a concrete model of encounter: not an ideological tribunal of humanity, but a Workshop – and therefore a building site – in which differences are acknowledged, fostered and directed towards common ends: *'Wherever in the world there is a lodge of Masons, there should be a focus of civilization, a center of the idea of universality, radiating reason to put down prejudice and advance justice in the disputes of peoples, and in the disputes of classes, and making for the peace and harmony and civilization that should prevail in this great lodge of the world'*<sup>3</sup>.

### FROM CONFLICT BETWEEN CIVILISATIONS TO THE WORLD AS A BUILDING SITE

From a historical perspective, initiatic cosmopolitanism treats tensions between civilisations as material to be ordered according to a just measure, since difference becomes fruitful when embodied in a form that gives it constructive expression. The reference to Pound makes it possible to clarify this transition: what other organisations seek to achieve within the boundaries of class, creed, ethnicity, territory or political affiliation, Freemasonry attempts to accomplish through universality, that is, by means of a discipline capable of freeing human relations from the immediate pressure of local prejudice. From this perspective, the Masonic building site retains an operative significance: working this material requires appropriate tools before it can be integrated into the design of the Work; in the same way, civilisations can contribute to the building of a shared architecture when their institutions establish stable forms of reciprocal mediation and generate lasting trust among historically different actors.

The common work also presupposes an education in attentive listening and becomes fully intelligible when each party's voice is heard in its distinctiveness and is met with an appropriate response within a

<sup>3</sup> Roscoe Pound, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Freemasonry*, Anamosa (IA), The National Masonic Research Society, 1915, p. 87.

shared horizon.

The form thus delineated ultimately implies sustained discipline over time, as the actions of civilisational states unfold over long periods, requiring patient commitment to the work, in keeping with the rhythm of the great cathedral building sites, in which construction transcends the horizon of the individual builder. The world as a Grand Lodge therefore indicates a form of historical coexistence in which civilisations are not dissolved into an undifferentiated, commodifying globalism, but made mutually intelligible within a common measure.

Albert Pike (1809–1891), jurist, poet, translator, soldier, scholar of comparative religion, and Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council, 33°, Southern Jurisdiction, was one of the most influential figures of nineteenth-century American Freemasonry. He received the degrees of the Scottish Rite in 1853 and, thereafter, devoted many years to revising the rituals and establishing their philosophical grounding.

In *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*<sup>4</sup>, Pike arranged religious, philosophical and ethical materials drawn from different contexts within a framework of moral instruction, in which the initiate is called to recognise, behind the plurality of historical forms, a shared aspiration towards truth, justice, the divine and duty.

The value of the text lies both in the erudite breadth of the references and in the Masonic principle that underpins their use. Freemasonry, from this perspective, acknowledges established religions in their distinctive forms and offers a disciplined framework for relations among those traditions, in which men belonging to different traditions can recognise one another within the same ethical grammar, founded upon the rectitude of the work, upon active charity and upon the ordered search for wisdom.

Almost a century and a half later, in *Native American Freemasonry*<sup>5</sup>,

the American historian Joy Porter, a scholar of Native American cultures and of relations between the indigenous world and Euro-American associational institutions, demonstrated the concrete historical significance of this orientation, reconstructing the exchanges between Freemasonry and the traditions of Native American peoples as processes in which the Masonic form could assume distinctive configurations, rooted in the communities that received it, and act as a channel of dialogue even within contexts marked by political tension, cultural fracture and identity negotiation.

The symbolic law of the Temple implies the recognition of the dignity of the other as a principle of shared edification; it entails an understanding of the ordered interdependence of historical forms and of the intrinsic limit of every claim to self-sufficiency.

## NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM

Reflection on the order of the world is one of the fields in which Masonic culture can offer a symbolic key to political theory, since the problem of order concerns not only the distribution of power, but the possibility of reconciling historical diversity within a recognisable form. Henry Kissinger, in *World Order*<sup>6</sup>, argues that every durable order rests on the relationship between legitimacy and power: on the one hand, a set of commonly accepted rules, capable of defining the limits of permissible action; on the other, a balance of power capable of preventing any one actor from subordinating the others. Legitimacy does not eliminate rivalry, but contains it within a shared framework; balance does not by itself generate peace, but limits absolute claims and reduces the possibility that conflict may become the negation of order itself.

Applied to the age of the civilisational states, this principle has practical implications. Relations between major historical actors can reach an accommodation only insofar as symbolic legitimation precedes the calculation of interests. Each civilisational state interprets its actions within a historical continuity that it recognises as its own and, at the

<sup>4</sup> Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, annotated ed., ed. Arturo de Hoyos, Washington, D.C.: The Supreme Council, 33°, S.J., U.S.A., 2019; first ed. 1872.

<sup>5</sup> Joy Porter, *Native American Freemasonry: Associationalism and Performance in America*, Lincoln,

University of Nebraska Press, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, New York: Penguin Press, 2014.

same time, in the light of a historical mission to which it likewise lays claim. Diplomacy between civilisations must therefore understand these self-representations rather than subordinate them to negotiable interests. Recognition establishes the framework within which interests can be situated in a broader order than that determined by purely material calculation: before interests can be negotiated, a shared language must be established in which the other can present itself as a bearer of dignity, with a form and historical destiny of its own.

Kissinger observes that the search for world order requires bringing the perceptions of different societies, whose experiences have long remained independent, into relation. The problem, therefore, does not consist in reducing civilisations to equivalent and interchangeable units, but in making their deep-seated self-representations comparable without erasing their distinctive character. From this perspective, diplomacy functions above all as an art of historical translation: it renders intelligible the images that peoples construct of themselves, of their own past, of their own legitimacy and of their own place in the world. Where this preliminary translation is lacking, negotiation remains exposed to the immediate pressure of force, urgency and distrust; where it succeeds, dialogue can develop into a search for long-term mediation capable of establishing order.

A culture capable of reconciling universal principles and manifold collective memories can be founded neither upon uniformity nor upon the simple competition of interests. It requires a stable form of recognition, in which continuity of institutional orders, the resilience of common institutions and shared memory support one another. For Kissinger, 'Order in this sense must be cultivated; it cannot be imposed.' Moreover, 'Any system of world order, to be sustainable, must be accepted as just—not only by leaders, but also by citizens.' The age of the civilisational states therefore requires forums in which mutual understanding can be established in advance and disputes addressed only after each side's legitimacy has been acknowledged; only in this way can conflict be contained within a form higher than the mere collision of wills.

Kissinger's formulation of a 'second culture that is global, struc-

tural, and juridical', capable of transcending particular interests and of respecting the history and culture of every country, indicates precisely this task. It does not postulate the erasure of differences, but their articulation in a common order. Here Masonic culture can offer a symbolic complement: beyond the juridical structure there is a need for a structure of trust, built on forms, memory and gradual progression. The common rule, to be truly common, must be preceded by a grammar of recognition; to be stable, order must be able to speak to the symbolic depths of the actors who inhabit it.

Diplomacy between civilisations therefore requires a systematic body of knowledge concerning the great historical civilisations. Such a discipline must reconstruct the character of each traditional form by drawing on the sources, the institutions, the texts, the rites, the images of power and the symbolic structures through which each community interprets itself. Under the dual sign of the Square and Compasses, fidelity to the sources and comparative analysis constitute two complementary functions within a single method: the Square preserves precision in the handling of evidence, proportion in analysis, and rectitude in documentary referencing; the Compasses open the field of synthesis, relation, and measurement across different orders. Masonic research into civilisations should therefore unite documentary rigour and hermeneutic openness, so that the analysis may remain faithful to the evidence and, at the same time, attentive to its deeper dimension.

The method finds its fulfilment in the Chain of Union, provided that research into the human civilisations that have succeeded one another throughout history aims to integrate partial perspectives into a common design. Translated into the language of the twenty-first century, this means that knowledge of civilisations must be placed at the service of ordered cooperation, not of polemical appropriation or hierarchical classification. The tools of construction do not belong to the individual, but to the common work; and the common work, in the age of the civilisational states, consists in making differences intelligible without dissolving them, in recognising memories without idolising them, in reconciling interests within a framework of shared legitimacy.

## EUROPE AS A WORKSHOP OF MEDIATION

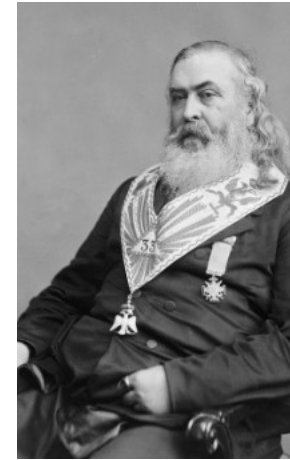
Among the civilisations called upon to engage with this relational criterion, Europe occupies a distinctive position. It possesses a deeply layered history and is called upon to turn this heritage into a capacity for strategic action, rooted in its own culture and capable of finding expression in a common voice and a distinctly civilisational responsibility. Its heritage, founded upon the Graeco-Roman and Christian roots of the West, remains operative insofar as it takes on a recognisable form.

European Freemasonry can help clarify this vocation, since, over the centuries, it has preserved the experience of bringing ritual, linguistic and institutional plurality into a unified framework. In this way, European heritage should not retreat into a defensive memory of past greatness, but should rediscover in its own plurality a method of dialogue: Europe's experience of internal tensions among law, philosophy, theology, science and politics can become a capacity for mediation with civilisations that order the relationship between power, symbol and memory differently.

Considered in this light, Freemasonry faces a cultural task commensurate with the political and symbolic forms of the twenty-first century. In the West, the Order preserves a plural form of the universal, founded upon symbolic discipline and fraternity; for this reason, it is capable of engaging in dialogue with analogous structures within non-Western civilisational states while respecting their historical character. The image of the world as a Grand Lodge is therefore not an ornamental metaphor, but the revival of an ancient intuition: wherever there is a Lodge, there is also a centre of civilisation capable of radiating universality, reason, justice, peace, and harmony within the Grand Lodge of the world.

E.R.

## Albert Pike



Originally published in *Rivista Massonica*, no. 6, July 1970, vol. LXI, V of the new series, pp. 241–246.

Albert Pike was Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States from 1859 until his death in 1891.

He is recognised as one of the foremost scholars of Masonic history and philosophy, and his revision of the rituals of the degrees of the Scottish Rite is therefore highly authoritative.

According to the system introduced by Pike and still in use today in the bodies under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Council in Washington, the Lodges of Perfection confer Degrees 4–14, the Chapters of Rose Croix Degrees 15–18, the Councils of Kadosh Degrees 19–30, and the Consistories Degrees 31 and 32.

Virtually no time limit is imposed on the conferral of these degrees,

in order to prevent the Scottish system from being used for profane purposes, as though it were intended to establish a new hierarchy of authority or – worse – an ecclesiastical or military-style ‘career’.

Possession of the degrees of the Scottish Rite means essentially that one is acquainted with the initiatic features of each degree and that, having sufficient aptitude and will, one can exercise one’s intuitive faculties and reflect philosophically upon those initiatic features.

Proposals for admission to the Scottish Rite must be submitted by two members of the Rite who already hold the 32nd degree. Applicants must be Master Masons in good standing in a regular Lodge.

Within the Mother Supreme Council of the World, this rule has never been altered or compromised. As early as 1802 that Supreme Council, then sitting at Charleston, declared: “The Sublime Masons never initiate any into the Blue degrees, without a legal warrant obtained for that purpose from a Symbolic Grand Lodge.”

Thus, from its inception, the first Supreme Council in the world recognised the jurisdiction of the Symbolic Grand Lodges over the three blue degrees, and no Scottish Rite Body, in the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States, has ever conferred those degrees.

Every member of the Scottish Rite must remain active in his own Lodge; otherwise, he automatically ceases to be a member of the Scottish Rite.

This principle was later adopted and implemented across all regular Masonic jurisdictions, with increasing difficulty as the misconception that the higher-numbered degrees of the Scottish Rite and other Rites are superior to the three degrees conferred by the Lodges – Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason – became more deeply rooted.

This misconception was, naturally, reinforced by the ‘career’ system used by European and Latin American Supreme Councils, in which advancement was often very slow and subject to various conditions.

He was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on 29 December 1809. That same year also saw the birth of William E. Gladstone, Abraham Lincoln, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles R. Darwin and Edgar Allan Poe, each of whom was to leave an indelible mark upon the nineteenth

century.

His father died when he was still a boy. Pike came from a distinguished Devonshire family whose lineage dated back to the fourteenth century. His American ancestors were men of progressive outlook, as may be seen in the history of Essex County, Massachusetts.

Since the founding of the town of Newbury, where they settled as pioneers in 1635, the Pikes had been noted for intelligence, broad-mindedness and independence of action.

The same qualities can be seen in their descendants: energy and fearlessness in the face of difficulty, steadfastness in upholding what was right, and courage in defence of their convictions. Such was Nicholas Pike, author of the first arithmetic published in America, friend of George Washington and the man who planted the liberty tree in front of his residence in 1775.

Such was General Zebulon Montgomery Pike, who explored the Rocky Mountains, gave his name to Pikes Peak and died in battle in the War of 1812<sup>1</sup>. And such was the poet-soldier Albert Pike, one of the heroes of Buena Vista, who received honourable mention from General Taylor. This family has produced scholars, poets, clergymen, teachers, statesmen, jurists and soldiers.

Albert Pike’s father moved to Newburyport, Massachusetts, when Albert was about four years old. He received his elementary and secondary education at a private school and at an academy in Framingham, Massachusetts, and in August 1825, having passed the examinations, entered Harvard as a freshman.

In order to support himself during his studies, he was compelled to teach. Thus, for six months in the autumn and winter of that year, he taught young men at Gloucester seven or eight years older than himself. He taught in the town of Fairhaven for six months and then at the grammar school in Newburyport, first as an assistant and then as principal; afterwards he taught for two or three years in a private school, until March 1831.

By heredity and by nature, he was a thinker, a scholar and a poet.

<sup>1</sup> He was killed in the attack on York, Canada, on 27 April 1813. Ed. note.

Broad-minded, highly gifted, sensitive, chivalrous, conscious of his own worth though reserved and modest, he was firm in his decisions. Surrounded by rigid Puritans, who had little tolerance for sentiment and who despised poetry and dismissed every expression of imagination or idealism as 'flowery speech', he longed to breathe a fresher air and to lead a broader life. Accordingly, all his efforts were directed towards this end: making enough money to go further west. He set out for the Pacific coast in 1831.

After stopping at St Louis, Santa Fe, Fort Smith and Van Buren, he settled in Little Rock, Arkansas, where, under the pseudonym 'Casca', he contributed a series of articles on the political issues of the day to the Little Rock Advocate.

These articles earned him the position of co-editor of the *Advocate*, a post which he held for a long period. In that Southern city he found the atmosphere he needed: he was loved and admired; his gifts were appreciated; he was encouraged to develop all his abilities; there he found fortune and fame.

In 1833 he was elected Assistant Secretary of the Council of the Territorial Legislature, began the study of law and was admitted to the Bar of that State in the winter of 1834. He married Mary Ann Hamilton on 10 October 1834 and continued to reside at Little Rock.

The poem *Hymns to the Gods*, which first appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in June 1839, and other writings published from 1831 to 1854, won him recognition among American poets.

Professor Wilson, known as Christopher North, said of him to Dr. Shelton Mackenzie: 'His massive genius marked him out to be the poet of the Titans.' In 1834 he published *Prose Sketches and Poems*; *Ariel* appeared in 1834 or 1835; *Ode to the Mocking Bird* appeared in 1836 and was subsequently republished in *Blackwood's* in March 1840. From time to time other individual poems appeared in various periodicals, and were always warmly welcomed by readers. In 1854 he finally published a collection of his poems entitled *Nugae*, but only for private distribution.

In 1836 he was engaged in overseeing the publication of the *Revised Statutes of Arkansas*, a work which brought him great credit. In the

spring of 1835 he purchased the *Advocate* and soon afterwards formed a law partnership with William Cummins that lasted for several years. Having realised that the management of the *Advocate* interfered with his legal practice, at the end of two years he sold the newspaper and devoted his free time to the practice and study of law. In 1840 he was elected attorney for the Real Estate Bank and in 1842 a member of its Board of Directors.

In 1846 he raised a squadron of cavalry, which he commanded with the rank of Captain, and fought in the war with Mexico, receiving special mention from Generals Taylor and Wool<sup>2</sup>. During that campaign he met Major Robert E. Lee, who would later become General of the Confederate Army.

As a lawyer, he was admitted to practise before the Supreme Court of the United States in 1849, and Daniel Webster would later praise him highly. He argued many cases before the Court with great distinction and honour, some for the Creek Indians, some for the Choctaws and some for the Cherokees.

In all matters concerning Roman law he was regarded as the highest authority. He translated the Pandects into English and, after he had moved to Washington in 1868, spent several years completing a work covering the entire body of Roman and French law, consulting in the course of his research the twenty-two volumes of Duranton, many volumes of Pothier, the five volumes of Marcadé – who was regarded as the foremost authority among them, by the French courts no less than by the most reputable scholars of public law – and other works.

When, in 1861, Arkansas cast its lot with the Confederacy, Pike was appointed Brigadier General and placed in command of the Indian Territory. As a representative of the Confederate Government, he negotiated many treaties with the Indian tribes.

At the end of the Civil War, he settled in Memphis and there practised law and published a daily newspaper for about two years. In 1868

<sup>2</sup> Zachary Taylor, future President of the United States. He is considered a Freemason by some historians; Bro. Rob Morris disputes this, while the history of Marsh Lodge No. 188, New York, states that Taylor was a Freemason and another Lodge bears his name. Ed. note.

he moved to Washington, where he remained for the rest of his life, except for a short period spent in Alexandria, Virginia.

He died in Washington, D.C., on 2 April 1891, mourned by all. His death was truly serene. His passing was so gentle, and the breath of life faded so gradually, that one could scarcely tell when he breathed his last and his great spirit returned to God.

He had abandoned the active practice of law about 1879 and thereafter appeared before the courts only through written submissions. He had been an accomplished scholar of Greek and Latin, had taught himself many languages and a great number of dialects, including Sanskrit, Hebrew, ancient Samaritan, Chaldaic, Persian and the languages of Native American peoples. From the study of these languages he went on to study the beliefs and traditions of the Parsis and Hindus, as well as the *Rig-Veda* and the *Zend-Avesta*. He left fifteen large manuscript volumes of translations and commentaries on these ancient Aryan writings.

Pike became a Freemason at Little Rock in 1850<sup>3</sup>. During the last years of his life, he devoted himself to the interests of the Order and received every honour the Order could bestow, culminating in the office of Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council, 33°, Southern Jurisdiction, U.S.A., the Mother Supreme Council of the World, an office which he held for thirty-two years, until his death.

He is considered the most eminent Freemason in the world, not only for the offices he held, but also for his exceptional erudition, his admirable dissertations on Masonic law and symbolism, his profound knowledge of statecraft, theology and ethnology, his broad and com-

<sup>3</sup> Albert Pike was raised to the degree of Master Mason in Western Star Lodge No. 2 in August 1850. Founder and first Worshipful Master of Magnolia Lodge No. 60, also at Little Rock, on 4 October 1880 he affiliated with Pentalfa Lodge No. 23 of Washington, D.C. On 29 November 1850 he was exalted in Chapter No. 2 of Royal Arch Masonry; he was later Grand Scribe of the Grand Chapter of Arkansas and finally High Priest in 1853–1854. During this period, on 20 March 1853, he also received the 4th–32nd degrees of the AASR at Charleston, South Carolina, from the famous Masonic historian Albert Mackey. In 1857 he received the 33rd degree at New Orleans. The following year he was elected an Active Member of the Supreme Council and on 3 January 1859 Sovereign Grand Commander. Ed. note.

prehensive grasp of every subject, and the soundness of his judgement.

These qualities made him arbiter and judge of all questions concerning the Supreme Councils of the world.

He is the author of more than twenty volumes of Masonic literature, in addition to volumes of poetry that brought him fame in the profane world.

It was said of Albert Pike that he was a king among men, by the divine right of merit. Majestic and imposing in figure, with the proportions of Hercules and the beauty of an Apollo, Pike enjoyed such prestige that, by resolution of Congress, a statue was erected in his honour in the nation's capital, an honour that remained without parallel for a man who had fought for the Confederacy.

James D. Richardson<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> James D. Richardson, member of the United States Congress from 1885 to 1905 and President of the Democratic Convention of 1900, was Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council in Washington from 1900 until his death in 1914. The paper translated and published here dates from 1909, the centenary of Albert Pike's birth. Ed. note.

## Letter to a Brother

Originally published in *Rivista Massonica*,  
no. 1, January 1972, vol. LXIII, VII of the new series, pp. 43–44.

*Dearest Brother,*

For quite some time now, your participation in the work of the Lodge and of the Rite body to which you also belong has become very sporadic.

It must be acknowledged that you ‘justify’ every absence. You are not among those who, besides failing to appear, do not even trouble to give notice or explain why. You have a reason, and it is always the same: you are ‘very busy’.

Shall we take a closer look together at what this expression means? ‘Being busy’, in fact, can mean many things.

There are those who are unavoidably ‘busy’ every evening because of their professional duties. Under such conditions, it is clear that participation in the evening activities of the Order or the Rite is impossible.

But there are other evening ‘occupations’: work commitments, attendance at conferences organised by other associations... even social engagements!

To what extent can such ‘occupations’ really interfere with a Freemason’s attendance at Lodge or Chapter meetings?

Here, dearest Brother, I must make a point on which the scope and credibility of my argument essentially depend. Putting the question the other way round, I ask whether taking part in Masonic work can be described as ‘being busy’ in the same way as attending a co-owners’ meeting or a session convened by the officers of a cultural club.

In my view, no. Whoever has sought and obtained admission to Freemasonry has made a qualitative choice: that is, he has recognised that there exists a sphere of experience and activity different from, and

superior to, the sphere of worldly interests and activities – however worthy and important these may be.

If this is so, the least that can be asked of a Mason is that he remember this: he has made a commitment – more to himself than to others – to give his life a distinctive meaning, and not merely to have one more membership card in his wallet!

It is simply a question of consistency. To someone outside the Craft one may very well say, ‘I am busy this evening’, when one is going to Lodge. But that is precisely a profane expression. A true and perfect Mason should, in reality, consider himself to be in Lodge at all times, even when he is not physically there. Here, on the Masonic plane, lies the difference between being in Lodge or in Chapter and ‘being busy’! ... Of course, even in the life of a Mason ‘who takes it seriously’, and to whom it would never occur to absent himself from Masonic work because he is ‘busy’ with a bridge tournament, cases of force majeure may arise: overtime required by a superior, a journey necessitated by a relative’s illness... But I am certain, dearest Brother, that if you are willing to examine your conscience, you yourself will see that, on various occasions, your ‘occupations’ could in fact have been set aside or postponed so that you could take an active part in the evening meeting of the Brethren.

Yet, I repeat, the question is fundamental and does not concern individual ‘absences’. It comes down to whether or not one has realised what it means to be a Mason. If a musicologist or a lover of the fine arts never questions the superiority of such interests over others, even though all of them remain profane, how could a Freemason – a man who has chosen the initiatic path – place that path on the same level as, or even subordinate it to, the ordinary paths we follow each day? Should he not make a continual effort to leave those paths whenever possible, so as to rejoin those who walk with him and, like him, follow the initiatic path, seriously, wisely, fruitfully and joyfully?

I hope to see you again soon and often. With the triple fraternal embrace,

Yours,

E.S.

The first official periodical of the Grand Orient of Italy was published in Florence on 30 July 1870 under the title *Rivista della Massoneria Italiana*, following a proposal by Grand Master Lodovico Frapolli.

In January 1905, the publication adopted the title *Rivista Massonica*, which it retained until September 1926, when, following the enactment of the Fascist laws against associations, Grand Master Domizio Torrigiani ordered the suspension of Masonic work and the dissolution of the Lodges of the Grand Orient of Italy.

After the fall of Fascism and the Liberation of Italy, the official periodical of the Grand Orient of Italy resumed publication in September 1947 and continued until December 1952 under the new title *Acacia Massonica*. In 1954, the journal changed its name again, appearing first as *Lumen* and later as *Lumen Vitae*, until 1959.

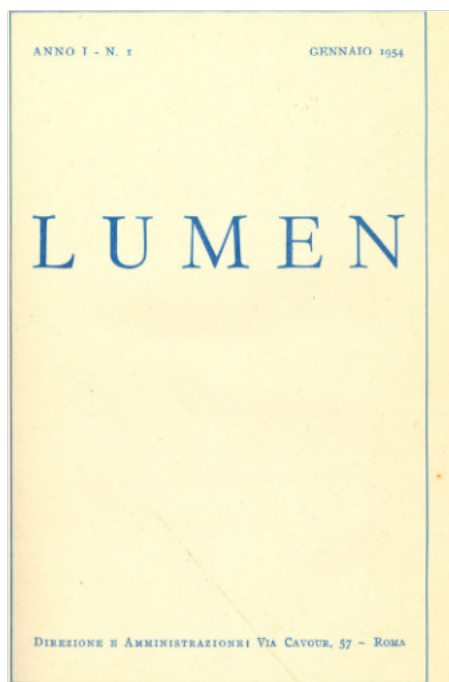
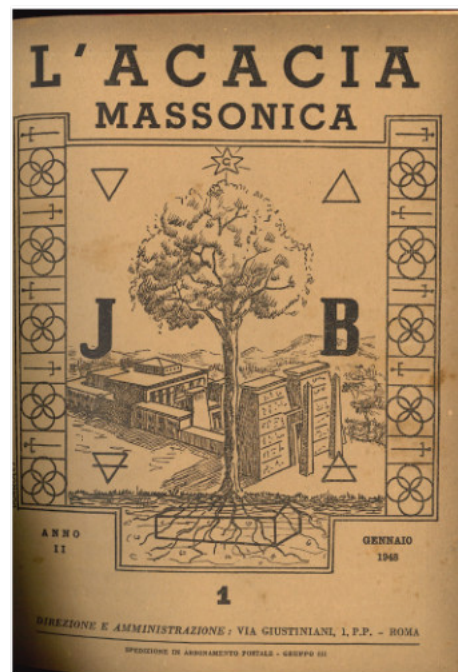
After a brief interruption, two pilot issues were published: *Rivista Massonica* (November 1965) and *Ordine Massonico* (December 1965). In January 1966, *Rivista Massonica* resumed publication with a new design, bearing the designation *Nuova Serie* on the cover, and continued until 1979.

In February 1980, the periodical adopted the title *Hiram*, together with a new editorial format. Publication continued until 1994, when the title was changed to *Massoneria Oggi*.

In 1998, the title *Hiram* was reinstated and retained until 2016, when a new publication entitled *Nuovo Hiram* was launched and remained in publication until January 2024.

From September 2026, at the initiative of Grand Master Antonio Seminario, the journal is once again published under the title *Hiram*.





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