

FREEMASONRY IN NIGERIA

BY

R.W. BRO. M. O. TAIGA
DISTRICT GRAND MASTER FOR NIGERIA

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ORIGIN OF FREEMASONRY

Freemasonry is the world's oldest and largest fraternal society practiced under the United Grand Lodge of England. Freemasonry is the UK's largest, secular, fraternal and charitable organization. Whilst a world-wide membership of all Freemasons cannot be estimated, there are over 600,000 members in Great Britain, tens of thousands on the continent and maybe four million in North America. There are over 9000 Lodges in England and Wales and overseas under the English constitution.

Freemasonry is a society of men, concerned with moral uprightness and self-knowledge. Its three cardinal principles are brotherly love, relief and truth. Essential membership qualification is belief in a Supreme Being. Freemasonry is open to all men of any race or religion, provided they are of good repute.

Whilst dispute continues to rage, as to the true origins of Freemasonry – stone Masons or speculative/esoteric masons and Masonic legends trace the history of Freemasonry to as far back as King Solomon (967BC), and some early Masonic historians stated this as fact. One clear disputed fact in the early history of Freemasonry is the getting together of four Lodges at the Goose and Gridiron alehouse in St. Paul's Churchyard London on the 24th of June 1717 to form a Grand Lodge of England, the first Grand Lodge in the world! It is certain that there were some Lodges in existence before then both in Scotland and England. Details are sketchy and thus have constituted basis of modern research by the "Canonbury Papers". For example, Elias Ashmole noted in his diary in 1646 that he was initiated in Warrington, other Lodges were founded in Chester around 1670 and Scarborough in 1705. By 1730, there were over a hundred English Lodges under the Grand Lodge. An Irish Grand Lodge was established by the mid – 1720s and a Scottish one in 1736. Then complications set in, with the establishment of various rival Grand Lodges. After decades of often bitter infighting among masons, two rival Grand Lodges, each with a royal Prince as its Grand Master were eventually reconciled and in December 1813, the United Grand Lodge of England was born, nearly a century after the first Grand Lodge.

THE SPREAD OF FREEMASONRY

The level of influence of Freemasonry in the development of political thought in eighteenth – century Britain is complex. However, following the formation of the first Grand Lodge in London 1717, Lodges spread rapidly and Freemasonry as a movement

enjoyed a geometric growth. The movement's appeal was not limited to the British Isles. During the 1720's Freemasonry spread to the low countries, France, Spain, Russia and the Asian continent. A decade later, there were lodges in Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden and Portugal. Whilst in France, Freemasonry attracted the aristocracy; in Britain it was one of a handful of convivial societies, attracting men who were aristocracy, city gents, men of moneyed society and some of humbler background. Freemasonry operated as a social movement and in England, it preached devout behaviors of prudence, tolerance and natural religion. It therefore attracted intellectual who appreciated empirical values and the new science. Royalty and masonry became closely associated. Members of the scientific establishment were enticed to the craft, so too members of the Royal Society and aristocracy. Between 1723 and 1730, of the first 250 fellows of the Royal Society, 89 can positively be identified as freemasons, including Sir Newton, so too were key political figures such as the Holy Roman Emperor Francis Duke of Lorraine.

FREEMASONRY AND AMERICA

The 1820's looked as though they would be the best of times for the special relationship between the Fraternal Order of Freemasonry and the young American nation. It was not just because so, as many prominent members of the founding generation, such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and 13 of the 39 signers of the Constitution, had been members. It was also that Freemasonry and the growing Republic had many ideals in common – honourable civic – mindedness, high regard for learning and progress and a broad and tolerant religiosity. According to historian Steven Bullock, a leading scholar of the American Masonic Fraternity, **“Freemasons helped to give the new nation a symbolic core”**

Masonic symbols – compass, square and other emblems associated with freemasonry emblazoned everywhere. Many Americans thought, wrongly but justifiably, that the great seal of USA itself contained Masonic symbol. But this is both a tribute and a liability to the brotherhood that people saw the influence of Freemasonry even where it did not exist. Royalty and masonry became distinctive aprons, wielding the trowels of their crafts – they routinely laid the cornerstones of important government buildings and churches and partook prominently in parades and other public ceremonies.

Americans took freemasonry more than did any other nation. There were masons among its founding fathers, those who drew up the Declaration of independence and those who approved the design of the Great Seal.

IN FRANCE

The Great Catholic country – masonry took strong hold in its early years. This is because, France, was at the forefront of the eighteenth – century Age of Reason; those intellectuals who embraced reason with the mind, needed mystery for their heart – and found it in Freemasonry.

THE INFLUENCE OF FREEMASONRY

It is fact that Freemasonry greatly infiltrated the nineteenth – century society. For example it was Masons who **“succeeded in erecting Cleopatra’s Needle”** on Victoria embankment in London in 1878; when its twin was raised in New York in 1880, the celebration was **“a brazenly Masonic affair”** The Washington monument **“was dedicated in another dose of fraternal self congratulation”**

In 1992, the words of Edgar Darling, grand master of the Grand Lodge of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts apply to the masons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; **“masons are movers and shakers, dreamers and builders, and above all we are freethinkers”**

BRIEF HISTORY OF MASONRY IN NIGERIA/WEST AFRICA

Very limited information is available on the origins of Freemasonry in the West African sub region. The British colonial master must have introduced Freemasonry as a natural concomitant evolution of the colonial administration. Gould’s history of Freemasonry Vol. IV page 32 (3rd edition) shows that the earliest Lodges were:

1791: Lodge No. 586 Bulan Lodge in Portuguese Guinea

1810: Lodge No. 621 Torridzonian Lodge at Cape Castle, Cape Coast

1820: Lodge No. 721 Lodge of Good Intent at Freetown, Sierra Leone

1833: Lodge No. 599 and St. Johns Lodge in Gold Coast

1851: Lodge No. 867 Gambia Lodge

All these Lodges are now extinct

1859: Gold coast Lodge No. 773, originally numbered 1075, the Lodge was consecrated in 1859, at that time the seat of the colonial Government in the Gold Coast. This is the oldest Living Lodge in West Africa followed by Lagos Lodge No. 1171 in Nigeria warranted in 1867.

The proposal for the formation of the District Grand Lodge of Nigeria was mooted in 1912 and by the 15th of July 1913, the District Grand Lodge of Northern and Southern Nigeria was formed. Following the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914, the name was later changed to 1916 to the District Grand Lodge of Nigeria. The Original six Lodges that initiated the formation of the District are:

Zungeru Lodge No. 3506 which is no longer in existence

Lagos Lodge No. 1171 warranted 25/05/1867

St John's Lodge No 2668 warranted 23/07/1879

St George's Lodge No 3065 warranted 25/07/1904

Northern Nigeria Lodge No 3325 warranted 20/07/1908

Calabar Lodge No 3434 warranted 01/02/1910

The District Grand Lodge English Constitution today has 33 Lodges administered under six Masonic areas each headed by an Assistant District Grand Master reporting to the Rt. Worshipful, the District Grand Master.

The DGM is helped in his duties by a Deputy District Grand Master.

The Irish Constitution came in 1897 with the formation of Macdonald's Lodge Calabar. They have a total of 20 Lodges under the Provincial Grand Lodge of Nigeria Irish Constitution.

The Scottish Constitution commenced with Lodge Academic NO 1150 in 1915. It has a total of 77 Lodges in the District Grand Lodge of Nigeria (S.C) of which 40 are reported Dormant.

CRITICISMS OF FREEMASONRY

As Freemasonry spread throughout the world in what appeared like the best of times, so quickly did it experience dire calamities. Freemasonry has never lacked enemies

who have included the Roman Catholic Church, other traditional churches, Pentecostals, the Communist Party and the Nazis. The movement has been condemned by Popes and Kings, governments, religious fundamentalists and the ignorant who feel threatened by the Fraternity's reputation for secrecy.

On 24th April 1738, POPE CLEMENT XII moved against the Society, issuing a **PAPAL BULL "In Eminenti Apostolarus Specula"** Which banned all Roman Catholics from joining Lodges and in a number of countries, Masons were hounded and arrested. Indeed the secrecy of the Lodges had aroused a good deal of suspicion not only in ecclesiastical circles.

In 1994 Pope Leo XII issued a serious condemnation of the society on the grounds that Masons say that they recognize all religions as equal. The simple truth is that Masonry does recognize the equal right of all men to Worship God as they see fit.

Religious zealots do not accept the doctrine of the free and equal right to worship according to ones conscience. It will appear that freemasonry pioneered the very concept of religious freedom and the individual right to worship God according to one's own conscience.

IS FREEMASONRY CORRUPT?

According to The Brotherhood and Inside the Brotherhood books by Stephen Knight (1989) and Martin Short (1989) respectively, Freemasonry is riddled with corruption. They claim that Masonic Policemen, Lawyers, Judges, MPS and Lords all traders engage in favouritism, preferment to each other, manipulate justice, and so on. Much more condemnation was made of the obligation made on becoming a Master Mason.

The Grand Lodge responded to these sudden appearances of Freemasonry in the news. "The closed mouth attitude" and Very Senior Masons decided to talk to the press, - even in the case of Commander Michael Higham, the then Grand Secretary of United Grand Lodge appearing on radio phone, TV programmes, booklets, and video tapes explaining Freemasonry were published. Several classic works of Freemasonry, defusing many of ridiculous theories were laid to rest.

The point must be made that Freemasonry has a long history of never answering critics. This is why the movement is a wonderful target for bigotry, those who are bent on

destroying it. But this has changed over time as the United Grand Lodge has now promoted “openness” of Freemasonry leading to better awareness of what Freemasonry is all about.

WHITHER FREEMASONRY IN NIGERIA DIRECTING HER COURSE

At the beginning, the Governor Generals, Chief Justices, Bishops and top hierarchy of the colonial administration practiced and advanced the course of Freemasonry in Nigeria. The early eminent Nigerians, directly involved with the British Government were invariably Freemasons and provided leadership of the craft. However, in 1977 the military Government published a list of societies and clubs it titled “Secret Societies” and endeavored to proscribe them. The government made a law that civil servants should not join “secret societies”. Then in the 1979 constitution proscribed by the military government for the incoming civilian government, they defined secret societies without mentioning any names. It is my considered view that the definition of secret societies in that constitution does not include Freemasonry. The direct consequence of that is the erosion of Masonic attendance and membership. Mass resignations were experienced by Lodges. Public office holders and seekers withdrew from Lodges with consequences on subsequent quality of new recruits.

In 1989, a Moslem organization took over the temple of Kano Lodge in the Northern part of Nigeria. The organization went to the press to claim that the temple was being deployed for blood letting rituals. The church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion has continued to insist that members of the church swear to an oath of non membership of the fraternal society. Other churches, like the Methodist congregation have shown equal aggression against the order.

There is outright ignorance in the attack against the fraternity in Nigeria. There are brethren who join, hoping to find the “magic wand” to all their problems. When this is not forthcoming disillusion sets in. There is the tendency to compare the society to other religious bodies in the country and to threat Masonry as “anti-Christ”.

THE WAY FORWARD

It is well established that no true mason perceives any conflict between the teachings of his faith whether a:

- Christian Mason,

- Jewish mason,
- Muslim Mason,
- Hindu Mason, and

the Masonic principles he experiences in the Lodge.

Masons are being condemned because they are against intolerance imposture, superstition, fanaticism and fundamentalism.

The major steps to reverse the tide should include the following:

1. All Masons must understand according to Foster Bailey (died 1977) in **“The Spirit of Masonry”** “All mankind of every race and creed are the children of one God. This Masonry from time immemorial has always known and taught its members..... Masonry has often been proclaimed as a spiritual quest. If it is not so understood, it is an ancient but empty shell”. We need to practice Masonry the way it should be, according to the secrets and mysteries.
2. When Masonry was publicly acceptable, it was a cross between a gentleman’s club, a mutual benefit society and a charitable institution. It had religious principles and semi-religious rituals and teachings, all put together as Freemasonry’s symbolism and allegory. We need to follow these dictums.
3. Freemasonry has continued to be the object of wide curiosity and intense suspicion. With its elaborate rituals, its involvement with ancient wisdom and modern enlightenment, science and reason, and its relatively exclusive membership (applicants must be invited to join and are carefully vetted) the non members will inevitably be non-trusting of the institution and conspiratorial theories are bound to be numerous. The society must be ready to prove that the **“Grand Secret”** of Freemasons, as brother Benjamin Franklin once said “is that they have no secrets at all”. But we have novelist Dan Brown of **DA Vinci Code** who again came out with two new books **“The Solomon Key”** now known as **“The Lost Symbol”**. Again critical of the society. We need to rise up to respond to every criticism with elaborate publications, TV interviews and all that is needed to prove the greatness of this noble institution.
4. In its early years, like in America, Freemasonry in Nigeria was eagerly embraced both by the establishment and the artisan and commercial class who aspired to that establishment. Indeed, Freemasonry encouraged social movement and

more inclusive elitism through education, the cultivation of politeness and honour, mutual assistance, networking and tolerance for differences in the delicate matter of religion.

5. Freemasonry in Nigeria has to learn from the experience of other countries.

- After the American Revolution, American Lodges began to move into the country's interior promoting commercial and other connections between coastal and the ever advancing frontier. We need such in Nigeria, rather than being limited to cities.

- Freemasonry in America is a story of successive re-inventions:

The introduction of two new higher degree systems of Masonry by younger Masons, the York Rite – following the English tradition and the Scottish Rite – following French practices, attracted younger masons. Even though Nigeria has similar institutions we need to grow them. For example the country Ghana came to Nigeria to study its higher degree model and started thereafter. Today Ghana has 17 Chapters including one in neighboring Togo. Nigeria has only 12 Chapters out of which 3 were recently consecrated in October 2010.

- Freemasons need to develop a well articulated good life style that shows living by example.
- Masons need to get more involved in the community by executing community projects. Community projects that are easily identifiable as the Rotarians do. Masons need to direct charity efforts towards the larger community, not just towards fellow Masons and their families.
- In America, partly to quiet criticism from women, Masons created the **Order of the Eastern Star** and other affiliates for women to join. Is there anything Nigerian Freemasonry can do to encourage our women?
- As professional pursuits, advent of TV viewing, armed robbery concerns affect attendance at meetings, is it possible for masonry to target a different audience who have more spare time for recruitment?
- The economic hardship is a major hindrance to Masonic pursuit and consequently many Lodges have lost membership.

The future of Freemasonry in Nigeria is an organic and growing subject, which we all must focus on and find solutions to.

RECENT MASONIC DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA

In February 2009, both the Scottish and Irish Constitutions in Ghana formed the Grand Lodge of Ghana. Their English brethren, constituting the largest number of Lodges, opted not to join. In a similar move, the Irish and Scottish brethren in Nigeria have advanced their desire to form a Grand Lodge of Nigeria. Again we the English Masons have opted out.

The three English speaking countries in West Africa: Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone have a very close working relationship. In addition to practicing the same EMULATION RITUAL, we consult widely and regularly and attend each other's Annual Communications and Anniversaries. The three Districts are close and strongly trying our best that Masonry is alive and well in that region. We hope that eventually this symbiotic relationship may lead to the formation of the District United Grand Lodge of West Africa.

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