

THE ROLE OF FREEMASONRY IN UNIVERSAL PEACEKEEPING

Masonry is an Applied Science

*“Let us act as the dictates of right reason prompt us,
cultivate harmony, practise charity,
and live in peace with all men.”*

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Mr. President,
Most Worshipful, the Grand Master,

Distinguished Brethren

The essence of all Masonic philosophy is derived from and based upon two fundamental questions around which all our rites and ceremonies revolve: *Whence come we?* and *Whither are we directing our course?* Freemasonry is, first and foremost, an initiatory order, engaged in the business of self-improvement through self-discipline. Properly considered, Freemasonry is a self-transformational art and science. As Speculative Masons we are persistently admonished to ask ourselves, *Where did I come from? What am I doing here? Where am I going from here?* In other words, Freemasonry challenges us to explore the great mysteries of life. It teaches us that we are here to enrich the world, with a spirit of hope and achievement by serving our fellow travellers.

Perhaps the theme of this World Conference is better framed in the form of a question: *What is the Role of Freemasonry in Universal Peacekeeping?* This paper will endeavour to show how that role may be exercised and our influence in the cause of good be exerted.

Freemasonry is not an abstract. We must be ever mindful that it is men; how men as Masons think, speak, and act. Every man that identifies himself as a Freemason is someone's definition of Freemasonry. It has been said that every man who kneels at the Altar of Freemasonry arises a different man, henceforth obligated to play out the game of life according to an uncompromising code of ethics based upon the *square* of morality and virtue,

the *level* of equality and respect, and the plumb rule of honesty and integrity. We are charged ‘*to practise outside of the lodge those excellent precepts which are ever inculcated within it.*’ In this sense, Freemasonry is a way of life. Mahatma Ghandi, the iconic Indian nationalist and social reformer, expressed it thus: “*We do not need to proselytise either by our speech or by our writing. We can only do so really with our lives. Let our lives be open books for all to study.*” ¹

I suggest that Freemasonry, while it may be considered to be a refined gentleman’s philosophical society, is in practice an applied science – actions not mere words. Bro. Albert Pike stated the object of our labours simply and succinctly: *To learn and to do.* The precepts embodied in the timeless yet timely core values of Freemasonry are clear; our rituals are replete with directions. As Masons we have been taught what we ought to do if we are to be true to our principles and press toward the mark of our high calling.

These lines from the Sacred Writings prescribe the ideal of that high calling:

*Whatsoever things are true,
Whatsoever things are honest,
Whatsoever things are just,
Whatsoever things are pure,
Whatsoever things are lovely,
Whatsoever things are of good report;
if there be any virtue,
and if here be any praise,*

¹ Mahatma Ghandi (1869-1948)

*think on these things.*²

It is significant that the first of the three fundamental principles of Freemasonry is *Brotherly Love* – sincere fraternal affection for our fellow creatures, respecting each other. Modern information technology in our time has created a global community giving a sense of kinship and neighbourliness with all. The Masonic bond of brotherhood transcends all ideological boundaries – religious, political, and social. Often referred to as The Mystic Tie, it is the real secret of Freemasonry – a real secret because it can never be expressed in words, but must be experienced to be understood.

In the Ancient Charges we read: *“Masonry is the centre of union between good men and true, and the happy means of conciliating friendship among those who must otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.”* The following edifying statement was published in Dublin in 1867: *“Overlapping all geographical divisions, rising above all religious and political differences, and ignoring all diversities of race, it established a common bond of kindly intercourse among the Craft.”* Herein is the potent force inherent in Freemasonry that if exploited, could answer the question posed by this Conference theme: *What is the Role of Freemasonry in Universal Peacekeeping?*

The divisive nature of party politics and sectarian religion has no place in a brotherhood based on the ideas and ideals of Freemasonry. It is not in the nature of Freemasonry to be aggressively proactive in political debate.

² Philippians 4: 8

Grand Lodges have jurisdiction over their own members only. Rather, Masons are admonished to fulfill the duties of a good citizen, to obey the laws of the country, and set an example for others to emulate. Gandhi proved the efficacy of this: *“What is true of the individual will be tomorrow true of the whole nation if individuals will but refuse to lose heart and hope.”*

The symbolism of the ashlar – the foundation stones of Masonic philosophy – illustrates the process. Masons are builders; builders of character – building a better person, a better community, a better society, a better world. By improving himself, the true Mason is an example to all he meets. Admittedly, this is a long term process, not a short term quick fix. However, the symbolism of stone illustrates the enduring quality of good character.

In North America we have a propensity to compile lists of eminent men of influence who were or are members of the Craft: Kings and Princes, Presidents and Prime Ministers, statesmen and politicians, scientists, musicians, authors, poets, and artists – leaders of the people. Surely these listings of the great and famous are not merely to give us bragging rights, or to establish credibility – or used as a public relations tool to attract members.

But what is the real significance of these lists in a fraternity that celebrates brotherhood and equality? From such we should draw inspiration. How did these men exemplify and apply the lessons learned in the lodge to their wider public sphere of influence? Few of us will ever be listed among the great and famous, but each and every one of us, acting for the greater good, can make a difference in our small corner of the universe. It was John F. Kennedy, thirty-fifth President of the United States of America,

who said: *“One person can make a difference, and everyone must try.”*
Shakespeare reminds us that:

*“How far that little candle throws its beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world”*³

Our fraternity was formed and maintained *‘in perfect unity and concord.’* It is often enlightening to trace the etymology of the words of our ritual. *Concordia* was the Goddess of Harmony, worshipped from early times in Rome. She was a symbol of peace and agreement between the two classes of Rome – plebeians or commoners and patricians or nobles. Thus, our use of the word *concord* in the Masonic context implies not only peace and harmony, but also equality.

In his latest novel, The Lost Symbol, published in 2009, Dan Brown the American writer, has Professor Robert Langdon, the fictional Harvard symbologist and Brown’s alter ego, respond to a question about the religious beliefs of the Masons from one of his students with this statement:

*“refreshingly open-minded ... In this age when different cultures are killing each other over whose definition of God is a better one, one could say the Masonic tradition of tolerance and open-mindedness is commendable. ... Moreover, Masonry is open to men of all races, colors, and creeds, and provides a spiritual fraternity that does not discriminate in any way.”*⁴

This message is one that displays the real face of Freemasonry. Brown is not a Freemason, but he has stated our principle of universal tolerance clearly and succinctly. Of the first printing of five million copies,

³ William Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice

⁴ Brown, Dan. *The Lost Symbol – A Novel.* p. 31

over one million were sold in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada on its first day. We must be grateful for the positive support Brown has provided.

In his insightful study entitled, On the Culture of Harmony: Where are Human Beings Headed, published in 2011, Dr. Gordon Wang, founder of the Global Union of Harmony, writes: “*Since the beginning of history, human beings have distinctively and deeply embraced the concept of Harmony, advocating Harmony, pursuing concord, and upholding peace. For years, human beings have related to and drawn strength from words that promote harmony – ‘peaceful coexistence,’ ‘work together with one accord in time of difficulties,’ ‘peaceful competition,’ ‘harmonious symbiosis,’ ‘harmonious coordination,’ ‘concord,’ ‘peaceful living,’ ‘harmony of people,’ ‘universal peace and harmony,’ and ‘compatibility,’ for example.*”⁵

In Canada we are justly proud of the role on the world stage that our nation has played as international peacekeepers. During the Suez Crisis in 1956, Lester B. Pearson, Canada's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, proposed that a force sponsored by the UN, made up of soldiers from non-combatant countries, could separate the warring armies and supervise the cease-fire. The UN General Assembly accepted his proposal, as did the various belligerents, and peacekeeping was born, an untried and untested idea. For his vision of a world where countries would enter a conflict in order to bring stability and peace, Lester Pearson would receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957. Since then Canada has been at the forefront of peacekeeping

⁵ Wang, Gordon. On the Culture of Harmony: Where Are Human Beings Headed? Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse Inc., 2011. pp. 7-8.

operations around the world. Soldiers, police and civilians have all played prominent roles in separating armies and in the resolution of conflicts. Over 125,000 Canadian personnel have served in peacekeeping operations for the United Nations; this is more than any other country.

When, as Prime Minister of Canada, Pearson proposed the distinctive Red Maple Leaf as Canada's National Flag, the adoption of which in 1965 was largely due to the adroit negotiations of our Masonic Bro. John Ross Matheson, these words from the Book of Revelation were quoted: "*The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*"⁶

At the end of his book, quoted earlier, Dr. Wang proposes a number of 'Concrete Tasks of Disseminating the Philosophy of the Culture of Harmony at the Current Stage.' One of these proposals suggests that "*We must organize volunteers who work toward actively spreading and popularizing the Culture of Harmony.*"⁷ I suggest that such a body of volunteers exists and has existed for several centuries, the representatives of which are gathered here at this World Conference. To quote Ghandi again: "*A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith on their mission can alter the course of history.*"

In his book, Rocket Men published on the fortieth anniversary of landing a man on the moon, Craig Nelson quotes one of the American astronauts, who, after circling the Earth and viewing our planet from space wrote this: "*Up there you go around every hour and a half, time after time. ...*

⁶ Revelation 22:2

⁷ Wang. p. 96

*When you go around in an hour and a half you begin to recognize that your identity is with the whole thing. You look down there and you can't imagine how many borders and boundaries you crossed. At the Mideast you know there are hundreds of people killing each other over some imaginary line you can't see. From where you see it, the thing is a whole and it's so beautiful. And you wish you could take one from each side and say, 'Look at it from this perspective. Look at that. What's important?'"*⁸

As a Global Fraternity, we too have a world view. The ideology of Freemasonry is centred on the metaphor of Brotherhood and the family. We believe that the human race is one family, the children of one parent – sons of Adam. The belief in a common Divine Essence is the first great link that teaches mankind that the whole human race is a Brotherhood.

Let us go forth from this World Conference of Masonic Grand Lodges resolved, at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances, as men and as Masons *"to act as the dictates of right reason prompt us, practise charity, cultivate harmony, and live in peace with all men."* Then will the great Doctrine of the Universal Brotherhood of Man be realized in our small sphere of influence for the greater good.

In conclusion to summarize what this paper suggests, the lines of Bro. Robert Burns, penned more than two centuries ago, express our faith and hope:

⁸ Nelson, Craig. *Rocket Men: The Epic Story of the First Men on the Moon*. New York: Viking, Penguin Group, 2009.

*Then let us pray that come it may,
(As come it will for a' that,)
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,
Shall bear the gree, an' a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
That man to man, the world o'er,
Shall brithers be for a' that.*

So mote it be.