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The Era of Conspiracy

The States or Society position against Masonic organizations: What should be our responses? Or Not?

As I wrote in a recent book, since its ‘inception’ (and I do not refer here to its official establishment in 1717, but rather to the early decades of the Seventeenth century), Freemasonry has been, and continues to be today, subjected to a series of criticisms, attacks and denigration.

Essentially, this ‘anti-Masonry’ was first manifested on a par with the creation of Freemasonry, and was to be its constant companion throughout its entire existence, right up until the present day, assuming a wide variety of forms. The reason why this took place, and continues to take place today, would represent an interesting topic for an in-depth study of sociology and social psychology.

The first historically reliable anti-masonic document was the ‘*Proceedings of the Presbytery of Kelso*’ dated February 24th 1652. The document narrates the so-called ‘Kelso incident’, relating to a debate directed against Reverend

James Ainslie, a minister of the Church of Scotland, who had become a Freemason. The accusation was based on the belief that the Masonic rituals were communicated through a series of *equivocal* signs and, in particular, a terrible and scandalous secret ‘Word’. If the truth be told, the *scandalous* and *blasphemous* word was nothing more than the ‘*Mason Word*’, used by the Masons as a sign of recognition¹. Subsequently, following a thorough investigation, the Kelso Presbytery closed the debate with a clear and detailed response: “...*There is neither sinne nor scandal in that word...*”. Over a period of three hundred years thousands of similar documents have been produced in varying forms throughout the majority of European states.

The attacks perpetuated against Freemasonry and its members, irrespective of whether these were of a political, theological or sociological nature, have unfailingly been linked by a sole, unavoidable common denominator: to convey an image of a ‘deviant’ Freemasonry to concur with the type of attack directed against the organisation. Between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, and subsequently throughout the dictatorships of the twentieth century, several European states ostracized Freemasonry based on the finding that its members were intent on ‘overthrowing’ the order created; in these cases, the Freemason was represented as a sort of fearsome ‘anarchic’ who held secret meetings for purposes that were never clearly delineated by the accusers, but that were evidently subversive. The offensives conducted by numerous

¹R.F. Gould, *History of Freemasonry*, Edn., Vol.III, 1951, pages 235-236.

religious institutions, *first and foremost* the Catholic Church (although others followed suit), accused Freemasonry of acting as a form of ‘heresy’ denoting satanic components, depicting the Freemason as a ‘heretical, blasphemous Satanist’. Lastly, and I refer in particular to the Italian State, having failed after more than a century to eradicate the scourge of organised crime present throughout the regions of the country in a series of forms and denominations (Mafia in Sicily, N’drangheta in Calabria, Camorra in Campania, Sacra Corona Unita in Puglia etc etc), with these criminal concerns becoming increasingly powerful and widespread, it has *of course* been suggested that they may be affiliated with an invincible ‘occult power, i.e. Freemasonry. Indeed, a series of absurd hypotheses have been put forward on both an historical and social level in support of this association. In these instances, the representation of Freemasons from a prevalently ‘ethical’ point of view is completely negative, depicting a common criminal to be hounded and, where possible, eliminated.

Due to this continual and pervasive process of delegitimization perpetrated by political and religious institutions, inevitably and guiltily highlighted by a widespread ignorance of the topic amongst the *Mass Media*, the public perception of Freemasonry has been subjected from the outset to a slow but progressive negative evolution, consequently resulting in the true nature of the Masonic Institution and the representation of the same, being irreparably distorted and transformed. Indeed, the current trend when discussing Freemasonry is to refer to it

with scorn, or even sarcasm or sheer disgust, frequently denigrating it and treating it as a matter for public mockery. The range of expletives used against members of Freemasonry is infinite and the attacks gratuitous and defamatory, eliciting a skewed and troublesome image of Freemasonry and its members.

The Religious Institutions

It is well known that the record for attacks directed at Freemasonry since its inception undoubtedly goes to the Catholic Church. For the sake of correctness, it should be mentioned how historically other religious institutions also openly criticised Freemasonry, including the “National Christian Association”, the “Society of Friends” (Quakers), and the Lutheran Church (particularly in the works of Theodore Graebner and the Missouri Synod). However, the Catholic Church was undoubtedly distinguished from all other Institutions in view of the *methodicity* and *duration* of the attacks that have constantly targeted Freemasonry throughout the centuries.

A brief analysis of the documents spanning three centuries that have fiercely attacked Freemasonry, will help to better illustrate the paragraph relating to the Italian issues.

Firstly, it should be highlighted how the attacks directed at Freemasonry by the Catholic Church have not targeted solely the Italian Freemasons, but have frequently reverberated throughout other important European nations.

In Germany, the most zealous adversaries of Freemasonry were the Jesuits, with the most widely renowned including

Father Pachtler, Father Schneemann and, particularly, Father Hermann Gruber. The Jesuit Father G. Michel Pachtler was active in the 1870s and, together with his brother Father Schneemann, was one of the most vehement adversaries of Freemasonry. A Catholic pedagogist, he collaborated on the extensive work conducted in the field of the history of education in German-speaking areas entitled "*Monumenta Germanicæ pædagogica*", published in Berlin by the "Gesellschaft für deutsche Erziehungs- und Schulgeschichte" (Society for the German history of education and schools), operational from 1890 to 1938.

In the era of Pope Leo XIII, the main antagonist of Freemasonry in Germany was the Jesuit Hermann Gruber (1851-1930). Gruber represented a militant Catholicism which, during Bismarck's Reich, fought strenuously against both anti-clericalism and Freemasonry. Tyrolean by birth, Gruber had become a Professor at the Jesuit College of Saint Ignatius in Valkenburg, Holland. His studies on positivism had led Gruber to Freemasonry and, on becoming acquainted with the latter, he made it his life's goal to combat the Masonic institution. The plethora of documents, articles and presentations published in Catholic journals and manuals were largely written under the pseudonym of "Hildebrand Gerber"; these documents included approximately 70 anti-masonic papers and the German translations of the "best sellers" published by the notorious Leo Taxil that Gruber reviewed in the publication "*Stimmen aus Maria-Laach*" (34th year, 1888).

More recently, following completion of a task carried out from 1974 to 1980 by a Committee officially charged with

investigating, together with the *United Grand Lodge of Germany*, the “compatibility” of belonging to the Catholic faith and being a Freemason, the German Bishops’ Conference confirmed this incompatibility, stating that Freemasonry “*in its mentality, in its fundamental convictions and in its work in the temple, has remained fully true unto itself*”. This incompatibility, or more specifically, irreconcilability (as specified in the document) was reiterated in the ‘*Declaration on Freemasonry Quaesitum Est*’ dated November 26th 1983, promulgated by the Prefect of the Doctrine of the Faith at the time, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later delineated and debated in a subsequent article on the ‘*Osservatore Romano*’ dated February 23rd 1985).

In Ireland, the publication of the work of the Jesuit Edward Cahill entitled *Freemasonry and the Anti-Christian Movement*’ (1930) caused much sensation. According to Cahill, the true enemy of the Catholic Church was undoubtedly Freemasonry; so much so that the Irish Jesuit was of the opinion that from the dechristianisation of France to the birth of Bolshevism, all the major and inauspicious historical events that damaged the Catholic cause were instigated under the guide of and in line with the vision of Freemasonry: “*Freemasonry is the central enemy of the Catholic Church. The partial dechristianisation of France, the unification of the German States under an anti-Catholic hegemony (1871), the temporary destruction of the Papal monarchy, the Portuguese revolution, the constant upheavals and revolutions in Spanish America, the rise of Bolshevism, have all been worked mainly under the guidance and with the aid of secret societies of which*

Freemasonry is the source and centre. Today we behold the apparently strange phenomenon of the most capitalistic government of the world (that of the United States of America) aiding and abetting in its disruptive and tyrannical measures the anti-Christian government of Mexico, which is avowedly Bolshevist in principle and aim, and openly professes a close alliance with the Soviet Government of Russia. We see, too, the capitalistic press of the world engaged in a conspiracy of silence or misrepresentation regarding the Mexican position. But these phenomena cease to be strange when we recollect that the capitalistic press, the U.S.A. government, the Mexican government and the Russian Soviet government apparently antagonistic to one another in many ways, are all equally Masonic, and more or less under Masonic influence or control”². Cahill’s work could not of course fail to refer to the accusation of Satanism, as Satan was deemed to be the main ‘object of worship’ of the Freemasons: “Besides in real esoteric Masonry, which is the centre on which the whole order pivots, the object of worship, as we shall show in a later chapter, is a material and not a spiritual being, or if a spiritual being, that being seems to be none other than Satan—the spirit of evil... Hence, whatever one may hold as to the identity of the Masonic deity, called the Great Architect, namely, whether or not it be Satan himself, this much at least is certain, that the religion of Masonry is closely connected with the most hideous and degraded of the pre-Christian cults, one which is commonly believed to betray the direct and immediate

²Rev. Edward Cahill, *Freemasonry and the Anti-Christian Movement*, M.H. Gill and Son. LTD, Dublin, 1930, pages VIII-IX.

influence of the Evil One...”³. A notably intelligent response to these absurd declarations, which are however still today cited in support of the hypotheses put forward by contemporary authors, was forthcoming from the Deputy Grand Master of the *Grand Lodge of Ireland*, Claude Cane, in two extremely interesting articles published on the *Irish Independent* on November 2nd and November 23rd 1929.

The accusation of ‘heresy’ has been present since the first papal document issued against Freemasonry, the sadly renowned Papal Bull ‘*In Eminenti Apostulatus Specula*’ (1738), in which it was specified that Freemasons were to be persecuted as ‘*suspected of heresy*’, a notion subsequently reiterated in nearly all official documents issued by the Catholic Church. These documents highlighted how the Masonic rituals were a challenge to the “*purity of the Catholic faith*” (*Providas Romanorum*, 1751); stating how “*the secret and illegal meetings they hold are like the meetings of heretics ...they profane and soil the passion of the Saver by some of their culprit ceremonies*” (Pius VII ‘*Ecclesiam a Jesu*’ 1821); and that “*Freemasonry and the other sects mocks the most holy mysteries of our religion and the pure precepts of Christ*” (Leo XII ‘*Quo Graviora*’ 1826); affirming that Freemasonry is the bearer of “*perverse doctrines*” that provoke “*the overthrowing of the Holy Scriptures*” (Pius VIII, ‘*Traditi Humiliati*’, 1829); lastly underlining how Freemasonry should be viewed as “*sacrilegious, infamous and blasphemous*” (*Mirari Vos*, 1832). For the sake of brevity, I shall not mention all the other unofficial documents that liken Freemasonry to heresy and, particularly, *Satanism*.

³Rev. Edward Cahill, *Ibidem*, page 33-58

With regard to Satanism, several years ago, even the *United Grand Lodge of England* experienced a few issues. Indeed, a short time after his appointment, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, referred to a hypothetical ‘satanic’ content in the masonic rituals. Robert Morrow, the Grand Secretary of UGLE at the time responded to these absurd accusations in a letter dated December 2002.

History should have indeed taught us to not overlook these worrying signs as ‘martyrs’ of Freemasonry had already been created in the past, as was the case of the Florentine poet Tommaso Crudeli, and the Swiss protestant of English adoption John Coustos, both imprisoned and tortured by the Inquisition in the mid eighteenth-century.

The Italian issue

The Parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission and the Laws against Freemasonry

Last year the *Report* prepared by the Parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission relating to the “*Infiltrations of Cosa Nostra and the ‘Ndrangheta into Freemasonry in Sicily and Calabria*” was published, making mention of the Italian Freemasonry. The tone of these errors and the gravity of the omissions indeed considerably harmed the image and honourable reputation of the Association of the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy, of its members and of Freemasonry in general (all of which are being addressed in the appropriate seat). However, it was first and foremost the contents and the conclusions of the *Report* that were undeniably misleading with regard to the public interest

that the document purported to safeguard: i.e. to divulge the truth with regard to the specific issue examined by the parliamentary commission.

On page 5 of the *Report* one reads how the aim of the work conducted by the Commission was of ‘common’ interest to Freemasonry, namely being to “*impede the contamination by the mafia of legitimate and historic private associations*”, a notion subsequently reiterated on page 8 where we read that “*the investigations carried out by the Commission do not focus on Freemasonry as an associative phenomenon per se, but rather with regard to the infiltrations of the mafia*” and that “*it should immediately be specified that the term Freemasonry used generically throughout these pages is not intended to refer to Freemasonry as a whole*”.

This seemed to be a good start! Everything pointed to an objective investigation which would result in an *impartial* and *third-party* outcome.

It is a shame therefore that the document gradually underwent a radical change of tone, becoming increasingly inquisitorial, deceptive, insinuating, and almost threatening (particularly in the conclusions).

Indeed, the Italian Constitutional Court in a sentence issued in 1975 (n. 231) relating to the nature and objectives of the Parliamentary Commissions had clarified that “*The task of the Parliamentary inquiry Commissions was not to judge but rather to gather the necessary facts and information to allow the Houses to act appropriately*”; conversely, in the report of the Parliamentary Anti-mafia Commission, the judgements expressed with regard to Freemasonry are frequent, disparaging and, in particular, unjustified.

Additionally, in the light of the objectives established by the Commission, the last paragraph of the Report produced by the Commission is remarkably disconcerting. The title of the paragraph is “the Catholic Church”!

In this revealing paragraph, it is deemed necessary to remind the Italian Parliament that “*based on the Declaratio de associantibus massonicis issued by the Cardinal Prefect Joseph Ratzinger, subsequently Pope Benedict XVI – there is an irreconcilability between belonging to the Catholic Church and being a member of Freemasonry*”, with its conclusion being even more troubling: the person presenting the document (I am not aware whether this was actually the President Rosy Bindi) is keen to inform the Italian Parliament how recently “*POPE FRANCIS ‘DISMISSED’ the credentials of a foreign ambassador present in the Vatican as he was a member of Freemasonry*”. Where was all this leading? What were they trying to insinuate? Was the Vatican State giving the Italian State lessons in diplomacy? Was it tenderly and Christianly indicating the right way forward to the Members of Parliament and to the Italian Government? To expel all foreign ambassadors who might be members of Freemasonry from Italy? I ask myself whether the Italian State is indeed still a ‘lay’ State?

In the conclusions of the Report however, it is once again underlined how the work of the Commission did not focus on Freemasonry in general. From what I have read this is certainly not so.

Lastly, I should like to point out how the President of the Commission, the Right Honourable Rosy Bindi, has been

involved with the association ‘*Catholic Action*’ (being Vice-President from 1984 to 1989) for many years, starting her political career with the Christian Democrats, and how the presenter of one of the ‘anti-masonic’ laws put to the Italian Parliament was the Right Honourable Davide Mattiello, pupil and right-hand man of Don Ciotti, a priest who has long been critical of Freemasonry.

We should pay particular attention to certain ‘undertones’ – should the *temporal* power once again form an alliance with the *spiritual* power we risk going back centuries in time.

Conclusions

What conclusions should we reach and what should I propose to this assembly? It is indeed quite simple, in light of the facts I have mentioned and in line with our history, I believe that the only way forward is to unite in a common initiative to undertake a joint initiative aimed at safeguarding our principles, our values and the image of Freemasonry.

I suggest that we set up a collective observatory to monitor the anti-masonic phenomenon throughout all European nations, enabling us to present, should the need arise, a jointly signed appeal to the **European Court of Human Rights** to protest against the injustices afflicted and the harm caused to our Obediences, and to protect our legitimate freedom of expression and association.

This Appeal would contribute towards preventing all those political, religious and social discriminations that have challenged Freemasonry over the last three hundred years both in Europe and elsewhere.

