

# The World's Freemasonry

by **Sir Knight Tom Jackson**

## **Editors Note:**

The article below was adapted from an address Brother Jackson made to the Masonic Society during their annual meeting in 2012, was originally published in The Journal Of The Masonic Society, Thomas W. Jackson, "The World's Freemasonry," Issue: 17 © The Journal Of The Masonic Society, and is used with permission.

I have been afforded the great opportunity and privilege of being able to travel over much of the world simply as a Freemason and to observe Freemasonry as it exists today. I therefore look at myself as a student of contemporary Freemasonry. Freemasonry is growing more rapidly than perhaps at any time in our history. There have been twenty-four new Grand Lodges consecrated since the beginning of this century, and there are others that will be consecrated in the not too distant future. The craft is emerging in Eastern Europe in countries that have either never had it or in countries in which it has been repressed for decades. In Africa, with the general exception of the existence of Provincial or District Lodges or Grand Lodges, Freemasonry is establishing roots in relatively untouched environments. What this can mean to the world is immeasurable.

In many stable societies, however; the potential influence of Freemasonry has become less than what it once was. This is simply a matter of fact due to those societies having evolved to a level of stability where future evolutionary change will be limited or at least slowed in its development. This does not mean that the need for the philosophical purpose of the craft has in any way become lessened but its ongoing influence will be more subtle than in the past.

There can never be a time, no matter how long this world may exist, that Freemasonry's philosophy would not be applicable to any society. It simply means that the need for dramatic societal change is no longer paramount in these environments. In addition, a change in leadership style has reduced our philosophical influence in some areas of the world and made us less visible in society. Where Freemasonry is now arising, there exists the fertile fields to be cultivated by those dedicated to a society in need of the gentle guidance of our craft.

Freemasonry has impacted the evolution of civil society for several hundred years. It has changed significantly the course of civilization. It has influenced the development of some of the greatest men who have ever lived, and therein lies our purpose beyond any other, to continue to contribute to the development of great men. These great men will then influence the ongoing evolution of civil society. Make no doubt about it, my brothers, were it not for Freemasonry, this world would be a vastly different place.

I firmly believe that Freemasonry on the continent of Africa has probably the greatest potential beyond any other to impact its peoples, to contribute to the evolution of its

societies, and probably to alter the future of this world. It has the opportunity to show to the world what a philosophy like ours can contribute to mankind.

It also, however, is perhaps going to meet some of the greatest challenges that it has ever experienced, for it must deal not only with what might be one of the greatest diversities of societies, cultures, and religious beliefs located on one continent but must also deal with the pressures which will be impressed by outside influences.

My brothers, the philosophy of Freemasonry has always and must always transcend the variances with which it will be confronted in the environment in which it exists. Because of the universality of its purpose coupled with the constancy of its zeal, it has risen above those restrictive barriers that have hindered societal evolution for several hundred years. The very fact that it continues to thrive throughout the free world is undebatable evidence that its purpose is universal and undying.

For most of our existence, even though there was that "Mystic Tie" binding us together in a universal brotherhood, there was a great tendency toward a provincial attitude of our Grand Lodges. We operated in a form of hierarchal isolationism. Today, however; modern technology has driven us to become a more visible organization, forcing us away from our isolationism and causing us to be more exposed and subject to more external examination.

What were once regarded as Masonic "secrets" can today be found by any computer or in any public library. This, however, in no way decreases our capacity of exerting our philosophical influence on society. What it does mean is that we must face reality, confront the complexities it brings with it, and adapt to using the technologies to further our goals which in turn must contribute to the betterment of mankind. We first, however, must understand ourselves and our goals.

I have traveled extensively throughout the world for the past two decades simply for the cause of Freemasonry and have been afforded the opportunity that few have had to study our present-day craft and its methodologies of operation. I have been granted the privilege of meeting with some great men and developing some of the greatest friendships that one could ever wish for. In doing so, I have observed the universality of the philosophical purpose of our craft regardless of where it operates in the world. This I refer to as its structural philosophy.

I also, however, have become very cognizant of the differences that exist in the operational philosophies of Freemasonry. Where the structural philosophies are an integral, inherent, and unchangeable characteristic of the craft, the operational philosophies seem to be more driven by the characteristic of the environment in which it must operate. These operational variances are worthy of note, especially in areas where Freemasonry is in a developmental stage.

From my studies and observations I have concluded that the personality of Freemasonry in different parts of the world is driven and shaped by the environment in which it exists. This is true historically in most jurisdictions. The only exception that I have found was in

early Russian Freemasonry where the craft tended to shape the society rather than the society shaping it.

Based upon these operational variations, I have been attempting to categorize the Freemasonry in different parts of the world in what I refer to as styles of the craft. Thus far, I have distinguished, at least for me, five distinctive styles, but I am sure that others, perhaps less distinctive, may exist or evolve into being. Please keep in mind that these styles are my creation, and there could be those who disagree with me.

When looking at Western European Freemasonry, we find that it retains more of the basic philosophical and intellectual qualities that characterized Freemasonry from its inception. This would be an expected natural phenomenon since its survival from the beginning has been dependent upon this style. External as well as internal pressures, although excessive at times and variable in their origins, dictated an intellectual elitism dominated by secrecy for its very survival. Thus, I have classified Western European Freemasonry as a philosophical style.

The Freemasonry of the British Isles is closely related to the philosophical style of continental Europe. However, these Grand Lodges retained much more of the social atmosphere of their early beginnings, and I therefore place it into what I refer to as a social style of Freemasonry.

When Freemasonry migrated into the South and Central American countries, it retained much of the philosophical style that characterizes Western Europe. It did however change over the years by adopting a more idealistic attitude of what it can accomplish than is to be found anywhere else in the world. The external pressures of society with which it was confronted stimulated the creation of a uniqueness in its Freemasonry that I refer to as a sociological style. It is perhaps more driven by the society in which it exists than anywhere else in the world.

Initially, I had included Mexican Freemasonry in a sociological style. However, it did not seem to fit comfortably in this category. It has more of a tendency toward a political activism, and although I have many friends in Mexican Freemasonry, I frankly find it difficult to understand. For want of a more definitive term, I refer to Mexican Freemasonry as a political style of the craft.

North American Freemasonry has diverged further away from its roots than any Freemasonry in the world. Much of the intellectual elitism that contributed heavily to the creation of what might arguably be referred to as the most influential organization ever conceived by the mind of man has been sacrificed in the pursuit of a static equality with a support of charitable objectives. If any external force is influencing Freemasonry today in America it's our acceptance of political correctness. Therefore I categorize the Freemasonry in North America as a charitable style.

Before I go farther let me clarify what I mean by elitism as it impacts Freemasonry and intellectual elitism as it has impacted Freemasonry. My brothers, there is a tendency today for many to frown upon elitism. I have found myself at odds with some North

American leadership by the use of this term. Yet, the day that we said that our goal was to take GOOD men and make them better, we became elitist, and there is nothing wrong with that form of elitism. In addition, one of the greatest reasons we became the major influential organization that we are, is because we attracted some of the greatest minds that ever lived, and that, my brothers, is intellectual elitism. Subtract that factor from the equation, and we are not nor could we have become what we are and were.

Present day Eastern European Freemasonry has not been in existence long enough to show whether it will retain the philosophical style of its Western European creators. A different mindset seems to exist in these countries as a result of fascist and communist suppression that might stimulate it to evolve into something distinctive as a result of the different societal pressures where it exists.

Although I have spent some time in the Far East, India, and the Philippines as well as in Africa, I have not discerned a specific style which differentiates and defines it. In these locations, as a result of operating as Provincial or district Grand Lodges or Lodges for a prolonged period of time, there has been a tendency to take on the characteristic of the mother Grand Lodge, but we should expect a modification.

If it is the intent of Freemasonry to remain a driving intellectual force in the evolution of civil society, if we wish for future historians to acknowledge our contributions in the developing world for the betterment of mankind, if we want to continue toward our goal of taking good men and making them better, then whatever style we choose must lead us on a pathway to that end. Upon examining the different styles that I have presented to you, we can measure degrees of success in world Freemasonry.

The philosophical style has been in existence for the longest period of time and has paved the way in almost every other environment. Therefore differences in style have all evolved from it. It has certainly stood the test of time and has impacted the world in general, probably more than any other. It was this style that became an integral part of the cornerstone of the Enlightenment and it was the Enlightenment that served as a pathway out of the ignorance of the dark ages.

The sociological style found in Central and South America has not deviated extensively from it. The infusion of the idealism has not in any way harmed the craft's potential in the society in which it lives. I am not convinced, however, that it could thrive as well in other parts of the world. The strength of this Freemasonry is a result of the continuing struggle to operate within its environment. I have great respect for both the philosophical and the sociological styles of the craft.

As I have indicated earlier, I do not really understand Mexican Freemasonry, but I do have a fear that it places itself in jeopardy by coming close to violating a basic Masonic protocol. Keep this in mind my brothers. We do not fear Freemasons becoming involved in political activity, but we must never permit Freemasonry to become involved.

I look at Canadian Freemasonry, although part of North America, as a modified version of both the philosophical and charitable styles. They retain more of the philosophical

style from their origin but have been greatly influenced by the charitable.

Freemasonry in the United States, however, is purely a charitable style today. Interestingly, the change into this style took place over the last 30 to 50 years. It began its life as a philosophical style as brought over by the early settlers from the British Isles and the European continent. There can be no doubt that its impact on the creation of the United States of America was extraordinary. The intellectual stimulus of the Enlightenment played a vital role in the idealistic structuring of this country, and more than a few of the enlightened thinkers who played a role in this structuring were Freemasons.

My brothers, it has changed. As a result of never having to face the great challenges to be a Freemason that most of the world has faced, it has not only failed to become stronger, but as a result of complacency, it has become weaker and has now evolved into apathy. Much of the present-day leadership lack the vision of our forefathers who structured our great society. Today our goal is not to change society but simply to become visible to society. We were an organization, respected beyond any other in America and one whose members were responsible for structuring a society that has been emulated by many others.

Freemasonry for the past 30 years in the United States has concentrated the vast amount of its energies on recruiting membership and raising money to give away to charities. We have become one of the greatest charitable organizations in the world at the sacrifice of our intellectual integrity and influence in society. We are trying to buy back, through charitable programs, that which we lost through ignorance. The result is that the membership has declined over 60 percent, and we have lost most of our influence and prestige in society.

This does not mean that charity has no place in Freemasonry. Indeed, charity has been a core value of the craft from its beginning, but this charity started as support of its brothers, wives, children, and widows. Now however, it has become the core value in North America with a face almost of a public charity.

Dr. E. Scott Ryan in his book *The Theology of Crime and the Paradox of Freedom* observed; "The wonderful work of Masonic charity is by no means synonymous with the wonderment of Masonic spirituality-and that is a shame when one considers how many fine charities there are and how few fine spiritualities there are." How correct he is.

Numbers of members and financial wealth are not visible signs of success in Freemasonry. The United States has had both and is now rapidly losing both. In studying the styles of Freemasonry we must not become blinded by the number of members nor by the magnificence of structures. Freemasonry changed this world not by rolling over it with large numbers or by buying its influence. Freemasonry changed the world by improving good men one at a time.

In reviewing the history of world Freemasonry it doesn't take long to realize that it had its detractors and enemies almost from the beginning of its existence. Among those who

became its greatest enemies were political leaders and leaders of religious institutions. Upon discovering the motivations which caused this enmity in such different entities, you will find that they are the same. Both have a desire to control the bodies and minds of those under their dominion.

Almost universally, dictatorial and despotic governments and religious leaders have opposed the craft, but it is significant that there is no religion that opposes Freemasonry; only religious leaders oppose it. The major objection that they indicate is that we accept membership from all monotheistic believers while requiring only a belief in a Supreme Being.

Even though this opposition from both groups continues to exist today, Freemasonry has never been destroyed by the forces of either. It has been suppressed at times, driven underground, and even forced to cease operation in some areas, but it has risen like a phoenix from the ashes when the tyranny was destroyed.

Looking at the condition of Freemasonry on a world level today in general and disregarding the Anglican speaking jurisdictions, we find a thriving organization continuing to exert influence in the evolving society. There does seem to be greater problems in some Anglican speaking Grand Lodges, especially in number loss. Perhaps it has been a willingness in these Grand Lodges to lower standards and to adopt a more charitable style of the craft that has resulted in the decline and loss of influence in society. This is unquestionably true in North America.

I have been greatly impressed almost everywhere I travel, not only with the quality of the men I have found comprising the craft but also in the positions of influence that they hold in their societies. Now however, Freemasonry is being confronted with challenges unlike any of those we have faced in the past and will require a continuing re-examination of our methods of operation. The greatest enemies threatening us today lie not in the leadership of governments or religious institutions, although some remain enemies of the craft. Our greatest enemy today is ourselves.

The three greatest challenges that I see confronting Freemasonry today are the expansion of irregular Freemasonry, the development of modern technology, and the ignorance of our membership.

Of course, irregular Freemasonry is nothing new in the Masonic world. It has been around almost as long as has regular Freemasonry, and it has never been a major obstacle to us. The concern regarding it today is the rapidity of its growth and expansion and the tendency to become more organized than it has been in the past. What was once a quiescent separate style of Freemasonry is now developing into a competitive threat to mainstream and regular Freemasonry. It also is appearing in jurisdictions that have been occupied by regular Freemasonry for years. It has become a major obstacle in stabilizing Freemasonry in Eastern Europe and is making its appearance felt in northwest Africa. This is an issue that we cannot choose to ignore, because it presents a different face of the craft to society, one not bound by the protocols that define the Freemasonry we know.

What is of an even greater concern and is something totally new to our noble craft is the impact that is being felt via the use of the World Wide Web. The Internet has created a new atmosphere that is causing considerable problems for us and is one that is not going to go away or one that we can eliminate.

Grand Lodges today are being bypassed by ignorant Freemasons, and ignorant Freemasons constitute the vast majority of our membership. Please note that I said ignorant, not stupid, although today from what I read on the net, I am not sure anymore.

I never cease to be amazed at how much misinformation is placed on the web by some of our members who become impressed with what they think they know. I now spend a considerable amount of time responding to brothers who have become "instant experts" on the craft. It is amazing how one can have all the answers without ever hearing the questions. The lack of Masonic knowledge by our own membership is one of the greatest threats to our survival. For an institution that impresses upon its membership the need for the acquisition of knowledge, the Internet reveals a considerable dearth of success on our part. It reminds me of a quotation I once read; "let he who does not know, shut up and learn."

In addition to the damage that is being caused by our own membership on the web, whose voice, because they are Freemasons, is accepted as fact by the non-Mason as well as our own members, damage is caused by those who would destroy us. Our enemies have found fertile ground on the web to dissipate their vitriolic hate of our fraternity. This we cannot contain any more than we could contain it in the past, but we must understand that it is there and educate our membership concerning it.

We have been fortunate to have been able to carry our isolationist attitude into almost the present day, but my brothers, like it or not, it is over. This modern technology along with the present-day attitude of our leadership is removing that choice from us.

One of our glaring weaknesses as leaders today has been our inability to see the big picture of the craft. We have a tendency to lose sight of the great accomplishments for which Freemasonry has been known and to concentrate our efforts on issues not paramount to our existence and of little consequence to society. This is not a viable option. We simply cannot afford to fail to understand the diverse impacts that we have created and continue to create on human society.

For 300 years, our past brothers worked to develop an unparalleled organization whose philosophical purpose could easily be used as a template for world peace, and there has probably been no time in our existence that the influence of that philosophy was anymore needed in the world than it is today.

As we acknowledge and recognize our place in the world as Freemasons, we must also acknowledge and recognize our responsibility to the world as Freemasons. Our brothers of the past have done their job exceedingly well. They have placed the Fraternity in the forefront as an elite organization, one highly respected for its contribution in developing world society. It is now up to us to continue to build upon what they established. The

very least we must do as Freemasons to contribute to a better world is to live as Freemasons, and so mote it ever be.

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