



Masonry from a Traditional Point of View via René Guénon

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Masonry is not solely a social institution. While as it is organized, there is surely a social role it plays in the lives of Masons – yet, it is still primarily a spiritual discipline cloaked within Traditional forms, intended to advance the initiate and participating brothers further upward in their journey home. Masonry is a repository of primordial initiatic transmission.

The metaphysician René Guénon explains initiatic transmission by writing that he "could not characterize it better than by saying that it is essentially the transmission of spiritual influence."¹ Guénon goes on to say "...an initial vibration must be communicated to it by the spiritual powers... this vibration is the *Fiat Lux* that illuminates the chaos and is the necessary starting point for all later developments."²

Masonic initiation is intended to illuminate the candidate with that *Fiat Lux*: "Let there be Light!" This illumination is above and beyond mere morality, it is rather the culmination of right action in every moment placed in a single and powerful push up Jacob's Ladder. However, the initiate may be completely oblivious to the ascent – because all this happens, or so they say, within the vertical dimension, not on the horizontal level.

Guénon continues by reminding us that "one can only transmit what one possesses; it is necessary, then, that an organization truly be the repository of a spiritual influence if it is to be able to communicate this influence to those attached to it."³ Thus a Traditional Lodge should be laboring to cultivate serious ritual work as well as presenting the best ambiance possible in order to invite this spiritual influence within the Tyled Lodge. As Guénon says "those who have been made depositories of initiatic knowledge cannot communicate this knowledge in the same way that a secular teacher communicates... for what is involved here is something that is in its very essence 'incommunicable' since it concerns states that are realized inwardly."⁴

¹ Guénon, René. *Perspectives on Initiation*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004. p26.

² Ibid. p27.

³ Ibid. p32.

⁴ Ibid. pp25-26.

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Modern man may respond to this saying that this has no grounding, yet Guénon counters: "Clinging to the most narrowly profane and exterior point of view that can be imagined, they have no notion of anything pertaining to another order, and since they will not admit that some things elude them, they naturally try to reduce everything to procedures they can understand."⁵ This is what a truly Traditional Masonic Lodge should try to resist, and is a major cause of decline in our age.

In this exposition, we are trying to explain the truly "'non-human' element" within Freemasonry, "since to not take [this] into account... is strictly to misunderstand the very essence of tradition."⁶ Masonry is a Traditional Initiatic Art. The truly non-human, or perhaps better described as spiritual or divine, qualities of Masonry are perennial and can be found in all primordial traditions and in all societies. We often presume, given our modern perspective, the sharing or borrowing of traditions as explanation for the similarities of "Truth" across the globe. This "historicist" perspective completely fails to take into account this non-human element. The profane historian's investigation is completely lacking in understanding of the true nature of initiatic transmission. The historicist dismisses the notion that the same truth should arise independently, and reduces the divine qualities of these traditions to a mere "question of borrowing".⁷ The truths within Masonry, both the teachings and the esoteric meanings, as well as the truly "spiritual influence" are perennial and have existed before in a different garment and will exist again if the spiritual center that is still, although faintly, alive in the Tradition of Freemasonry is lost or the initiatic transmission severed in the future. We can look to the ancient mysteries for comparison. Masonry contains within its forms and within its esoteric rituals and symbols similar methods of spiritual influence as these ancient orders, and while the historian may suggest a borrowing and a temporal relationship we can justify this experientially in that the elevation within the sacred Masonic meeting is without time and has not originated from borrowed beliefs.

Perhaps further evidence comes from the fact that "whatever is truly inspired by traditional knowledge always proceeds from 'within' and not from 'without'..."⁸ and "there exist no traditional ritual forms to which any specific individual authors can be assigned."⁹ The authors of the Masonic rituals are likewise anonymous, like most pre-Renaissance artists.

Another clarification is needed between ceremonies and rites. While Masonic ritual may resemble ceremonies, they are of a completely different character – they are not "strictly limited to this domain."¹⁰ Guénon says, "Rites, like everything that is of a truly traditional order necessarily includes a 'non-human' element [while] ceremonies, on the contrary, are purely human."¹¹ Masonry, as we have explained, is a Sacred Rite proceeding to us from the primordial past into the present moment. The word "Rite," if one looks to its Sanskrit

⁵ Ibid. p39.

⁶ Ibid. p41.

⁷ Ibid. p40.

⁸ Ibid. p41.

⁹ Ibid. p35.

¹⁰ Guénon, René. *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004. p65.

¹¹ Ibid. p65.

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origin, is nothing other than 'what conforms to order', which Guénon says, "this alone... is really 'normal'."¹² Masonic Rites transform the Lodge of brothers. While "...in an integrally traditional civilization every human activity, whatever it may be, possesses a sacred character... its applications thus extend to all things without exception in such a way that nothing can be considered indifferent or insignificant to it..."¹³ And so the Mason will naturally carry his brotherly love with him out of the Lodge. This love then can emanate to the entire world, and so the Masonic "Rites" will manifest in all our actions. Swami Rama of the Himalayas says in his commentary of the Bhagavad-Gita, "In the universe every action is a ritual, and the ritual is performed for the sake of the sacrifice. The raindrop itself to become part of the plant, and the sun gives up its energy to give light and life to all beings."¹⁴

What Masonic Rites do is transmit the sapiential knowledge of sacred rite to the participating brethren. Guénon writes, "there is the transmission or communication of a spiritual influence, and it is this influence, 'infused' so to speak by the rite, that produces in the individual the 'transmutation' in question."¹⁵

Let me briefly touch on the ritualistic form of Masonic rite. The words, tone, and speed of the ritual attempt to express beauty, for the ritual form is itself truly poetic. Guénon refers to this poetic form as follows: "...before [poetry] degenerated into mere 'literature' and the expression of purely individual fantasy, poetry was something quite different and could in the final analysis have been a real magical poetry as well as a poetry intended to produce effects of a much higher order..."¹⁶ While this exposition focuses more upon what lies beneath the form of Masonic ritual, we must remember that the form we have is there in order to launch us to great heights. Masonry is not a product of our age.

And fortunately, as Masons, and as participating officers of a regular Masonic Lodge, there is renewed energy from Guénon's writings that it is not only individual efforts, but something much greater than the individual. Guénon writes, "If the one who accomplishes a rite has attained a certain degree of effective knowledge, he can and must know that there is something about it that transcends him; that does not depend in any way on his own individual effort."¹⁷

And so, any good completed by the participants in Masonic Rites, or the experience of spiritual influence, is the work of the Great Architect. Masons are only here to cultivate the garden, so to speak; they are not the source of the growth. All Masons can do is continue the Masonic work in a way that provides the most conducive situation for spiritual influence, and collectively and individually work toward that perfect ashlar. For they say that Realization is not acquired, but results when our self-imposed barriers are removed. Masons need only to work on themselves to comprehend the Mysteries of Masonry.

¹² Guénon, René. *Perspectives on Initiation*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004. p132.

¹³ Guénon, René. *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004. p58.

¹⁴ Rama, Swami. *Perennial Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita*. Honesdale, PA: The Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy of the U.S.A., 1985. p136.

¹⁵ Guénon, René. *Perspectives on Initiation*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004. p154.

¹⁶ Ibid. p136.

¹⁷ Ibid. p132.