

## **FREEMASONRY THIRD PILLAR OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY**

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**Is it possible to speak, in our days, of esoterism, rituals, secrecy of initiation, without making the subject oppressed, in between the vision of unelaborated positivism, which is uncompromising, in its declared war, against the "irrational", and the vision of the mystical radicalism, which, in its turn, is completely detached from the social context and the routines of the daily life?**

**Can phenomenons, such as those that are related to freemasonry, serve to fulfil a role in our present day societies?**

**According to Sociologist Ralph Dahrendorf, at crucial times, such as, when a society finds itself confronted with periods of crisis of a transitional nature, there are institutions, which have already proven to be capable of constituting a valid point of arrival for all free-minded men, who cannot find satisfaction, for one way or another, in the traditional religions, or in the type of secularism pursued by the political parties.**

**As a matter of fact, in a democratic society, which is in crisis, the functioning of a "prescribed central nuclei" can be guaranteed: (a) by a secular religion which manifests itself in conformity with the discreet and not coercive form of a civil religion, typical to "open societies" or (b) through the overall pattern of religion politics, which is typically the case of undemocratic "closed societies".**

**If democracy, because of the tensions inherent in modern societies, remains always vulnerable, the threat to its very existence comes, more, from the presence of religion politics, rather than, a civil religion, when exigencies to secure a "prescribed central nuclei" begin emerging.**

**In civil societies, the enemy that hangs over the liberal expression has been the temptation, if one may say so, exercised on men by means of omni-comprehensive ideologies and above all, by the fundamentalist convictions; which at times, are religious, at other, national and even tribal; in other words, always, by the authoritarian ideologies, which claim to speak in the name of the abstract, collective entities, such as: nation, race, proletarians, etc. Therefore, what democracy needs is a civil religion, rather than an aggressive creed, as the latter poses a constant threat to the former's very existence.**

**According to Dahrendorf, "If, against such threats to liberty, one wants to find a remedy, he should try to discover it from within the realms of the civilized society. That type of a society, in fact, came already into existence in the Western world between 1700 to 1800, only thanks to important progress made in the field of secular socialization (in the form of academies, clubs, lyceums etc).(1)**

**In my opinion, Freemasonry enters fully into this type of secular socialization, which, in civilized Anglo-Saxon societies represented an important "Third Pillar" against all forms of fundamentalism and totalitarianism.**

**A short excursus inside the Italian situation will clarify better the meaning of associationism and consequently of Freemasonry, that with all its peculiarities also re-enters in the phenomena so-called associative, inside the civil society. In the light of foregoing when the situation of Italy is compared with those of the countries which are always shown as example to "open societies" the weaknesses and the inadequacies of the Italian example become, unfortunately, so evident that, because of its endemic situation, its case also looks rather anomalous. In fact, in the Anglo-Saxon countries,**

which are the real examples to "open society", the importance of making proper use of the guiding institutions, among which Freemasonry, has always been well understood and well respected, so much so that, these institutions, during the transitional periods of crisis, have been able to promulgate values which represent the only valid deterrent against the rise of any type of totalitarianism or fundamentalism. At this juncture, one has to admit that, in the proper way of the functioning of such a mechanism, Great Britain has always been an undisputed master.

In the British society, at least, as far back as three quarters of this century, not only a civil law and a civil state, but democratic, political institutions were, as well, in existence. In fact, as Dahrendorf states: "Also, guiding-institutions, such as those capable of promulgating values, have all existed in England in the pre-modern times. These institutions which represented the British "elite", had, though limited, not a negligible influence on the majority."

The guiding-institutions were acknowledged in all respects; among them, freemasonry had its modern origins nowhere else but in England. Consequently, it is possible to affirm that in the pluralism of an "open society", the "creative chaos", which presents itself as the product of the individual or a group, have been able to defend itself against the pretensions of a revolutionary minority, as well as against the arrogance of majority.

The democracy of modern times, therefore, in addition to liberty and market economy, is in need of, what Dahrendorf defines: a "Third Pillar", that of democracy, namely, of the "Civil Society". But one has to take into account that in a "open society", our life, by and large, is bound to revolve around private "associations" which remain beyond the nature and the scope of State institutions. In fact, an important difference between the model of totalitarian state and that of an "open society" lies in the very fact that, whereas in the former everything becomes an organic part of the State, and thereby, nothing but the State is in existence; while in the other, instead, within the possibility recognized and offered to individuals, divers and autonomous associations may exist, one next to the other, within the pluralism of democracy, without being whatsoever obliged to pursue one single and same objective only.

In Italy, in the aftermath of the second World War, an anomalous development took place; and the associations were developed under the protection of the political parties; as a result of which, instead of becoming autonomous creations of a civilized, modern and dynamic society, they have often, become the "driving belt" of the political parties.

Thus, mainly for this reason, "The Third Pillar" of the Italian democracy, starting from the very beginning, remained weak. Lacking of a cultural and social autonomy of its own, on the other hand, led the Italians, to delegate the solution of all their problems, solely to the State.

The hope is that even in Italy it may be possible to achieve a higher maturity in the comprehension of the concept of "associationism"; this would help to have a better comprehension even of the same Freemasonry experience, exploiting in this way at the best the enormous potentialities of ethical and moral values that are inside it, confirming its fundamental rule of "establishing values" in a society now defined "post-modern".

(1)Ralph Dahrendorf, Reset, June 1994, pag.3

M.W. Bro. Fabio Venzi, M.W. Grand Master, The Regul M.W. Bro. Fabio Venzi, was installed as the M.W. Grand Master of the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy on April 6 th 2002 by M.W. Bro. Dr. Giuliano di Bernado. He will hold office for three years period 2002-2005. M.W. Bro Fabio Venzi is an erudite Masonic scholar and a well read intellectual. He has

**delivered numerous lectures and presented many papers in Research Lodges and Masonic Societies. He has graciously granted us permission to post his lectures and articles in our web site. R.W.Bro. Bruno Gazzo, the illustrious webmaster of the Premier Masonic web site Pietre Stones Review of Freemasonry had kindly helped us to obtain the gracious permission of M.W.Bro. Fabio Venzi. We are very much beholden to both of them and profusely thank them.**