

BAPHOMET XI°

What is Freemasonry?

An Excerpt on the Reconstituted O.T.O. from his Confessions

“WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?” I collated the rituals and their secrets, much as I had done the religions of the world, with their magical and mystical bases. As in that case, I decided to neglect what it too often actually was. It would be absurd to judge Protestantism by the political acts of Henry VIII. In the same was, I could not judge masonry by the fact that it had denounced the Concordat. I proposed to define freemasonry as a system of communicating truth--religious, philosophical, magical and mystical; and indicating the proper means of developing human faculty by means of a peculiar language whose alphabet is the symbolism of ritual. Universal brotherhood and the great moral principles, independent of personal, racial, climatic and other prejudices, naturally formed a background which would assure individual security and social stability for each and all.

The question then arose, “What truths should be communicated and by what means promulgated?” My first object was to eliminate from the hundreds of rituals at my disposal all exoteric elements. Many degrees contain statements (usually inaccurate) of matters well known to modern schoolboys, through they may have been important when the rituals were written. I may mention one degree in which the candidate is portentously informed that there are other religions in the world besides Christianity and that there is some truth in all of them. Their tenets are explained in many cases with egregious error.

The description of Buddha as a god is typical. I saw no point in overloading the system with superfluous information. Another essential point was to reduce the unwieldy mass of material to a compact and coherent system. I thought that everything worth preserving could and should be presented in not more than a dozen ceremonies, and that it should be brought well within the capacity of any officer to learn by heart his part during the leisure time at his disposal, in a month at most.

The eighteenth-century Rosicrucians, so-called in Austria, had already endeavoured to unite the various branches of Continental freemasonry and its superstructures; in the nineteenth century, principally owing to the energy and ability of a wealthy iron master named Karl Kellner, a reconstruction and consolidation of traditional truth had been attempted.

A body was formed under the name O.T.O. (Ordo Templi Orientis) which purported to achieve this result. It is purported to communicate the secrets, not only of freemasonry (with its Rites of 3x, 7x, 33x, 90x, 97x, etc.,) but of the Gnostic Catholic Church, the Martinists, the Sat Bhai, the Rosicrucians, the Knights of the Holy Ghost and so on, in nine degrees, with a tenth of an honorary character to distinguish the “Supreme and Holy King” of the Order in each country where it was

established. Chief of these kings is the O.H.O. (Outer Head of the Order, or Frater Superior), who is an absolute autocrat.

This position was at this time occupied by Theodor Reuss, the Supreme and Holy King of Germany, who resigned the office in 1922 in my favour. The O.H.O. put the rituals of this Order at my disposal. I found them of the utmost value as to the central secret, but otherwise very inferior. They were dramatically worthless, but the prose was unequal, they lacked philosophical unity, their information was incomplete and unsystematic.

Their general idea was, however, of the right kind; and I was able to take them as a model. The main objects of the instruction were two. It was firstly necessary to explain the universe and the relations of human life therewith. Secondly, to instruct every man how best to adapt his life to the cosmos and to develop his faculties to the utmost advantage.

I accordingly constructed a series of rituals, Minerval, Man, Magician, Master-Magician, Perfect Magician and Perfect Initiate, which should illustrate the course of human life in its largest philosophical aspect. I begin by showing the object of the pure soul, "One, individual and eternal," in determining to formulate itself consciously, or, as I may say, to understand itself. It chooses to enter into relations with the solar system. It incarnates.

I explain the significance of birth and the conditions established by the process. I next show how it may best carry out its object in the eucharist of life. It partakes, so to speak, of its own godhead in every action, but especially through the typical sacrament of marriage, understood as the voluntary union of itself with each element of its environment. I then proceed to the climax of its career in death and show how this sacrament both consecrates (or, rather, sets its seal upon) the previous procedure and gives a meaning thereto, just as the auditing of an account enables the merchant to see his year's transactions in perspective.

In the next ceremony I show how the individual, released by death from the obsession of personality, resumes relations with the truth of the universe. Reality bursts upon him in a blaze of adorable light; he is able to appreciate its splendour as he could not previously do, since his incarnation has enabled him to establish particular relations between the elements of eternity.

Finally, the cycle is closed by the reabsorption of all individuality into infinity. It ends in absolute annihilation which {...} may in reality be regarded as an exact equivalent for all other terms soever, or (by postulating the category of time) as forming the starting point for new adventure of the same kind.

It will be clear from the above that the philosophical perfection of this system of initiation leaves nothing to be desired. We may write Q.E.D. The practical problem remains. We have already decided to incarnate, and our birth certificates are with our bankers. We do not have to worry about these matters, and we cannot alter

them if we would; death and what follows death, are equally certain, and equally able to take care of themselves. Our sole preoccupation is how to make use of our lives.

Now the O.T.O. is in possession of one supreme secret. The whole of its system at the time when I became an initiate of the Sanctuary of the Gnosis (IXx) was directed towards communicating to its members, by progressively plain hints, this all-important instruction. I personally believe that if this secret, which is a scientific secret, were perfectly understood, as it is not even by me after twelve years' almost constant study and experiment, there would be nothing which the human imagination can conceive that could not be realized in practice. {...}

The injunctions of the sages, from Pythagoras, Zoroaster and Lao Tzu, to the Cabalistic Jew who wrote the Ritual of the Royal Arch, and the sentimental snob who composed those of the Craft degrees, are either directed to indicating the best conditions for applying this secret, or are mere waste of words. Realizing this, it was comparatively simple for me to edit masonic ethics and esoterism. I had simply to refer everything to this single sublime standard. I therefore answered the question "How should a young man mend his way?" in a series of rituals in which the candidate is instructed in the value of discretion, loyalty, independence, truthfulness, courage, self-control, indifference to circumstance, impartiality, scepticism, and other virtues, and at the same time assisted him to discover for himself the nature of this secret, the proper object of its employment and the best means for insuring success for its use.

The first of these degrees is the Vx, in which the secret is presented in a pageant; while he is also instructed in the essential elements of the history of the world, considered from the standpoint of his present state of evolution and his proper relation to society in general with reference to the same.

The degree of Knight Hermetic Philosopher follows, in which his intellectual and moral attitude is further defined.

In the VIx, his position having been thus made precise, he is shown how to concentrate himself to the particular Great Work which he came to earth in order to perform.

In the VIIx, which is tripartite, he is first taught the principle of equilibrium as extended to all possible moral ideas; secondly, to all possible intellectual ideas, and lastly, he is shown how, basing all his actions on this impregnable rock of justice, he may so direct his life as to undertake his Great Work with the fullest responsibility and in absolute freedom from all possibility of interferences.

In the VIIIx, the secret is once more manifested to him, more clearly than before; and he is instructed in how to train himself to use it by certain preliminary practices involving acquaintance with some of those subtler energies which have hitherto, for the most part, eluded the observation and control of profane science.

In the IXx, which is never conferred upon anyone who has not already divined from previous indications the nature of the secret, it is explained to him fully. The conclusions of previous experiments are placed at his service.

The idea is that each new initiate should continue the work of his predecessor, so that eventually the inexhaustible resources of the secret may be within the reach of the youngest initiate; for at present, we are compelled to admit that the superstitious reverence which has encompassed it in past ages, and the complexity of the conditions which modify its use, place us in much the same position as the electricians of a generation ago in respect of their science.

We are assured of the immensity of the force at our disposal; we perceive the extent of the empire which it offers us, but we do not thoroughly understand even our successes and are uncertain how to proceed in order to generate the energy most efficiently or to apply it most accurately to our purposes. The Xx, as in the old system, is merely honorary, but recent researches into the mysteries of the IXx have compelled me to add an XIx, to illustrate a scientific idea which have been evolved by the results of recent experiments.

In the reconstituted O.T.O. there are therefore six degrees in which is conveyed a comprehensive conception of the cosmos and our relation therewith, and a similar number to deal with our duty to ourselves and our fellows, the development of our own faculties of every order, and the general advancement and advantage of mankind. Wherever freemasonry and allied systems contribute to these themes, their information has been incorporated in such a way as not to infringe the privileges, puerile as they often seem, which have been associated hitherto with initiation. Where they merely perpetuate trivialities, superstitions and prejudices, they have been neglected.

I claim for my system that it satisfies all possible requirements of true freemasonry. It offers a rational basis for universal brotherhood and for universal religion. It puts forward a scientific statement which is a summary of all that is at present known about the universe by means of a simple, yet sublime symbolism, artistically arranged. It also enables each man to discover for himself his personal destiny, indicates the moral and intellectual qualities which he requires in order to fulfil it freely, and finally puts in his hands an unimaginably powerful weapon which he may use to develop in himself every faculty which he may need in his work. {...}

I believe that my proposals for reconstituting freemasonry on the lines above laid down should prove critically important. Civilization is crumbling under our eyes and I believe that the best chance of saving what little is worth saving, and rebuilding the Temple of the Holy Ghost on plans, and with material and workmanship, which shall be free from the errors of the former, lies with the O.T.O.