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Is Freemasonry a Religion?¹

¿Es la masonería una religión?

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Abstract

When answering the question of whether freemasonry is a religion or not, one needs only to clarify the origins, nature, and purpose of Freemasonry and that of the Catholic Church. It is, evidently, an impossible task to achieve here. Since we cannot avoid approaching the topic, so we can only offer some guidelines for discussion in an attempt to answer these questions.

Resumen

La respuesta a la pregunta de si la masonería es o no una religión no requiere ni más ni menos que se aclararen el origen, la naturaleza y el propósito de la masonería y de las religiones. Es, evidentemente, una tarea imposible dentro del marco de este trabajo. No podemos dejar de abordar el tema en cuestión, por lo que sólo podemos responder a esta pregunta con algunas pautas para la discusión.

1. Answering to the question of whether or not masonry is a religion or not means nothing more and nothing less than clarifying the origin, nature, and purpose of masonry and *the* religions. It is, evidently, an impossible task to achieve here. We cannot stop approaching the topic in question, so we will only offer and attempt to answer these questions, some guidelines for discussion.

1 This is a revised version and translated into English of the essay by Aldo Alessandro Mola, “¿Es la masonería una religión?” in *Masonería y religión: convergencias, oposición, incompatibilidad?*, coord. José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 1996), 13-25.

Before anything else, we must precise that the question that constitutes the title to this paper and the whole course may be answered in at least three different ways.

First, there can be a merely doctrinal answer, meaning, based on the documents in which masonry defines itself. Apparently simple and quick, this solution actually leads to a very difficult road, full of obstacles. It could be agreed that masonry is just as defined by the United Grand Lodge of England.

It would be precise to base ourselves on a series of official documents or institutional sources that succeeded from the Anderson Constitutions of 1723 to the Declaration of 1985. In spite of placing itself in the institutional course, this answer may not provide unique data: the declarations of principles around God, religion, and antique duties changed over centuries as the inner avatars of masonry were developing, particularly in the latching between the Grand Lodge of London and the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE), which underwent divisions between “former” and “modern”.

Secondly, since UGLE was not, nor it is the only association that can be entitled as “masonry”, we cannot stop studying how other fellowships, orders, and institutions defined their relationships with God and religion. It is clear that the *answer* to the main question here shall be searched for through history and not in mere doctrine. Particularly, it is about finding out who, between masons, how, and when has masonry contributed to the character of religion. Also, from a history point of view, we need to ask ourselves who, between no masons, has accused or praised masonry for such character and with what type of legitimacy. Third, under the light of scientific reflection of the last two centuries around the nature and function of religions, it is difficult not to ask ourselves if, regardless of what masons could have maintained, if masonry has actually acquired the characters of religion and has developed such corresponding functions. If that is the case, we can disregard it as an imitation of positive or revealed religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, or Islamism, having a more plausible approach to new religious movements, which in the last few years have been taking a more important position in the scope of religiosity.

In such perspective, it is necessary to pay special attention to the function of masonry regarding *civil religion* (or *laic, or political*), in connection with the process of secularization and modernization of the last centuries and, above all, the present century. This is why, besides theology, history, and masonology, we need to turn to sociology, anthropology, and functionalism.

Finally, a field of investigation to understand whether or not masonry is a religion or not (not *a* religion anymore, but a religion itself) is rites and, in general, the proliferation of cultural sectarianism which is intrinsic to different masonry communities (*crafts*), including UGLE.

Another methodological and important problem is not only making sure masonry is a religion, as understood from formal documentation, but also if it has developed a role of religion, not only on the “classic” sense of religion, but in the sense of “new religious movements”.

We also need to point out that the matter of interest here is not just historiography in general, or masonology in particular. To tell the truth, the judgement on the legitimacy on the attitude regarding masonry by churches, political regimes of different ideals, and power organizations, depends on the answer that can be given. In other words, besides the interest of masonry, this problematic affects the society as a whole, and it translated in a verification of the degree of civil awareness in a determinate time.

Finally, a terminological precision must be mentioned: the word “religion” is not used here in the modern sense of religiosity, spirituality, *pietas*, but a strong connotation of *faith*. The one that refers to Revelation, the Promise, the Prophecy, to the discovery of a metaphysical, transcendent God, which presumes a system of fundamental principles and regulations derived from such, from a sense of initiation and belonging, plus a sanction mechanism of fidelity from the “initiated person” regarding the “Truth”.

This does not mean underestimating unrevealed religions anyway, but simply stating that ideologies risen from myths and politics with totalitarian effects have been acquiring the characters of a religion over the last centuries, meaning rules of life, salvation, condemn, thus, religion.

2. If we turn to the fundamental letters of UGLE and, particularly, the Fundamental Statement of June 21st, 1985, to answer to the question made, we may conclude that “Masonry is not a religion or a substitute of religion”. This famous statement rose “regarding recent comments on masonry and religion, and regarding studies performed by some churches on the possibility of reconciling masonry and Christianity”. By explicitly connecting with the Statement of September, 1962, which was later confirmed on December 1981, such document intended to express that the UGLE itself has always coherently denied the identification between masonry and religion. In spite of that, as read in the cited statement, masonry “requires the belief in a Supreme Being in its faith, of whom, however, there is no faith doctrine”.

UGLE denies masonry as a religion, but at the same time it demands “the belief in a Supreme Being”, adding that “the many names used to indicate the Supreme Being allow people from different faiths to come together in prayer (destined to God himself and as conceptualized by each individual), without the content of such prayers being a cause of disagreement”. Even without being *one* religion, masonry *imposes their affiliates the cult of a religion* regarding the budget of initiation. What for?

To avoid the “Supreme Being” to be elevated to the hinge of a masonic religion, the Statement mentioned completely clarifies that “there is no masonic God. The God of masons is the God of the religion manifested by himself. Masons hold a mutual respect for the Supreme Being as He continues to be supreme in the respective religions”.

Going back to the Old Charges, the Statement reiterates that “during the works of the lodge, talking about religion is off the table” and that “*there is no mission of masons to try and bring different religious creeds together*”. The consequence of “not having [...] a single masonic God” is that masonry does not intend to be “syncretism” between different faiths, nor a super-

religion, an absolute and superior Truth to the “truths” (or “beliefs”) of particular faiths, which is against what esoteric and ritualist people defend, who combine aspects of different monotheist and paganist religions.

It is true, though, that the Order “is far from being detached from religion”, and that it actually “favors” it as understood from the mentioned Statement from 1985, masonry cannot find the following constitutional elements of religion: a) a *theological doctrine*; b) the *offering of sacraments*; c) the *promise of salvation* through works, secret knowledge and different means”. However, it is still evident that UGLE stands out exclusively from positive religions, from revealed monotheism: if anything, it does not impose a specific faith, but demands masons to believe in a Supreme Being and to prioritize their charges to God.

The tenor of the Statement of 1985 is coherent in every way to the English masonic tradition, which is based on the Payne General Regulations from 1720 and the Anderson Constitutions of 1723. As it is known, the First Title of these son the *Duties of a Freemason (on God and religion)*, it foresees that a mason, on their condition as is, has the obligation to obey the moral law and, if they correctly understand the Art, they will never be a stupid atheist or a non-religious profligate. Although on old times masons were forced to follow the religion of the country or nation they were on, no matter what it was, today it is more appropriate to force them only to those religions all people agree upon and to let them have their particular opinions, meaning, being good, sincere men, men of honor and honesty, no matter the denomination or convictions that may tell them apart, and so masonry becomes a *Union Center and the mean to establish an honest friendship between people that otherwise would have stayed perpetually apart*. If that was the case, it is not about a religion that imposes theological principles, but a club that prescribes social regulations.

In opposition, the Constitutions themselves, in their second edition from 1738, establish that the “mason, in their condition, has the duty to observe moral law and, if they correctly understand the Corporation, will never be a stupid atheist or a non-religious profligate, *nor will they act against will*”.

Because of that text difference, it has been repeatedly said that between 1720-1723 and 1738, it went from the theism of former corporations and guilds to deism, which eliminated the explicit faith on the God-Person as enunciated in the Bible and taught by the Church. According to this interpretation, the deist inspiration also comes from section 2 of the title *Duties of a Freemason*. “When lodge is constituted -as read- no founders, personal matters or other issues regarding Religion or Nations or State politics can be introduced, being us, as freemasons, part of such Universal Religion; we are also part of all Nations, Speeches, Backgrounds, and Languages, we averse all politics, like everything that cannot, nor will it ever lead Lodge to wellbeing”.

Based only on such texts, we could reach the conclusion that masonry never was *one* religion, nor did it intend to be considered as such. It actually always prevented, and will continue to

prevent its affiliates to mind religious business in the lodge, and the only requirement for their admission would be to not be atheist and to believe in the Supreme Being.

Actually, from the first lines of the long preamble on “history, law, duties, orders, regulations, and uses of the very venerable fellowship of freemasons, free and accepted” comes a definition of the Supreme Being, the Great Architect of the Universe, which is destined to be posed as an alternative to the God from the Bible.

Although there are no vocals on the meetings of the Grand Lodge of England between 1717 and 1783, there are no references regarding the Bible or God or the Great Architect, who is defined as “our Supreme Master” since the first edition of *Ahiman Rezon* from 1756, meaning, the *Constitutions of the Grand Lodge*, also known as of the *Ancient*, and prepared by Dermott. Effectively, its text leaves no room for doubt regarding the inspiration not generally theist or deist, but *explicitly catholic* of the new Constitutions, by stating that “as masons, we are *the oldest catholic religion* taught to this day”. This precedent explains the content of the agreement stipulated on December 27th, 1813, between *Ancient* and *Modern*, where, as per our interest, it is stated that: “[...] a mason is obligated to never act against the commandments of their conscience. No matter their religion or manner of adoration, they will not be excluded from the Order because they believe in the Glorious Architect of Heaven and Earth, and they comply with all the sacred duties of morals”. The Great Architect is God, undoubtedly, it is God the creator of Heaven and Earth.

Throughout the following two centuries, UGLE accepted or refused to tighten the fraternal bonds with other masonic communities, coherently applying those principles. There is where posterior statements on the acknowledgement of other Grand Lodges take hold. For example, the Statement from 1929 establishes on the first section that: “The belief on the Great Architect of the Universe [GAOTU] and his *revealed will* shall be essential conditions for the admitting of their members”. The attribution of the Revelation configures the Great Architect as the “Creating” God, and not as a simple “Regulator”. By breaking bonds with the Grand Lodge of Uruguay on October 18th, 1950, the UGLE hardened its theist posture, stating that: “Every person requesting to enter masonry *must profess the faith in the Supreme Being, invisible, Almighty God*. There are no exceptions to this matter. Masonry is not a philosophic movement which is open to all orientations and opinions. Real masonry is a cult to preserve and diffuse the belief on the existence of God, which must be that of a monotheist religion”. The UGLE also concludes that “masonry is a cult based on religious foundations”. This is why every attempt to present the GAOTU as a mere symbol, a “generic metaphor” alluding an undefined “Supreme Being” was rejected. This does not mean “religion”, however UGLE assigned itself the function of clergy and priesthood in order to protect and diffuse a preexisting religion. Where is its pretended laicism?

Because of its fear to be acknowledged as deist, the Grand Lodge of England -and those from Scotland and Ireland- imposed the monotheist faith on their affiliates and those initiated to obedience linked to it. It is a constitutional and irrevocable principle of masonry from which “the duty to preserve and diffuse the belief in the existence of God” comes, so that the relationship of the mason and God was inverted regarding its original configuration. In

the meantime, on the early XVIII century, the initiated were forbidden to talk about religious matters since they were detrimental to the lodge. Now, masons do not need to care for that, since they all must be monotheist and missionaries of true religion. Analogically, just as then it was expressly denied that masonry was *one* religion, now religion –precisely monotheism, meaning, *the* revealed religion and not any form or conception of religion– turns into the budget of initiation itself, and the propagation of religion raises in reason of masonry.

However, the identity between masonry and religion was never kept. The Real Art configures itself more as an organization whose objective is to disclose monotheist faiths, particularly the Christian faith. Even so, it is still unclear if that is an exclusive, main, or collateral objective.

In conclusion, we can confirm the *masonry is religious* without becoming a religion itself. The purpose of the UGLE is not to reconcile the faith of two individuals into a single, superior, or different religion. There is still separation between the Great Architect, religiosity of the Order, and self-identification of masonry as a religion. This would be an ulterior step that has yet to be taken and that, supposedly, is not into the perspective of the UGLE, which understands that the *compatibility* with diverse religions roots their adepts into the required religiosity. In other words, the lodge shall not provide initiation to religion, nor learning to the affiliates, since they already practice the belief in God somewhere else.

3.1 Research on the link between masonry and religion would be quite incomplete if it stuck to official documents from the UGLE. This would lead to unreasonably discriminating *legitimate masonries* that are not acknowledged by the UGLE, and would indicate poor historic sensibility. In fact, masonry, as every human institution, has been transforming throughout time, adjusting to principles and customs of every period of time. Thus, it is necessary for the historian to investigate masons by focusing on ideas manifested by them.

And so, if the requirements of religion from the XVIII century identified themselves in the Revelation, the Vicar, the sacred texts, the doctrinal body, the promise of salvation, cults, rites, and catechism, we can conclude the numerous mason organizations from France, Germany, and Italy undoubtedly held the character of religion. Some of them may be recognized in the Catholic Church, other create their own identity different from others even without resigning to adopt fragments of the biblical tradition. There are also anti-churches that also show mason features despite the rejection of masonic organizations of the same name. In fact, no one can intend to stop the origin denomination of an association that is not founded in the Revelation of the divine verb, but in recompilations of regulations which are made-up by their own adepts.

Some of those “anti-church masonries” are not limited to be proposed themselves as “centers of union” and intend to be depositaries of Truth. They are religions, or at least they aspire to be. Without going into detail, there is the question, what do Martínez de Pasqually, Claude de Saint-Martin, Willermoz, Swedenborg represent other than the effort to organize the ceremony-annalistic ritual until it gets surrounded by strong suggestions that deviate the possibility of “salvation”? We are before an attempt to elevate masonry to a new religion with the inevitable

attachment to the Judaic-Christian tradition. Through archeology and the knightly tradition, Michael Ramsey and new Templars try to bring a new appeal to the arid and artificial catechism of the first essays of theology without God. In the framework of the search of pseudo-religious practices without God, the figure of Cagliostro is emblematic as one of the main authors of the reduction of faith to credulity, from mystery to a simple arcane, from sacred to mere ceremonial, and, lastly, from the search of God to curiosity or an intellectual game. Apart from materialistic, nostalgic of alchemy, and rationalist permeated from a mysticism with no idols, the masonic world from the XVIII century saw an outstanding figure in Joseph de Maistre, who tried to organize the chaos of the knightly masonry of the duke Brunswick. During such times, lodges were breeding grounds for the most extemporary inventions, but also to turn to the “religion of ancestors”.

In one word, masonry back then -illustrated, mystical, sacred, purifying- was not a true religion although it was a “weak” cult *pour dames*. A more atomized religiosity was in fact condensed from another part.

3.2. Whomever alluded masonry as an alternative religion was never initiated nor was glorified from visiting the temples. Such “auxiliary mason”, Jean Jacques Rousseau, recklessly celebrated as a brother along Voltaire, was, of course, not an example of tolerance of humanity. By formulating the idea of “general will”, the philosopher of Geneva was the inspiration of terminal and most grueling phases of the French revolution. Many masons were not persuaded during that occasion and afterwards under Napoleon or even later, during the Restoration. Furthermore, some of them actively participated in such organization. They were half-regretful, half-convinced of playing a superior role in historic awareness.

Thanks to Fichte, Krause, and Herder, masonry offered the guiding ideas during the times of revolution: the necessary awareness between State and Nation, between the will of God and the spirit of the people. This was a guiding concept present in all countries, the Americas -for example Mexico and Argentina- until Greece and the Balkans, who had lost almost all of their European features after being submitted to Turkish domination for centuries.

Masonry incarnated a national, liberating, and progressionist revolution which resided itself in guiding countries: Prussia which, under the direction of Bismark turned into an empire and attacked the Catholic Church in the *Kulturkampf*, and Italy with Cavour, Garibaldi, Crispi, and De Sanctis. The historic process is defined by the publication of works that unveil a thorough perspective and concern to the political and military sphere, as well as to the “subtle history”. In 1859 *La Franc-Maçonnerie doit-elle être considérée comme une religion universelle?* (“Should franc-masonry be considered as a universal religion?”) from E. Rebold rose. For a while, many works theorized the convergence of Egyptian, Judaic, and Christian religions in masonry. That way, the Christians were reminded that in spite of schism and the proliferation of sects, their religion was no more differentiated than it could be reconciled with different or even opposite religions.

During the post-Napoleonic Restoration (1814-1815), many affiliated plotted liberal and constitutional conspiracies. Masonry had turned into a center of sect groups in France, England,

and the Americas. Exiled, conspirators, ideologists, heretics, and utopians transformed the lodges into places of human, global integration, just as in previous centuries by monks in monasteries and convents.

The life of lodges was marked by oaths, conjuries, imprecations, and even prayers: masonry did not have much to do with the clubs from the XVIII century, and was getting closer to becoming a religious sect. Finally, it devoted itself to the cause of “homeland”, turning into the organizational foundation of the religion of unrepentant patriotism.

3.3. In 1861, J. Ch. Fauvety, recently biographed by André Combes, published the breviary future of masonry as “laic religion”: *Révolution universelle, Réalisation. Qu'est-ce que la Maçonnerie?* (“Universal revolution. Realization, what is masonry?”). In *Requiem per un imperio defunto* (“Requiem for a deceased empire”), the Hungarian historian F. Fejtő sustains that the first world war responded to the objective of universal masonry to overthrow the Russian, German, Austrian-Hungarian empires, and substitute them by the Republics by following the example of Washington and Lamartine with the mediation of La Fayette. Fejtő retakes the historical interpretation advocated a hundred years previous by Fauvety, the founder of the laic, properly masonic religion. For him and his followers, masonry is a *faith*, and as such, it imposes its initiated to *believe*: in freedom, equality, and fellowship; but also in work, union, and prosperity (WUP in Spain and Italy) in the fight against the lies of the clergy, in the emancipation from all slavery and, at the end of the XIX century, in Science and Progress. This form of revolution shaded by reason and scientific knowledge becomes the God of a widely diffused cult, who is capable of promising salvation, to distinguish between good and evil. While on the XVIII masonry is an elitist mystic, during the following century it becomes mass catechism. Their dissemination instruments are mandatory, free elementary education, newspapers, popular libraries, feasts, commemorations... Masons live a great part of their “faith” out of the temples: adorned with bands, aprons, necklaces, they parade on the streets, gather around the statues of heretics burnt by the Inquisition, they apologize the victims of reaction, they exalt the Light.

A bas calotte (Down with clergy!) is not only an anti-clergy slogan, but the affirmation of truth, science, and progress. In hundreds of books and tens of thousands of articles masonry is referred to as the “religion of progress”. Besides acknowledging marriage and children, the mason aspires to the masonic burial, where their remains, surrounded by the fellows of the lodge, shall be incinerated as an extreme defiance to the Church.

Through school, the army, and publicists, masonry organizes itself everywhere as a laic religion, an enemy of external dogmas, but quite decided to impose their own.

Also, the “nationalization of the masses” from mid XIX century is the work of masonry, which also secularizes the Hebrew world by substituting the “chosen people” from Israel into the “masonic people”. The modernization goes through the deification of men celebrated in lodges as long as masons define “new Templars”, militants of democracy, priests, or prophets of truth and progress.

In some countries, masonry gets to be the official religion of the new society. Their adepts are offered eternal salvation through the memory of fellows in the lodge, the Grand Family, of masonized Humanity.

4.1. Ironically, anti-masonry was the one who conferred masonry the character of religion. Without meaning to do so, by the reiterated and definite condemn of their enemies, they turned masonry into an alternative to the very Church of Christ. Far from being hurt by this accusation, during the XIX century, the masons bribed by being the supreme synthesis of all heresies. An evident fact of such attitude is the *Libro del massone italiano*, by Ulisse Bacci, which is almost the written echo of the monument by Giordano Bruno raised by the great master Ettore Ferrari.

Because of this particular event, whose news circulated around the world, the exasperation of the duality Catholic Church – masonry unveiled the *gnostic* nature of masonry, even when between masons, almost no one knew what gnosis and Gnosticism was. Before such a shameless attempt to falsify reality, and even taking advantage of the affiliates, even Pope Leo XIII deemed appropriate to distinguish between ignorant masons and mischievous sectarians.

Anyway, what matters to be highlighted is that anti-masonry contributed to consolidate masonry as a totalitarian laic religion, forced, by its own survival, to *écraser l'infâme* (“crush the shameful”).

Masons at the end of the century used to believe in what their ancestors had rejected: to know that they were the red thread of evolution, of conspiracies, of the political-religious sectarism, as defended by Barruel, Hauqwitz, Parascandolo, and many other writers of *Civiltà Cattolica*. Under such perspective, Primly Andy replied to *Whumper's* in 1889 by saying that masonry is indeed a religion: the religion of humanity. The same way, Albert Lantoine later in 1925 traced a memorable synthesis of French masonry. This author quotes many renowned writers that had sustained that some ideologists of masonry included Numa Pompilo, Licurgo, Zoroastro, Moses, and, why not? Adam, the first mason man. For thousands of years, instead of building the “constructors of the temple”, they had dedicated themselves to overthrow reigns, empires, and churches. They were doing so because, by repeating the emulators Voltaire and Rousseau in 1878, masonry would be the Supreme Truth. A suggesting synthesis of this vision can be found in the *Studio sul massonismo, il so, il suo culto, I sui costume (citazioni massoniche)* (“Study on masonry, means, its cult, its customs. Masonic quotes”). Its author, hidden behind the mysterious acronym I.G.V.S.M.A. starts by quoting the encyclical by Pius IX from November 21st, 1873 –where masonry is defined as a “synagogue of Satan”– and crediting it not only with a religious nature, but configuring it as the anti-religion by excellence, hence, religion itself: the religion of homeland, laic and totalitarian.

4.2. Reached by religious and political excommunications, masonry had no choice but to shelter under the State. That was easier where this had risen as a process of secularization led by anti-clergy forces such as masonry itself. For example, this was the case in the France of the Third Republic, divided between Sacred Heart and laic laws, and then torn by the *affaire*

Dreyfus; but also in Italy, where the cult of Homeland was prefixed by the cult of the Church, also aggravated by rites, ceremonies, processions...

Once again, the sides were the victim of history in the same amount. In the one hand, the Holy See was unable to deprive itself from the nostalgia by the temporal power and became the victim of a conjuring entangled by Satan serving masonry. On the other hand, in order to free itself from the enclosure of the Catholic Church, it used the State to secularize the masses.

Placing itself on the same line, Fascism was a laic religion taken into paroxysm. Just when it intended to be a depository of the destinies of nation, masonry was condemned to fight to death against the forces that revendedicated the same function, both in Italy and Germany, in Spain and in Portugal.

Also, by being the holder of a global concept of men, and thus, religion -laic or not, whatever-masonry inevitably crashed against the totalitarian communism. This consideration is also subscribed under the title of masonry as a "laic religion". To ensure the unconditional support of subjects, totalitarianism must eliminate all form of double belonging. To do so, it imposes to choose between their own anthropology and that of other totalitarians. A similar conflict radicalized itself so that masons were the ones who paid a higher price against Nazi Fascism.

Whether a sect or a religious minority, masonry could not accept any commitments that would question its function as a representative of the progress of freedom. By proclaiming itself radically opposed to all totalitarianism and decided to eradicate it, it also had to accept the risk of the fight. And it could not be far from a deadly duel. A Manichaeism would derive itself from there, which, far from being subscribed in the DNI of the institution, explains itself precisely as risen from the facts.

5. During the last fifty years, "new religious movements" (N.R.M.) have proliferated present in the United States since the last century. It is a complex overview, dominated by 6.000 African native cults, 10.000 "religions", plus 250 Christian "denominations". When tracing a summary chart of religion in the XX century, Mircea Eliade has reported the indiscriminate use of the word religion, even though he has acknowledged that is late to find another term, so "religion" continues to be useful as long as we keep in mind that does not necessarily imply faith in God, gods, or spirits. It simply alludes to the experience of sacred and it is closely linked to the notions of "being", "meaning", and "truth".

Once reduced to "experience of the sacred", religion ends up coinciding with religiosity at the same time that the being turns into appearance and the truth into opinion. This process started to substitute the revelation to the search, relativity to certainty, sophism to "Being", as known by Parmenides. Starting from the mason Lessing, it was translated to an attitude of confrontation between peers of European philosophy of Greek and Christian roots regarding those outside Europe. These were no longer demonized but researched. Between Charles de Brosses and François Dupuis on one side, and Ms. Muller, Durkheim, Husserl, Lévy-Brühl on the other, there is a continuous link that is based on the substance in the acknowledgement of the character of religion to fetishism to the general "religious behavior", and a "phenomenology

of the sacred” that provides religious value to all cults, rites, gestures, symbols. In a similar perspective, every human act covers in a religiosity bath, so even the most agnostic of men can draw themselves as a mystic, since in their daily behavior (including crimes) ritual footprints, symbolic allusions, mythical traditions, and in one word, manifestations of a diffuse religion can be seen.

This extensive interpretation of religion can of course work to remove, even to the most skeptical person, the illusion of not being religious, the hope of separate from God or from the gods, meaning, being really indifferent to faith. However, it is not useful to understand how *one* religion (or *the* religion) differs from common language, truth from error, good from evil, the virtue of the *will to sin*. On that path every act is legitimated, even the most repugnant one: even a criminal can act in ways that can be subscribed under the title of rite, symbol, and, lastly, the search of God. In another way, the Romans used to say *homo sum, nihil humanum a me alienum puto*. *Sacer* precisely means “marked by God”, meaning intangible, but by a divine decision. That is worth for both Cain and Abel, for Remus and Romulus. Once such path is undertaken, it is difficult to differentiate between a holy mass and a black mass: anyway, in both cases you are before the manifestations of different yet complementary cultures, hence equally legitimate regarding the expression of the eagerness for religiosity.

Before a similar scenario, it is not strange to consistently question whether masonry is a religion itself. In 1963, Ubaldo Triaca affirmed that, regarding humanism, masonry is the religion of humanity, retaking the work from J.P. Mazaroz, *Mutualité, solidarité, reciprocité: la Franc-Maçonnerie religion social du principe republicain* (“Mutuality, solidarity, reciprocity: the French-masonry social religion of the republican principle”) (Paris, 1880). The possibility to standardize it to religion explains why over the last decades almost all historians of religion have included masonry into their works.

Opening the issue of whether the question of Theodor Braebner, *Is Masonry a Religion?* (St. Louis, 1947) can be answered in a positive way, what matters here is to underline that the inclusion of masonry in the “new religions” leads to the definite closing of all possibility of dialogue and reconciliation with the Church with the ulterior confirmation for masons. On the other hand, the identification of masonry as a “new religion” approaches the possibility for masons to find shelter under the religious freedom. Thus, interestingly, the old enemies now find new alliances in view of their battle against the manifestations of the sacred. Whether this corresponds to an “altered state of awareness”, there is no difference between a theologian leaning on the books of their library and a shaman on drugs frenetically dancing among the crown, heaving while waiting for the miraculous tears of a statue, and the clergy that, in a procession psalmody between the ships of Saint Peter. Masons also fit there, adorned with ritual clothing, aligned between the columns of temples filled with symbolic objects.

From that implacable difference, anti-masons back then raise a new compatibility as a hypothesis today. The moment a “new religion” is standardized, this new form to conceive masonry does not take into consideration the Statement from 1985 by the UGLE. A perception of the religious fact different from the previous is subscribed, where religion is composed by

the sum of religious behaviors or, if preferred, form becomes the norm.

In accordance of that, the main question may be answered negatively as long as religion is considered as Revelation. Only on such case, and under the motto of double belonging, masonry is compatible with religions (including the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman). Otherwise, if by religion we simply understand a “subjective perception of sacred”, masonry must then be identified as just another religion. This would make it compatible with other religions externally only, as long as there is a principle that acknowledges religious freedom and imposes everyone the respect for other cults.

There is always the possibility of masonry being conceived as an anti-religion, militant atheism, denial of the sacred, extreme fight for the emergence of materialism. On the eve of the third millennial, no mason community acknowledges these completely mistaken principles from the XIX century. Also, Gnosticism, even though it highlights masonry regarding supreme religion.

If this conclusion is seemingly a little untrue, it is due to the complexity and multiplicity of the faces of masonry. In a time that is poor of certainty such as this one, the doctrinal codes and of masonic behaviors, along to the trend of their high dignitaries, can only promote it as a “religion of search”, the one of “doubt”.

I trust we too, are allowed to conclude with a doubt and to offer these ideas as material for a debate in order to inaugurate a course as promising as this one.

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