

Universality

Unknown

The initiate is taught. “via” ritual and information given by fellow members, that Masonry is a universal Fraternity, world wide in its ramifications, admitting to its privileges worthy men of every country, sect and opinion, and providing a Fraternal intercourse based on common ideals which extend to all men, in all lands.

How far from the fact of this beautiful conception is well known to all who have occasion to study Freemasonry in its international aspects. Only occasionally does the average Mason come in contact with the absence of universality; then it is usually with something of a shock that he learns that while his brother from a neighboring state may visit and hold Masonic intercourse with a certain foreign Lodge and brother, he is forbidden the same privilege, “vice versa.”

Neither the prophet nor son of a prophet, this Bulletin can not state with any authority that a genuinely universal Craft may not be developed at some time in the future. But it can be said without fear of contradiction that while diverse peoples hold diverse ideas as to what constitutes Freemasonry, a genuinely universal Fraternity, without bars or restrictions of any kind, is not likely soon to come into being.

According to the theory, ass man initiated, passed and raised in any legitimate Grand Lodge in the United States (of which there are forty-nine) has the “right of visitation” into any symbolic Lodge in the world, and may and should recognize his brother Mason regardless of race, creed or religion.

But according to the facts, in some Grand Jurisdictions Masons are expressly forbidden to visit the Lodges of certain other Grand Lodges; in other Jurisdictions they may visit the Lodges of all Grand Lodges from which recognition has not been specifically withheld by their own Grand Lodge. Put another way, some Grand Jurisdictions warn: “You can visit only the Lodges of Grand Jurisdictions we recognize and with which we have Fraternal relations; while others say” “You may visit Lodges in all Grand Jurisdictions of the world except those we have expressly forbidden you to visit.”

In neither class, of course, is there “real” universality.

These pages are not to be taken as an argument that there “should” be universality in the full meaning of the word. It is impossible for the majority of Masons, Lodges and Grand Lodges to admit that certain other Grand Lodges and their brethren are Masonic, because of a fundamental difference of opinion as to what Masonry really is.

The classic instance, of course, is the Grand Orient of France, from which the large majority of English speaking Grand Lodges have withdrawn recognition.

In 1877 the Grand Orient of France eliminated from its constitutions the following:

“Freemasonry has for its principles the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and the solidarity of mankind.

“In place, it adopted:

“Whereas Freemasonry is not a religion and has therefore no doctrine or dogma to affirm in its Constitution, this assembly has decided and decreed that the second paragraph of Article 1 of the Constitution, (quoted above) shall be erased and that for the words of said article the following shall be substituted:

“Being an Institution essentially philanthropic, philosophic and progressive; Freemasonry has for its object, search after truth, study of universal morality, science and art; and the practice of benevolence. It has for principles absolute liberty of conscious and human solidarity. It excludes no person on account of his belief and its motto is ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.’”

New rituals were adopted from which all mention of God, a Supreme Architect, a Great Ruler of the Universe were deleted; and the Volume of Sacred Law was removed from the altar.

No man was excluded from the Lodges of the Grand Orient of France “because” he believed in God, but neither was any man “required to believe in God.

It was this which brought down upon the Grand Orient the withdrawal of Fraternal recognition by practically all English speaking Grand Lodges.

It seems only fair to clarify the position of the Grand Orient by quoting a few words said in defense of this revolutionary action, by one of its officials:

The Grand Orient of France, while it respects all philosophical beliefs, insists upon an absolute liberty of belief. This does not mean that we banish from our Lodges the belief in God. The United Grand Lodge of England, on the contrary, desires to make a belief in God in some manner compulsory. The Grand Orient of France is much more liberal, since in proclaiming the absolute liberty to believe or not to believe in God, and by so doing desires to respect its members in their convictions, their doctrines and their beliefs.”

English speaking Freemasonry is universal in its insistence upon a belief in a G.A.O.T.U.; the presence of a Volume of Sacred Law upon the Altar as indispensable to a Lodge at work; the division of Ancient Craft Masonry into three degrees; secrecy; the legend of the Third Degree,

that Masons can be made of men only. Let any Grand Lodge try to introduce a fourth degree or cut the list to two, remove the Holy Book, fail to require initiates to state a belief in Deity, make the ritual and the meetings public, substitute another subject for the Hiram Legend or initiate a woman; and every English speaking Grand Lodge would immediately withdraw recognition, just as recognition of the Grand Orient of France was withdrawn by practically every Anglo Saxon Lodge in the world when that body declared for freedom to believe or not to believe; and the Volume of Sacred Law was not necessary. The Grand Orient of France became, to those Grand Lodges which would have none of it, no longer a Masonic body.

Today a number of other matters are concerned in “recognition” of one Grand Lodge by another; other hurdles to get over before “universality” is practiced as between any two Grand Lodges. Important as many of these are, however, failure to recognize Grand A by Grand Lodge B because Grand Lodge A does not conform to all the requirements, does not necessarily mean that Grand Lodge B declares Grand Lodge A without pale, unMasonic, outlawed. It but sets forth that Grand Lodge B does not yet know, is not yet satisfied, whether or not Grand Lodge A fulfills all those conditions as well as practices all those principles which Grand Lodge B demands of those Grand Lodges it is willing to recognize.

If these additional requirements were all alike for all Grand Lodges, the Masonic world would be so much nearer the ideal of universality. They have grown more and more alike as the years have gone by, but the several Grand Lodges of this nation are not entirely of one mind as to what they demand of a foreign Grand Lodge before recognition can be extended. Indeed, a number of American Grand Lodges have “no” standards of recognition whatever; such usually consider each case on its merits, and generally blindly follow the report of the committee on Foreign Correspondence.

This results in certain anomalies; a Committee composed of brethren of very broad and liberal tendencies, for instance, will recommend recognition of a Grand Lodge which another committee, composed of brethren with very strict ideas, would have none of. Hence it is not infrequent that two neighboring Jurisdictions will differ, one recognizing a certain foreign Grand Lodge, and another refusing that recognition.

Standards of recognition of the Grand Lodges of the United States which have such instruments follow fairly well in principle, often in words also, the standards set up by New York and Massachusetts. These are given herewith:

MASSACHUSETTS

“Fraternal recognition may be extended to a foreign Grand Lodge when (a committee having first considered and reported thereon), it appears to the satisfaction of this Grand Lodge:

1. That the foreign Grand Lodge in question represents a substantial unity of the Freemasons of the territory over which it assumes jurisdiction; i.e., the Country,

Province, or State; or else shares such territory Jurisdiction with another Grand Lodge by mutual consent.

2. That it has been lawfully organized by three or more regular Lodges, or that it has been legalized by this Grand Lodge, or by a Grand Lodge recognized by this Grand Lodge.
3. That it is an independent self-governing organization, having sovereign Masonic authority within its Jurisdiction.
4. That its ritual is fundamentally in accord with the Ancient Landmarks, customs and usages of the Craft. This involves:
 - (a) Monotheism;
 - (b) The Volume of the Sacred Law a part of the furniture of the Lodge;
 - (c) Secrecy;
 - (d) The Symbolism of the operative art;
 - (e) The division of Symbolic Masonry into the three adherers of Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Mason;
 - (f) The Legend of the Third degree;
5. That it makes Masons of men only;
6. That it is non-sectarian and non-political; i.e., that its dominant purposes are charitable, benevolent, educational and religious.

NEW YORK

Before a recommendation of Fraternal recognition of a foreign Grand Body may be submitted, it shall be ascertained by the committee on Foreign Correspondence:

1. That such Grand Body has been formed lawfully by at least three just and duly constituted Lodges, or that it has been legalized by charter or other valid act issuing from the Grand Lodge of New York or from a Grand Body in fraternal relations with this Grand Lodge;
2. That it is a responsible, independent, self-governing organization with sole, undisputed and exclusive authority over the Symbolic Lodges of its Jurisdiction, and not in any sense whatever subject to, or dividing such authority with, a Supreme Council or other Power claiming ritualistic or other supervision or control;
3. That its membership is composed of men exclusively, and that it entertains no Masonic relations with Mixed Lodges or Bodies admitting women into their fellowship;

4. That it adheres in principle to the Ancient Landmarks, traditions, customs and usages of the Craft; as set forth in the Constitutions adopted by the Grand Lodge of England in 1723;
5. That it meets in particular the following tests which the Grand Lodge of New York considers essential to acceptance of a foreign Grand Body into its fellowship;
 1. Acknowledgment of a belief in God, the Father of men,
 2. Belief in immortality,
 3. Presence of the Three Great Lights of Masonry in the Lodges while at work, chief among them the Sacred Book of Divine Law,
 4. Exclusion of controversial, political and sectarian religious discussions from the Lodges and from all meetings held under the auspices of a Lodge.
6. While the Grand Lodge of New York claims exclusive Jurisdiction in the territory in which it is the Supreme Masonic authority, it recognizes that the law of exclusive territorial Jurisdiction, while firmly established in the United States and many other countries, is not universally accepted and does not constitute an Ancient Landmark of the Universal Craft. To the end that no unwarranted impediment may exclude from our fellowship such Grand Bodies as are sharing the same territory with others by mutual consent, we shall accept such mutual consent as entitling the several Grand Bodies included therein to Fraternal consideration, providing the applicant for recognition does not presume to establish Lodges in, a territory occupied by a lawful Grand Lodge, without the expressed assent of such Supreme Governing Body.

It is to be noted that all Grand Lodges of the continental United States recognize and are in Fraternal relations with all the others. This state of affairs has not always existed – indeed, the last two “sore spots” were removed within the last few years. But the differences which at one time separated some of our Grand Lodges from others have all disappeared, been adjusted or are better understood, so that peace and harmony prevails Masonically in this Nation. One United States Grand Lodge, for reasons which to her are wise and sufficient, has severed relations with the Grand Lodge of the Philippine Islands (as have the Grand Lodges of England, Ireland and Scotland) but all Grand Lodges in this nation unite in hoping the differences can be healed.

The period of rapid spread of Freemasonry from land to land, or course, is over, but with new political divisions resulting from a remaking of the world’s maps, new Grand Lodges are still coming into being, many of them not recognized by many of the older Jurisdictions, and as such, not on the “visiting list” of Masons of these obedience.

American Masonic universality exists; it is possible for a Mason from any Lodge in the Continental United States (including Alaska) to knock upon the door of any other Lodge in the

United States (including Alaska) and, if he proves himself, and the brethren and Master are willing to receive him, visit. But any United States Freemason desiring to visit Lodges abroad is wise if he first satisfies himself – which he may do by reading his current Grand Lodge “Proceedings”, or asking his Grand Secretary – that the Lodge or Lodges he proposes to visit owe obedience to a Grand Lodge with which his own Grand Lodge is in Fraternal relations.

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