

“THE CHAIN OF UNION”

ANOTHER OMITTED ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR RITUAL

By: Carlos Antonio Martinez, Jr.

The Chain of Union is, without a doubt, one of the most significant parts of all Masonic Rituals and actual symbols, which, decorate the Masonic Lodge. This “chain”, is actually a rope, which, circumvests the inner walls of the Masonic Temple in its upper part. Its “elevated location” gives it a celestial connotation, confirmed by the twelve knots that appear at intervals all along said rope, and, which, symbolize the twelve signs of the zodiac. These knots also correspond to the twelve columns that, except in the East side, surround the Inner Sanctum of our Temples in its entirety. Five of these columns are situated in the North, the other five in the South, and the remaining two, “Jachin” and “Boaz”, in the West.

To comprehend this symbology, the studious Free-Mason must bear in mind that the Lodge Room is, foremost, an image of the world, and, as such, there must exist, within its walls, a representation of the very “frame” of the Cosmos. Many edifices and sacred sanctuaries, just like entire cities built in accordance with the rules of traditional architecture, are, in one way or another, enframed by the Zodiacal Constellations. Such is the case, for example, of most Governmental Abodes all around the world, the majority of ever enigmatic Templar Churches in Europe, the magnificent Taj Mahal in India, the unequalled Great Mosque of Baghdad in Irak, the extrasensory Chartres Cathedral in France, the sumptuous Vatican in Rome, the formidable Chinese Ming Tang, the former Temple of Herod (“Third Temple”) and its mythical archetype “The Celestial Jerusalem”, of buildings as ancient as those time-defying and opulent Egyptian, Mayan and Aztec Pyramids, and even the megalithic formation of Stonehenge, just to name a few. In like manner, Operative Masons, Artisans and Builders of any traditional society made use of a rope to determine the correct position of their Palaces, Temples, Cathedrals, and more modern edifices, which, were always situated keeping with the coordinates demarcated by the Four Cardinal Points. Bro.: Rene Guenon once stated and wrote: “... among the functions of a “frame”, perhaps the principal-one, is to maintain in its place the diverse elements which, it contains or encloses in its interior, in order to form an Ordered Whole, which, as already known, is the very significance of the word “Cosmos”. This “frame” must, in certain manner, “bind” or “unite” those elements amongst themselves - hence the term “chain of union” and its most profound significance, for all symbols exposed to human view in the shape of a “rope”, a “thread” or a “chain” (all symbols of the axis) are in definitive relation with the Sutratma ...” Therefore, from a metaphysical point of view, the Masonic Chain of Union comes to signify exactly the same as “the chain of the worlds”: a symbol that synthesizes the conjunction of all states, beings and worlds, which, conform the Universal Manifestation, and coexist joined by the “Thread of Atma” (Sutratma), or, in simpler terms, through their “Breath” or “Vivifier Spirit”.

In another related aspect, the Chain of Union is also the Knotted Rope (or “houpe dentelee”) that appears in all Masonic tracing boards, particularly in those corresponding

to the Degrees of Apprentice and Fellowcraft, and as a decorative piece surrounding the inner space of the Lodge Room. The symbolic significance of this actual rope is identical to that of the Chain of Union; However, there is one aspect that must be added and considered: the function of “protecting”, in addition to “uniting” and “linking” the symbols and emblems which appear on the tracing boards, and giving a character of Sacredness and Inviolability to the Lodge Room. In this sense, the idea of “Protection” is comprehended within the symbolism of knots and ligatures, which, by their respective shapes and forms, are reminiscent of Initiatic Mazes and Labyrinths. In Universal Symbolology, besides being related to “voyages” and initiatic trials, the Labyrinth has the function of protecting and defending Holy Sites and Spiritual Centers, by impeding its access to the Profane who is Unqualified for Initiation. This “Protection” is equally extended (and I should state “mainly”) to impeding the access of Subtle Influences of Inferior Psyche, which, due to their dissolvent characters, represent a clear danger and must be avoided at all cost – for it is through such influences that certain chaotic and malicious energies can manifest themselves, by endeavoring to weaken and destroy these Spiritual Centers and those Traditional Organizations linked to them, and, thus, obstructing any and all possible communication with truly Superior Influences, which, have been the main support of said organizations. I must add that there is also the danger of Dissolution (or Petrification, which, in this context means the same) that, nowadays, threatens to render Free-Masonry extinct. Every day it becomes more evident that our American Craft is still being subjected to the gradual extirpation of the Initiatic and Esoteric Dimension of its symbols and rituals. And what is more lamentable and alarming, is, that such actions have been taken and/or sanctioned by the very Hierarchies or Grand Bodies of our American Craft – They are either too ignorant, too indifferent, or, simply, too recalcitrant to understand and accept that thanks to these symbols (terminology included) and rituals, revealed to us through the ages, the Masonic Order acquires its purest sense; Our symbols and rituals constitute the core of our Identity; that, which, our Institution is in itself and cannot cease to be, unless we allow it to become Devalued and Empty of All Essential Content. In order to keep such menacing eventuality from happening, it becomes necessary that all Free-Masons of Traditional Spirit (meaning those who consider Free-Masonry to be a ramification of Ancient Primordial Traditions and, thus, a path to Wisdom) reinstate, once more, the Cosmogonic and Metaphysical Sense of its symbolical and ritualistic legacy, starting with the implementation and use of Omitted Indispensable Ceremonies and Allegories, such as: “The Chain of Union”. This emblem is, indeed, the “celestial frame” which limits, separates, and protects “The World of Light” from “The World of Darkness”; the Sacred from the Profane.

In addition to the knotted rope that surrounds the Lodge Room and its tracing-boards, there is a highly significant ritual by the same name. It is one consisting of the interlacement formed by the hands and arms of all the Brethren in attendance. This Chain of Union is one of the Masonic Rituals that alludes the most to the sentiment of Masonic Fraternity – a sentiment, which, in fact, is sustained by the Bonds of Friendship and Concord that prevail among all Free-Masons. Hence the use of the expression “Bonds of Brotherly Love and Affection” when referring ourselves to the knots along the rope of the Chain of Union; for only Love, duly understood and expressed to others, can generate the

strength to conciliate adversaries and dissolve all oppositions. Masonic Fraternity represents, therefore, the same fundament over which its own initiatic and traditional organization is supported; In this sense, the interlacing of the hands and arms configures a cruciform play that evokes the image of a strongly cohesioned and organized structure.

This ritual takes place all around the Inner Sanctum and the pillars of Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty, right before the closing of all Business Meetings and ceremonies of Initiation, Passing, and Raising. It was fundamentally designed to direct a Prayer of Invocation to the Great Architect of the Universe, being said invocation at the very core of principles behind its indispensable utilization in our rituals. It is for that reason, that to omit the use of prayer, as well as a number of other symbols, allegories, terminology and formulas, (as it is commonly done and officially sanctioned nowadays) is to provoke an inevitable impoverishment of our rituals, and their consequential reduction to practically nothing. Perhaps it is about time, for Organized American Masonry, to start looking back past 1717 and beyond England, and assimilate at least the example of Operative Masonry, where a number of clearly esoteric ceremonies were implemented, and where religious pleas and invocations to “divine entities” were a constitutive part of their rituals and symbolical labors. The chain of union in an Operative Lodge, is, still, the model after which this segment of the Universal Masonic Ritual is carried out - thus confirming its truly “central” and “traditional” role in the conferral of our Degrees.

Generally, the Chain of Union starts and finishes with the Worshipful Master, and, it is him, as maximum authority of the Lodge, who conducts the invocation to the Supreme Architect. Most of those invocations, which, are still used by a vast number of Masonic Rites, Orients and/or Grand Jurisdictions around the globe, conserve their Operative Legacy and Influence. A rough example of such invocation is the following: “... Supreme Architect of the Universe! Sole Fountain of All Goodness and Perfection! Oh Thou, who has always labored for the happiness of men and all thy creatures; we thank thee for thy Paternal Goodwill, and so we conjure thee to provide for us, per thy considerations and according to our own necessities. Do spread over us thy Celestial Light. Do fortify in our hearts the Love toward our obligations and duties, that we may fulfill them faithfully. May our gatherings be strengthened in their union and make us ever-useful to our fellow men, by the very desire of thy pleasure. May our Temples forever be an abode of Peace and Virtue, and this Chain of Perfect and Fraternal Friendship among us, be so solid, as to never let anything break it. Amen! ...” As it is thus inferred by this Masonic Prayer, this fraternal and chained unity is, consequently, transformed into that horizontal and psychosomatic (terrestrial) support over which shall “descend” – stimulated by the use of prayer – the blessings of Spiritual Influence or Transcending Self – “Thy Celestial Light”, thus facilitating an avenue of axial communication between heaven and earth, or, as commonly stated in Masonic Language, “between the Celestial Grand Lodge, up above, and our Terrestrial Subordinate Lodges, here below”. It is through the use of an Invocation, that we essentially pretend to communicate with Celestial Energies (the Ideas or Creating Attributes of the Universal Architect) whose spiritual actions have comprised – and permanently constitute – the ritualistic, symbolical and mythical (or better said cosmogonical and metaphysical)

reality of our distinct initiatic organization. Moreover, it is within the ritual of the Chain of Union where the collective entity, constituted by our ancestors and forebrothers whom now labor at the “Eternal Grand Orient” or “Celestial Grand Lodge”, gathers and concentrates in ethereal fellowship with us. Said collective entity becomes one in communion with its present inheritors, or, Free-Masons whom, having received and understood (to whatever extent) the message of its Traditional Legacy, nowadays contribute to keeping it alive and current. In this sense, therefore, we can assert that the Chain of Union is also symbolizing the Initiatic Chain of Masonic Tradition (and per analogy, of all traditions) whose origin is as immemorial as the message, which, it has been conveying throughout time and history.

Individualities, or, better stated, the ideas and/or characteristics of oneness and singularity, that each “component” of the “chain” may have of himself, disappear in order to form One Body, which, vibrates and breathes in a single rhythmic harmony. The Chain of Union, thus, becomes a magical and sacred circle where a cosmic and theurgical force concentrates and flows through every “chained man” - in this way permitting them to be part of the True Masonic Spirit and partake of the same salubrious and regenerating energy.

It should come to us, as no surprise, that during the course of the ritual of initiation, the neophyte receives “Light” while kneeling at the altar, at the very center of a “circle” integrated by all those in attendance.

To conclude, let it be known that restoring this ceremony and symbol to our ritual and Lodge vesture, is not only a Duty, but, a Timeless Obligation, in a Tradition where Genuine Ritual and Collective Work carry out an imminent function as transmitting vehicles of spiritual influence.

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