

FRATERNITAS

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SPECIAL "FREEMASONRY & DEMOCRACY"

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DISCUSSION ON "FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION OF THOUGHT" (Mira et al).

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND PEACE CONNECTED WITH FREEMASONRY (Cáceres).

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THE ROLE OF BENEFICENCE AND CHARITY IN THE MASONIC BODIES OF THE CMI (Braune & Hoyos).

THE MOSAIC PAVEMENT: DEMOCRATIC FOUNDATIONS AND STRATEGIES ... (Franz).



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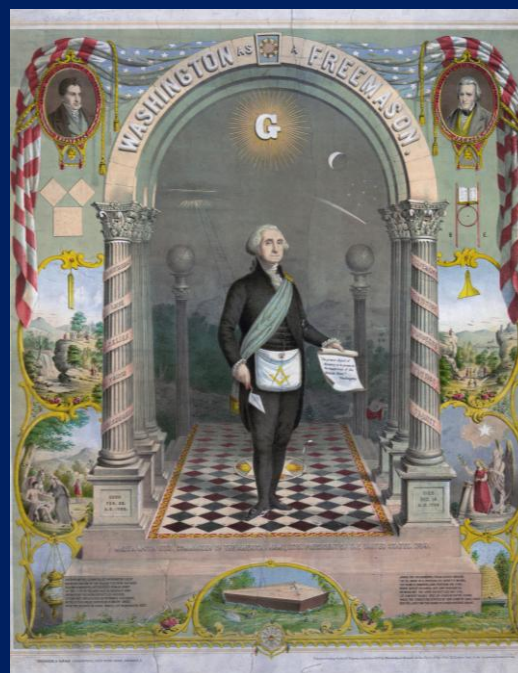
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Editorial

Brothers and Readers,

With joy, we deliver this edition that pulsates with important reflections and contemporary themes.

These are not cold words printed on paper. It is a call that echoes in temples and in the streets: **We are born free to think.**

The **Mosaic Pavement** we walk on is no mere ornament — it is the sacred ground on which stands true **Democracy**, the one that is not content with appearances, but demands that the Mason carry into life the same unwavering commitment: **Justice without fear, Freedom without shackles, Thought without chains.**

In this issue, we will feel the indissoluble connection between **Freedom of Expression, Democracy, Human Rights and Peace** — pillars that Freemasonry did not invent, but with which it has commitments in favor of the citizen. We will see, with data that touch the soul and numbers that scream the truth, how **Beneficence and Charity** are not pious gestures, but acts of fraternal love that change destinies and restore dignity.

And, with the courage that only the true initiate possesses, we will dare to look it in the face: **Freemasonry – Banality of the Good? Crisis of systemic coherence – between being and doing.**

Brethren, this question is supplication. It is the call echoing in our hearts: It is not enough to swear. It has to **be** in life. It is not enough to talk about Light. It is necessary **to make** the Light shine.

May every line of this issue awaken you. May each reflection raise your eyes from the ground and ask: "Am I, today, being faithful to the obligation I made on the Altar?"

Because Freemasonry needs **more Masons in fact**. May you think freely, may you speak with truth, may you act with ardent fraternity and, above all, may **you live** what you profess.

Read, reflect and act with courage.

Faternally,

Rubens Ricardo Franz
Executive Secretary

FREEMASONRY - BANALITY OF GOOD?

Crisis of systemic coherence - between being and doing

Carlos Cantero Ojeda ¹

Abstract:

This article analyzes the crisis of systemic coherence between the values proclaimed by Freemasonry and its effective influence on contemporary society. Starting from the philosophical principle of correspondence, it questions why institutions that defend humanist values fail to produce proportional impacts in the social world. To interpret this dissonance, it draws on theoretical frameworks from thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, Pierpaolo Donati, Humberto Maturana, and Manuel Castells, which allow us to understand the crisis as a problem of institutional communication, systemic disconnection, weakening of social relations, and difficulty adapting to the networked society. Another central point is the institution's inability to fully keep up with the dynamics of digital society. As a response, it proposes a process of critical reflection and institutional adaptation. Furthermore, it advocates for the creation of coherence metrics capable of concretely evaluating the social impact of Masonic actions. The article concludes by warning of the risk of the so-called "banality of good," inspired by Hannah Arendt's concept, in which high values are merely repeated rhetorically without producing real transformation. To avoid this situation, Freemasonry must strengthen the coherence between discourse and practice, promote responsible leadership, and renew its collective action to maintain relevance in the 21st century.

Keywords: Freemasonry; systemic coherence; digital society.

Resumen:

Este artículo analiza la crisis de coherencia sistémica entre los valores proclamados por la masonería y su influencia efectiva en la sociedad contemporánea. Partiendo del principio filosófico de correspondencia, se pregunta por qué las instituciones que defienden valores humanistas no logran generar un impacto proporcional en el ámbito social. Para interpretar esta disonancia, se recurre a marcos teóricos de pensadores como Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, Pierpaolo Donati, Humberto Maturana y Manuel Castells, que permiten comprender la crisis como un problema de comunicación institucional, desconexión sistémica, debilitamiento de las relaciones sociales y dificultad de adaptación a la sociedad en red. Otro punto central es la incapacidad de la institución para adaptarse plenamente a la dinámica de la sociedad digital. Como respuesta, se propone un proceso de reflexión crítica y adaptación institucional. Además, se aboga por la creación de métricas de coherencia capaces de evaluar concretamente el impacto social de las acciones masónicas. El artículo concluye advirtiendo sobre el riesgo de la llamada «banalidad del bien», inspirada en el concepto de Hannah Arendt, en la que los altos valores se repiten retóricamente sin producir una transformación real. Para evitar esta situación, la masonería debe fortalecer la coherencia entre discurso y práctica, promover un liderazgo responsable y renovar su acción colectiva para mantener su relevancia en el siglo XXI.

Palabras clave: Masonería; coherencia sistémica; Sociedad digital.

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Anatomy of a Contradiction

At the heart of the great philosophical and spiritual traditions lives an ancient maxim: *"As above, so below; as it is inside, so outside."* This **Principle of Correspondence** is not just a mystical phrase, but a law of existential symmetry. It affirms the connection between all planes of existence: spiritual, mental, and physical. What happens on one level is reflected on the others. Our inner world (thoughts and emotions) are reflected externally (reality, relationships). When observing the current panorama in institutions such as the Churches of different denominations, spiritual movements such as Buddhism (the most dynamic in the West) and philosophical movements such as Freemasonry, an uncomfortable question arises: if the institutional interior proclaims itself nobility and universal vocation, why does the exterior (the emerging society) show a systemic dissonance?

Spiritual institutions present themselves to the world as schools of improvement. Freemasonry, of great influence in the past, is assumed to be philosophical, ethical and initiatory, to build temples to virtue, wisdom and fraternity. However, these values are not reflected in society, on the contrary, an overflowing materialism, **nihilism** (the lack of meaning and the weakening of values), **hedonism** (the search for immediate pleasure without consideration of the consequences) and an **individualism** that devours the community fabric are imposed. Faced with this reality, a process of normosis (which is normalizing the abnormal), conformism, leniency, absence of critical thinking, often due to misunderstood prudence or loyalties, is observed. It is worth remembering that famous phrase or sentence: "For evil to triumph, it is only necessary that good people do nothing". In this scenario of inaction by good people, the forces of evil thrive. Even worse if there are false appearances or degrees of hypocrisy. Without a clear awareness of reality, the same dysfunctional behaviors and processes are autopoietically replicated. With more of the same, it is clear that the result will be no different.

When an institution and its members proclaim their commitment to the strengthening of Humanist values, with universal scope. But these are weakened in an increasingly banal society. Something is not right. This disconnect is not just a miscalculation, it is a **cognitive, ethical, and systemic dissonance**. These are produced by upholding a high ideal, while living in an

increasingly sterile practice. This scenario defines what is called an aporia.

The Masonic aporia

We face an **aporia** (R.A.E.)², a term that refers to a statement that presents a logical difficulty or a rational impossibility that seems unsolvable, a logical dead end. This situation is what we observe in Masonic discourses that, for decades, proclaim the commitment to themes and values that are not reflected in reality. There is talk of fraternity, ethics, quality education, peace, probity and social commitment, while the observable reality in society is completely contradictory. **The aporia is configured when Freemasonry and its commitment to Humanist values fail to mitigate the impact of socio-political trends and economic dogmas, with global impact.** It also occurs when institutional difficulty is observed in assuming and facing the new processes of communication and viralization of ideas and emotions in the digital society.

For a better understanding, let's relate the thought of contemporary philosophers and sociologists, addressing some dissonances that are evident and that can serve as a framework for this analysis: Habermas, from his critical theory and communicative action, could argue that aporia arises from a distortion of communication in the institution, where the discourse of values does not translate into a consensus and a real ethical practice; Luhmann, from his systems theory, would see it as a dissonance between the Masonic system and its environment, where self-reference prevents coherence with social demands; for Pierpaolo Donati, from his relational sociology – a perspective focused on social relations – the systemic dissonance would be in the relational crisis, where individualism and hedonism weaken solidarity and social commitment. For Humberto Maturana, from his biology of knowing (and autopoiesis), aporia arises from the drift of internal processes (Freemasonry), which are disconnected from the environment, losing coherence with social needs, a structural condition derived from their own functioning; and, from the perspective of Manuel Castells, the aporia would be the structural and functional disconnection of Freemasonry with the network society, an adaptive dissonance with the digital society.

² RAE - Royal Spanish Academy. Cultural institution dedicated to linguistic regularization among the Spanish-

speaking world

The Clash with the Digital Society

It is necessary to become aware of and assume the profound change represented by the emergence of the Digital Society, which constitutes a revolution of time and space, in digital networks, in human relationality, in the way in which ideas and emotions are contagious or viralized among people in global society. The role of powerful digital tools in global networks characterizes the OMNI culture: omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, instantaneous, multidirectional, multi-language, multimedia, multimodality, transparency, horizontality, direct and superficial communication. Freemasonry is on the margins of these vertiginous, global processes, which require knowledge management and constant updating.

Freemasonry, in its **structural, organizational and cultural drift**, is not fully integrated into the processes and networks of the digital society and its emerging paradigms. The consequence of this dissonance is expressed as the loss of influence, relevance, relevance and legitimacy in the ethos. This problem of adaptability reduces their relational capacity with the environment, with the technological revolution, especially in the forms of communication and viralization of ideas and emotions. There is no awareness or use of the benefits of knowledge management, the use of Big Data, Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the link with mass audiences.

Freemasonry has historically claimed to form people to act in the world. It is noted that it is not the institution, but its members who are called upon to act. Consequently, this reality must be auscultated and evaluated. What is the influence on society, on education, justice and equity? It is evident that there is a systemic structural and institutional dissonance. If there are no concrete and verifiable facts, Freemasonry becomes a discursive sphere, self-absorbed or isolated, while the outside world continues its march towards a value and ethical degradation, which has no containment or counterweight.

To face the challenge, the egregore must be strengthened, that collective energy of the group of people, created by their shared thoughts, emotions and intentions, functioning as a collective will with autonomy to influence the being, being and doing of its members.

Quo Vadis Freemasonry?

It is necessary to open a process of reflection and critical thinking, which arises from the institutional itself, from each link, from its workshops, from the bottom up (Bottom-Up Strategy), from small and detailed problems to achieve comprehensive and general understanding.

To do this, positive critical thinking must be promoted, even if some look at it with distrust. Excessive discretion or care, excess of zeal, or overprotection (Sacristan or Dear Brothers) end up harming or causing harm to those they want to care for or help (the Priest or the Venerable Master).

In this process, it is not a matter of looking for those responsible. We will not find them, since these are systemic, global, dynamic, multicausal, synchronous and asynchronous processes. It is about opening reflection, promoting dialogue, agreeing on the process of adaptability of Freemasonry to the digital society.

Axes to sustain Masonic relevance and relevance

To understand this crisis of coherence, we must look at and take care of five axes, which must sustain Masonic relevance in the twenty-first century:

- a) Personal and Institutional Integrity: The need for Mason and Freemasonry to be the same in lodges and in society.
- b) Social Responsibility: The commitment that transcends private charity, personal or group interest, to generate real changes of systemic societal scope.
- c) Transparency: Breaking the veil of opacity so that society understands and trusts its principles and coherence.
- d) Respect for Diversity: A real fraternity that strengthens the egregore, respecting diversity, with clear limits for the parts, avoiding the cancellation of systemic relational otherness.
- e) Continuous Improvement: Learning that does not remain in ritual (neo-dogmatic), but that translates into synchronous efforts of permanent updating with social impact.

Towards Metrics of Coherence.

Good intentions and noble values must be evaluated in their fulfillment, if we want to gain relevance, legitimacy and influence. As Peter Drucker teaches, in management: "What cannot be measured cannot be improved". As the old and ingrained saying

of popular wisdom teaches: "Works are loves and not good reasons". Fraternal love is demonstrated with concrete deeds, not only with beautiful words or promises, highlighting the importance of coherence between saying and doing.

The proposal is clear: we need consistency metrics. Not only to tell those good intentions, but to evaluate the real impact and perception of society (quantitative and qualitative indicators). If we do not manage to spread and viralize these ethical and spiritual values in society, in the same way that content goes viral on networks, Freemasonry will become obsolete. Admirable, but irrelevant.

If we do not react with relevance and opportunity, Freemasonry will fall into what (paraphrasing Hannah Arendt) we can call the "Banality of the Good", that is, talking about values in an abstract and repetitive way until it ends up losing its transformative power in society. As the philosopher Arendt teaches us, these are normal people, bureaucrats without intrinsic evil, who simply obey orders, or follow protocols thoughtlessly, without critical thinking, without measuring the consequences of their actions or omissions, in replicative and repeated processes, people who stop thinking for themselves, delegating that task to others higher up in the hierarchical structure. surrendered to the system or dogmas. Banality is pertinent not only when talking about evil, there is also banality in good.

To avoid this fate, the body of values, the types of leadership of the dignitaries, those who are first among their equals, in the lodges and grand lodges, must be taken care of. Reassess the role of workshops so that they guide the adaptive process. That will depend on the responsibility and coherence of those who elect those authorities, to lead the processes with controlled egos, openness of criteria, clarity, coherence, commitment and value honesty. Let's hope that these good elections will take place in the Great Universal Chain.

The systemic dissonance, which is expressed in the gap between the proclaimed Humanist values and

materialism in society, can only be cured with a renewed praxis, which beyond individual perfection values and promotes collective work, commitment as a sense of common unity, which constitutes the essence of the community. May that command of the sacred book become flesh: "*So by their fruits you will know them*" May it be so!

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DISCUSSION ON "FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION OF THOUGHT"

Jorge Gabito Mira;¹ Ricardo Morales Estavillo; Darío Irazoqui Martínez; Bruno Fernández Iguini; Pablo Cúneo Granese; Edison Casulo Bernasconi.

Abstract:

This article presents the work carried out in the Symposium on Freedom of Expression of Thought, held in Montevideo on September 15th, 2025, under the auspices of the Inter-American Masonic Confederation. The document brings together several complementary perspectives: an institutional introduction highlighting the essential value of Freedom of Expression of Thought within the Masonic tradition; an initial reflection on the contemporary challenges surrounding the right to express oneself; a historical study tracing its evolution from the philosophical and religious roots of Western culture to its consolidation in modern Uruguay; a legal analysis of its constitutional and statutory framework; and a philosophical and initiatic perspective exploring the inner and spiritual dimension of freedom of thought. The text addresses current tensions arising from post-truth, information overload, digital anonymity and the fragility of public discourse, contextualizing these phenomena through the lens of liberal tradition, national historical milestones, republican secularism and the country's democratic institutions. It also examines how Uruguayan Freemasonry has promoted the defense of Freedom of Thought through symbolic, legislative and educational initiatives, highlighting milestones such as the 1830 Constitution, the 1989 Press Law, and Law 17.778, which establishes September 20th as the Day of Freedom of Expression of Thought. Overall, the article reaffirms that Freedom of Thought and Expression constitutes a civilizational legacy requiring ongoing protection. From a Masonic perspective, this right also represents a moral duty oriented toward the pursuit of truth, individual improvement and the building of a more just, dialogical and plural society.

Keywords: freedom of expression, thought, Freemasonry, law, history, philosophy.

Resumen:

El presente artículo recoge el trabajo desarrollado en el Conversatorio sobre Libertad de Expresión del Pensamiento, realizado en Montevideo el 15 de setiembre de 2025 bajo los auspicios de la Confederación Masónica Interamericana. El documento integra diversos enfoques complementarios: una presentación institucional que destaca el valor esencial de la Libertad de Expresión del Pensamiento dentro de la tradición masónica; una reflexión inicial sobre los desafíos actuales del derecho a expresarse; un estudio histórico que recorre su evolución desde los orígenes filosóficos y religiosos de Occidente hasta su consolidación en el Uruguay moderno; un análisis jurídico de su consagración constitucional y legal; y una perspectiva filosófica e iniciática que profundiza en el sentido interior y espiritual de la libertad de pensamiento. El texto aborda las tensiones contemporáneas derivadas de la posverdad, la sobreinformación, el anonimato digital y la fragilidad del discurso público, contextualizando estos fenómenos a la luz de la tradición liberal, los hitos de la historia nacional, el laicismo republicano y la institucionalidad democrática del país. Asimismo, examina cómo la Masonería uruguaya ha promovido la defensa de la Libertad de Pensamiento mediante iniciativas simbólicas, legislativas y educativas, destacando hitos como la Constitución de 1830, la Ley de Prensa de 1989 y la Ley 17.778 que consagra el 20 de setiembre como Día de la Libertad de Expresión del Pensamiento. En su conjunto, el trabajo reafirma que la Libertad de Pensamiento y de Expresión constituye un legado civilizatorio que requiere defensa permanente. Desde la visión masónica, este derecho es también un deber moral orientado a la búsqueda de la verdad, el perfeccionamiento individual y la construcción de una sociedad más justa, dialogante y plural.

Palavras-chave: libertad de expresión, pensamiento, masonería, derecho, historia, filosofía.

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Opening Remarks - Jorge Gabito Mira

Freedom is, for the Mason, the greatest triumph achieved by man in his constant evolution. In Freemasonry, Liberty is freedom of spirit, of heart and intelligence, of thought, of word and action.

As an objective, the CMI (Inter-American Masonic Confederation) aims to identify and permanently disseminate the good practices of Secularism and Freedom of Expression. On this occasion we opted for the modality of Conversation, through videoconference in hybrid format, which allows communication with all the Masonic Powers that make up the CMI.

The commitment is to transmit generationally the task of reinforcing, strengthening and being faithful custodians of the Freedom of Expression of Thought, acting proactively in society, in accordance with the Values, Ideals, Principles and Postulates developed by our Great Confederate Powers.

We must make an appreciation regarding Freedom of Thought. It is worth considering two concepts that are related despite being different. On the one hand, Freedom of Thought itself, or freedom of conscience, that is, the freedom to form opinions or beliefs. On the other hand, the possibility of expressing those ideas without suffering consequences for expressing them.

We must differentiate Freedom of Thought and Freedom of Expression from Thought, since they are not synonymous and do not necessarily contain each other. Both are fundamental freedoms, although the scope of their application is substantially different. Freedom of Thought and Conscience is exercised within us, while the exercise of Freedom of Expression takes place externally, in our different areas of daily participation.

The expression of thought must be regulated for reasons of general interest, so as not to infringe the rights of other people. Freedom of Conscience, on the other hand, does not require any regulation. Thus, it is possible to freely elaborate one's thought but to be totally deprived of expressing it. On the contrary, it is also possible to lack Freedom of Thought by having submitted the conscience to dogma, and yet be absolutely free to express it.

Freedom of Expression of Thought is a fundamental right whose defense we must never resign. Both freedoms are recognized as fundamental rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approved by the United Nations on December 10, 1948.

September 20 marks a new anniversary of the episode known as "the Porta Pia breach". In our country, at the initiative of Brother legislators, a bill was presented and discussed that declared September 20 as the Day of Freedom of Expression of Thought. The proposal, which had detractors, generated a debate that lasted from 1997 to 2004, the year in which Law 17,778, of May 11, was finally approved. In its only article, September 20 of each year is declared the Day of Freedom of Expression of Thought, thus imprinting in our DNA such an important achievement, a legacy that we must guard.

In accordance with this law, the Freemasonry of Uruguay instituted the Freedom of Expression of Thought Award, aimed at recognizing in a public act personalities or institutions that have contributed to its defense and promotion.

The Grand Lodge of Freemasonry of Uruguay, together with the CMI of the 6th Zone, carries out this Conversation with young Masonic Brothers, of biological and Masonic age, in order to strengthen the value of free expression so deeply rooted in Freemasonry and in the DNA of our country, with the firm purpose of ensuring its generational transmission.

In this way we reaffirm our commitment to the defense of Freedom of Expression and Thought, among other principles that sustain our Fraternity.

By way of conclusion: Freedom of Thought and Expression is one of the most precious gifts we possess. It is in our hands not only to preserve it, but also to cultivate it and project it to the world, so that future generations may enjoy this sacred right.

Some initial questions - Ricardo Morales Estavillo ¹

It is an enormous honor for Uruguayan Freemasonry, a fundamental part in this small country of secular tradition and which proudly raises the flag of Freedom of Expression of Thought, that this entity that brings together almost half a million Freemasons has chosen us to promote and lead this space for reflection.

Likewise, those of us who subscribe to this work wish to thank in the same way the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Freemasonry of Uruguay for having given us this opportunity and for having proposed this challenge to us.

We refer to challenge, because we do not intend to make a conceptual study on Freedom of Expression of Thought, because it is a subject that has been widely studied and on which there are Brothers with much more credit to speak about it, but today we want to propose to you to reflect with a historical, legal and Masonic approach on the current situation and on the

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challenges facing freedom of expression in the 21st century.

His defense is not a new issue. Almost 2,500 years ago, faced with the offer of being acquitted of his charges if he ceased his questioning, Socrates did not hesitate for a second: "If you would acquit me on the condition that I would no longer say what I think... I would say to them, 'I thank you for your interest and I appreciate you, Athenians, but I would rather obey God than you.'" He preferred to drink hemlock rather than let the Athenian establishment quiet its constant search for wisdom.

In some countries it is relatively comfortable for us to talk about freedom of expression because we enjoy it to a greater extent, but that does not mean that we can neglect it. Paraphrasing Foucault, we can say that freedom is exercised, and if we do not, we can lose it.

This freedom, being constantly conditioned by the nature of men, will never cease to be a topical issue and will never be completely conquered.

This conditioning occurs because it is a very human feeling to struggle to exercise freedom and try to reach the truth, but it is also a feeling of men that, out of fear, ignorance or interest, muzzles and restricts freedom of expression. Freedom of expression has fought against this permanent obstacle over the centuries.

The first question that arises and that we hope to be able to answer is whether the free communication of ideas and opinions really serves to liberate the human being. Should everyone be allowed to express what they want and in the way they want?

Or if, on the contrary, that right needs forces to control it to ensure that we can all exercise it. Is this control of the free expression of ideas always reactionary? *per se* as those who judged Socrates? Or does he sometimes act guided by reason?

Despite the fact that freedoms of opinion and expression are included in the International Bill of Human Rights and that in Uruguay we have it present in the Constitution of the Republic and in several laws, it is a right that to this day has not been able to be conquered by all humanity equally. People numbering in the billions live under regimes that are unwilling to tolerate freedom of expression.

Therefore, it is appropriate to question some aspects related to how we exercise that right and whether in today's society, we are more or less free.

In these times, no one doubts that information is power and the channel par excellence is the Internet. For the search for truth, as well as freedom of expression, the freedom to inform ourselves is essential. Both are very powerful tools in our hands.

Although it is not a new problem, in many countries there is a great attempt to minimize the critical spirit of men, closing access to the Internet, and in others,

developing systems that allow access to digital information to be controlled and directed.

In most of the West, no one disputes that most people can freely demonstrate and inform themselves through different means and especially on social networks.

Let's go back for a moment to Socrates, the father of philosophy postulated that freedom of expression should be based on the pursuit of wisdom and morality, not simply on freedom for its own sake, and that ignorance was the source of slavery.

So, can we consider all manifestations as liberating for the human being? Can attacking and belittling someone who does not think the same be considered freedom of expression? Am I freer when I say anything and in any way?

Freedom of expression has mutated so much that today there are people who exercise it by publishing on the internet – for example – their skepticism about the sphericity of the Earth.

Let us not forget that with regard to the confrontation of ideas, Stuart Mill and Chomsky advocate broad freedom. The first said that "*If Newton's philosophy had not been allowed to be doubted, the human species would not be as sure of its certainty as it is.*" and Chomsky, for his part, argues that even the most repulsive ideas should be able to be expressed in order to be debated and criticized, since this is the best way to combat them and not through censorship.

Do these types of demonstrations, mere abusive exercise of freedom of expression, point to human progress? Or what purpose do they pursue?

Nowadays there are other more dangerous discourses. We are witnessing with great concern the proliferation of science-denial discourses, manifestations of hatred on the networks, generally shielded behind the anonymity they provide, and many other groups that play with reality and post-truth. A large part of them are loaded with dogmas and obscurantism. Let us not forget the question proposed: are all manifestations really liberating for human beings?

Professor Héctor Balsas said in this same venue on the commemoration of the Day of Freedom of Expression of Thought that "all varieties of post-truth play with contemporary uncertainty, with that liquid character in which the truth is nowhere and can be anywhere".

In that search for truth, we must often rethink whether we should act like Socrates, questioning the prevailing social order and values, or whether instead, we should control ideas that may prove dangerous or harmful, as his jury did.

It is up to us that freedom continues to be a creative

force of progress for man.

Governments, as guarantors of freedom of expression of thought, also have the duty to prohibit speech that promotes hatred and incites violence.

The problem arises when we see regimes that, invoking the fight against terrorism or the defense of national security, abuse their authority, silence peaceful dissent and criminalize freedom of expression.

Finally, we cannot ignore the anonymity provided by social networks. At first glance, it would seem that this provides more freedom. But is this so? Does shielding oneself under a pseudonym imply that one is freer?

Regarding how we exercise freedom of expression, on the occasion of the presentation of the Freedom of Expression of Thought Award for the year 2023, the Venerable Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Freemasonry of Uruguay said something very eloquent, "that a tool in itself is not one that has goodness or defects, it is human beings who decide whether its use will be positive or negative".

Freedom of Expression of Thought. A historical look - Darío Irazoqui Martínez ²

It is easy to say today that Freedom of Expression of Thought is an essential human right, but its historical journey shows that it was the product of struggles, tensions and gradual conquests.

In medieval Europe, particularly between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, thought was conditioned by the hegemony of the Church. It imposed strict limits on which one could think and express oneself. Even so, in this period cracks were generated in this control, spaces for critical reflection emerged, cases such as Peter Abelard (1079-1142) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), introduced tension and harmony, respectively, between faith and reason.

The Renaissance (15th-16th centuries) and the Protestant Reformation (16th century) opened the door to a greater diversity of ideas. Gutenberg's printing press revolutionized the publication of texts, making it difficult to control knowledge. Likewise, this period also saw figures such as Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), who challenged the authority of the Church with his vision of an infinite and plural universe.

To this is added works such as *Areopagitica* (1644) by John Milton, who defended the freedom of the press against prior censorship, or the *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670) by Baruch Spinoza, where he argued that thought should not be the object of coercion.

These and other proposals deepened in the eighteenth century with the Enlightenment, where the right to think and express freely became a banner of social and political transformation. Among the Encyclopedists – such as Voltaire with his "Treatise on Tolerance", Rousseau with "The Social Contract", Montesquieu with "The Spirit of the Laws" – new ideas were promoted that exalted the unrestricted freedom of thought. This aspiration was crystallized, after the French Revolution, in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) in its article 11.

This Enlightenment legacy, through Freemasonry and thought societies, traveled to the American continent and permeated the emancipatory struggles.

The Revolution of the American colonies against the British Crown (1775-1783) marked modern thought: independence was not conceived only as a political rupture, but also as an affirmation of rights. In the Declaration of Independence of the United States, it was proclaimed that all men possess inalienable rights, including liberty.

In the Río de la Plata, debates and gatherings were nourished by this intellectual climate, following the periodicals, the freedom of thought and expression was inseparable from the idea of independence.

In this context, the figure of José Gervasio Artigas (1764-1850) emerged. Artiguismo was a collector of the Enlightenment tradition and adapted it to the realities of the Río de la Plata. In his "Instructions of the Year XIII", he makes it clear that civil and religious freedom will be promoted to the fullest extent imaginable, his leadership embodied a democratic ethos that valued the word of the people.

After independence, the new Latin American states faced the contradiction between proclaiming freedoms and restricting them in practice. In the Uruguayan case, the Constitution of 1830 in its article 141, recognized freedom of expression of thought.

Uruguay's political history in the second half of the nineteenth century was characterized by civil wars and party rivalries, showing that, in practice, freedom of expression of thought was permanently attacked and restricted. Both the Colorado and White governments resorted to censorship, the closure of newspapers and the persecution of opponents.

Even so, spaces for cultural and educational emancipation germinated, promoting critical thinking and seeking to cement a project of citizenship based on intellectual freedom. An example of this influence is the Hiram School, founded in Salto in 1856. A secular and free institution in the interior of the country, two

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decades before the Varelian Reform (1877). Among its promoters was Leandro Gómez, who served as director, who maintained that education should form "free men", guided by reason and freedom of conscience, without submitting to religious or political dogmas.

The Ateneo de Montevideo, founded in 1868 after the merger of the University Society and the Ateneo del Uruguay, joined this process, fulfilling a cultural and educational role as a free university with its preparatory courses and a faculty of Law, free from the official system of the State, free from the political changes and religious dogmatism that prevailed in our society at the end of the nineteenth century. A true school of citizenship, becoming a bridge between Enlightenment thought and the social reforms that would mark the twentieth century.

With José Batlle y Ordóñez in the presidency, at the beginning of the twentieth century, freedom of expression was intertwined with the project of a modern and pluralistic State. After the revolution of 1904 and the Peace of Aceguá, the cycle of armed caudillismo culminated, allowing social legislation, public education and secularization to unfold in a framework of progressive plurality and free expression.

With the idea of consolidating a secular and liberal tradition, in 1906, a delegation from our country, in which the figure of Emilio Frugoni stood out, participated in the International Congress of Free Thought in Buenos Aires, carried out by the International Federation of Free Thought founded in Brussels in 1880, ten years after that September 20, 1870. that the entry into Rome by the forces of the Kingdom of Italy took place, ending the temporal power of the papacy.

That intellectual militancy found an echo at the institutional level from 1915, through a decree of President Viera, which established September 20 as a holiday.

Just as in 1919, the General Assembly approved the new calendar of holidays and adopted the secular terminology for religious holidays, September 20 appeared on that list as "Italy Day".

The twentieth century had episodes of setbacks and repression, the dictatorship of Terra in the thirties and later, the civic-military dictatorship from 1973 to 1985. In those years, the fragility of this right was evident when authoritarianism was imposed. Media outlets were censored and shut down, as well as exile, persecution and forced disappearance of citizens.

The return to democracy in 1985 reinstated this principle in all its force, as it was demonstrated that freedom of expression of thought was not a right

definitively conquered, but a practice to be defended day by day.

This principle was normatively embodied in Article 29 of the Constitution of the Republic, and was developed by the Press Law of 1989.

Subsequently, Law No. 17.778 of 2004 instituted September 20 of each year as "Day of Freedom of Expression of Thought".

It has become clear that the journey of freedom of expression of thought in Uruguay and the world has been arduous and long, not being a linear process, leaving as a legacy a shared conviction: without freedom of expression of thought there is no full citizenship, nor democracy possible.

Freedom of Expression of Thought, Seen from the Legal Point of View in the Uruguayan Legal System - Bruno Fernández Iguini³

Freedom of Expression of Thought is a Constitutional guarantee and a civilizational value of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay. Its legal protection has been strengthened over time, incorporating influences from international law as well as from philosophical and political traditions, including the Masonic tradition.

Q.H. Darío comes from enlightening us about those roots. Likewise, Uruguay has incorporated symbolic milestones by Law 16.099 (1989) on Freedom of the Press and Law 17.778 (2004), which establishes the declaration of the Day of Freedom of Expression of Thought on September 20, which consolidate it as a space for commemoration and democratic reaffirmation.

Article 29 of the Uruguayan Constitution establishes that *"the communication of thoughts by words, private writings or published in the press is entirely free in all matters, without the need for prior censorship."* There is only subsequent responsibility for the abuses that are committed. Our Magna Carta constitutes a pillar where freedom of expression of thought is supported.

It should also be noted that freedom of expression of thought is enshrined as a fundamental right in most of the constitutions of America, Spain and Portugal. In Spain, Article 20.1 of its Constitution guarantees it, as well as in Portugal, Article 37.1 of its Magna Carta. In the Americas, examples such as the Constitution of Argentina (Article 14), the Constitution of Mexico (Article 6), the Constitution of Colombia (Article 20), the Constitution of Brazil (Article 5, paragraph IV), the Constitution of Chile (Article 19, Article 12), and the Constitution of the United States (in its First Amendment), among others, expressly protect

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this right with similar formulations, although with nuances specific to each legal system.

A unique contribution of Uruguay to the culture of freedom of expression is the legal consecration of a commemorative day.

- Law 17.778 (2004) declared September 20 as a working holiday with the name of "Day of Freedom of Expression of Thought".

As has just been said, September 20, 1870 meant the entry of Italian troops into Rome and the end of the temporal power of the Popes, an event loaded with symbolism for republican, freethinker and Freemason movements. As the explanatory memorandum of the Chamber of Senators recalls, the date was linked to the tribute to Giordano Bruno, executed in 1600 for holding ideas contrary to the orthodoxy of his time.

In Uruguay, celebrations linked to this day have been promoted since 1917. The recovery in 1989 and its reaffirmation in 2004 made it a civic symbol, not only of Italian heritage and Freemasonry, but also of national adherence to the principles of free thought, tolerance and secularism.

It is worth highlighting the work of QQ.HH. Rubén Correa Freitas and Yamandú Fau, in their capacity as Former Senators of the Republic, created the bill and actively participated to make it a reality.

Uruguay's **Press Freedom Law, No. 16,099**, enacted in 1989, is also a fundamental pillar in the defense of freedom of expression and thought within the country. This regulation, which repeals the previous press law of the dictatorial era, enshrines essential principles such as the abolition of prior censorship, the protection of journalists' professional secrecy and the right to information, standing as a dam against state arbitrariness.

Its deep connection with freedom of expression of thought finds a notable echo in Masonic ideals, guaranteeing a public space where ideas, including those that challenge the status quo, can circulate and confront each other freely, thus constituting a pillar for the construction of an enlightened and democratic society.

International law reinforces the local framework. Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights protects all forms of expression, limiting only those necessary and proportionate restrictions.

Recent United Nations documents, such as the report by Special Rapporteur Irene Khan (2023), warn that freedom of expression faces new risks: gender-based disinformation and digital attacks that seek to silence critical voices, especially of women and

vulnerable groups. Uruguay, with its secular and rights-protecting tradition, has a fertile field to apply these contemporary approaches, ensuring that the digital space is also safe for the full exercise of expression.

The Communications Services Regulatory Unit (URSEC) was created by Law 17.296 (2001) as a decentralized service. Its mission is to manage the radio spectrum, control telecommunications and postal services, and advise the Executive Branch on frequency assignments and licenses.

In practice, URSEC:

- It ensures neutral technical conditions that allow the free circulation of voices.
- Evaluates tenders and transfers with criteria of pluralism and transparency.
- It intervenes in processes such as number portability (Law 19.889), which democratizes access to networks.

It should be noted that the URSEC does not regulate content, but guarantees that all voices can access communication platforms, avoiding technical or economic monopolies that would affect freedom of expression.

Freemasonry has defended freedom of conscience and thought as pillars of human progress since its origins. In Uruguay, its influence is reflected both in the secular tradition of the State, and in the commemoration of September 20.

Freemasonry understands that without freedom of expression there is no possibility of rational debate or social improvement. The tribute to Giordano Bruno and the link with free thought are testimony to that tradition that finds an echo in Uruguayan legislation and in modern institutions.

Freedom of Expression of Thought. A Philosophical and Masonic Perspective - Pablo Cúneo Granese⁴

We have heard from the Brothers who preceded me how Freedom of Expression has been vigorously defended throughout the Uruguayan historical process and consecrated at the highest legislative level in our country.

Since its inception, the Masonic Institution has raised the flag of Freedom of Expression as one of the noblest conquests of the human being. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, proclaimed in the framework of the French Revolution, recognized the free communication of thoughts and opinions as one of the most precious rights of man.

This individual right is the fundamental pillar on which democratic societies and Freedom of the Press are based. The individual as the center of all things, and

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his personal opinion as the support of the democratic system and the republican form of government.

For Freemasonry, however, the analysis of this freedom is not exhausted only in the cold letter of the laws that shaped it or in the milestones that marked its history. Freedom of Expression touches directly to the very heart of our initiatory identity.

When we talk about "Freedom of Expression" in modern societies, we usually consider it as a simple legal right: the possibility of expressing our ideas or opinions without censorship or without being persecuted for it. But its ultimate meaning transcends the mere right to speak or write freely, to reduce it to that plane would be to amputate its deepest significance.

Freedom of Expression is nothing more than the extension and natural consequence of our Freedom of Thought, of the free reflection that is gestated within us, of that exercise of the sovereign faculty of the individual to govern himself, build his identity and trace the course of his life without ties.

Conceived in this way, Freedom of Expression is inseparable from its predecessor, Freedom of Thought, and inextricably linked to the concept of personal autonomy that Immanuel Kant elevated to a supreme moral principle: we are legislators of our own conduct, we self-regulate in our own rules and purposes, guided by the universal principle of reason.

Ideas, whose externalization guarantees Freedom of Expression, are the result of that internal dialogue that allows the individual to explore his own truth.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in his "*Discourse on the Dignity of Man*" describes the human being as a unique being, capable of defining himself and molding himself. The Italian humanist puts himself in the shoes of God the Creator and whispers to Man: I have given you neither form nor function whatsoever, so that you may form yourself according to your free will. I made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal, so that, with freedom and honor, you might forge yourself in the form you prefer.

This Renaissance vision of man as a builder of himself is key to understanding that Freedom of Expression always begins within us, and not outside of it. It originates in our innate ability to freely choose the values and purposes of our life, to choose what form we want to be and transcend; and thus give a unique meaning to our existence.

However, true Freedom of Expression requires being able to externalize those internally forged values and purposes.

Without the possibility of expressing them, man remains a slave, personal autonomy is chained and the soul mute.

Our right to think freely would be of little value if such thought were confined to the silence of our interior, just as it would be illusory to speak of freedom of expression without the possibility of previously forming an autonomous conviction, stripped of dogmas and conditionings.

Freedom of Thought and Freedom of Expression are complementary and interdependent human prerogatives, one is a necessary condition of the other, and if any is lacking, both fall apart.

The first represents that intimate environment in which each human being builds his convictions, values and beliefs; the interior space in which reason and conscience dialogue with themselves in silence and without interference. The second guarantees that these ideas can be communicated and shared in the public sphere, that the ideas transcend the individual through words, writings or actions, to nourish society as a whole in the plural exchange of opinions.

This is especially relevant in Freemasonry, where symbolic work invites the initiate to roughen the rough stone of his being. Our Workshops honor Freedom of Thought and Expression in your daily practice. The freedom of our members to think and express their ideas is not a rhetorical ornament, but a primary condition of the Masonic work that takes place in our Temples.

Our Lodges are spaces for fraternal debate where the free expression of ideas is encouraged, as long as they are expressed with respect and tolerance.

Freemasonry is nourished by the opinion of its members and the result of the interaction between them. The free voices of the Workers in our Workshops not only reaffirm their personal sovereignty, but contribute to the common good, to the dialogue that forges the collective truth.

For us Freemasons, Freedom of Expression is both a right and a duty: to contribute with our voice to the dialogue that forges the collective truth, because without diversity of voices, there is no light or full truth.

As Owen Fiss rightly pointed out, we protect freedom of expression not only to protect the speaker as an isolated individual, but also to preserve the collective process by which we discover truth.

Where man can think and express himself without fear, we can consider our Masonic mission minimally accomplished.

Freedom of Expression of Thought. Reflections - Edison Casulo Bernasconi⁵

This Conference was prepared in fraternity, each individual presentation was enriched among all the participants and the contributions were added in equality and respect.

The introduction of Q:. H.: Ricardo states that Freedom of Thought in Uruguay has a historical development, a legal framework in accordance with institutional support, but that fundamentally it is a value that the community recognizes as positive and substantial for coexistence.

This is not the result of a voluntarist aspiration but of a construction of various aspects where Freemasonry has had, has and will have a preponderant role, which is confirmed with this Conference.

The Q:. H.: Darío in his historical journey showed that Freedom of Thought is the result of long intellectual, political and social struggles, both in Europe and in America.

In Uruguay it found fertile ground, as José Artigas pointed out within the sense of national identity a "freedom in all its imaginable extension", this continued with the development of secular institutions and with the democratic consolidation of the twentieth century; but freedom of thought was also achieved by censorship and dictatorships that proved its worth.

This story serves to show a process that provides a bundle of unique possibilities to advance towards universal freedom and freedom of thought in each country.

The Q:. H.: Bruno described the Uruguayan legal framework that articulates from the Constitution to the laws through the institutional design, and specifically pointed out a milestone that reinforces the concept by establishing the Day of Freedom of Expression of Thought.

Uruguay recognizes and protects Freedom of Thought as a fundamental right and guarantees free expression in a system that ensures that everyone can think, believe and express their ideas in a plural and respectful framework.

However, modernity brings new challenges and public policies seek to ensure plurality, balance and security, our Masonic tradition contributed its spirit of freedom and fraternity to the democratic imprint.

The milestone we highlight today is Law No. 17,778, which more than a norm is a political and social commitment that reaffirms freedom as the essence of the Uruguayan collective.

Its promoters, former Senators Prof. Yamandú Fau and Dr. Rubén Correa Freitas present here,

expressed in a simple and forceful formula: "September 20 of each year is declared "Day of Freedom of Expression of Thought".

These two notorious politicians and prolific legislators, as well as respectable Brother Masons, with their unique ethics and intellectuality put this sign to inspire coexistence and human progress in Uruguay.

In a fair and perfect way they materialize the object of the Order expressed in its Civil Statutes: "The Freemasonry of Uruguay is an essentially philanthropic and progressive institution, its object is the search for truth, the study of morality and the practice of solidarity; works for the material, moral, intellectual and social improvement of humanity."

Thus, Freemasonry impacts the profane world by contributing to democracy, the rule of law, secularism, freedom of conscience and expression in the search for improvement.

The Q:. H.: Pablo pointed out that the Institution is a promoter of Freedom of Thought not only as an external right, but as a central philosophical and initiatory principle for our internal work.

From our perspective, freedom begins in inner autonomy, where each man is "monarch of himself", governed by his thought before his word and it is with free will, the plurality of voices and the importance of dissent with what contributes to human progress.

Our collective morality is based on the freedom of conscience of our members; without personal autonomy there is no true fraternity, the idea that freedom is not only the absence of censorship but the emancipation from internal conditioning and dogmas provides us with the tools for truth.

The free word emanates from inner silence and is projected in three principles: freedom of conscience, active tolerance and the search for truth.

For this reason, Freemasonry maintains that the defense of freedom of expression is not an occasional act, but a permanent duty towards humanity.

That is why I call for the active defense of freedom of thought and expression in democratic societies and also in those in which expressing oneself compromises one's integrity and even one's life.

I will only point out three aspects to seek answers to new forms of censorship and self-censorship in the media, social networks and virtual commerce.

In the first place, and given that thought itself has no borders and no one controls the individual conscience, when contemplating expressions without arbitrariness on social networks it is valid to ask how far

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does my freedom go without affecting the freedom and dignity of others?

Which leads us to other uncomfortable questions: are there limits? And if it exists, what is that limit? And what or who marks it?

Today there are communication channels like never before: social networks, digital media, global platforms, direct communication between all users of the networks and yet never has so much concern been shown about the effects of free manifestations of thought.

How many times have we asked ourselves what to do in the face of hate speech, manipulation of information, self-censorship for fear of harassment or virtual discredit.

So where should we look for that limit?

Of course, not in censorship, nor in imposed silence and in my opinion the answer lies in ethics, and that is where I ask myself, what ethics?

And the answer is ethics based on universal principles such as freedom and equality of people, in a spirit of fraternity.

It is not a question of limiting freedom by not finding answers to the new challenges that offend it, but of exercising it responsibly.

Because freedom of thought without ethics destroys; Freedom of thought with ethics builds fraternal coexistence and equal rights.

Secondly, there is a clash between freedom of thought in the digital age with Artificial Intelligence and the algorithms that seek to shape us.

If freedom of thought is the greatest act of sovereignty of the human being and we seek to be masters of our own conscience, how is that sustainable in the digital scenario where the boundaries between the true and the virtual are blurred.

The great challenge is to preserve freedom of thought in the face of algorithms, networks and bubbles of Internet users that try to shape our consciousness without us noticing it and only offer us results that are friendly to us.

On social networks everyone talks, everyone has an opinion, everyone knows everything, I wonder if that massiveness is really freedom, or is it just a deafening echo to dissolve and silence our inner voice?

Anonymity and immediacy liberate, but they also enslave us.

And let's not forget to add artificial intelligence to all of the above, which promises us all answers and without effort.

We are facing a hypnotic cocktail of virtuality that shines like pyrite.

If dignity is based on moral autonomy and our own moral law, what happens when we delegate our judgment to a computer program? Don't we lose inner

freedom if we replace critical thinking with a comfortable digital conclusion?

And if algorithms show only what reinforces our beliefs, how can we think freely when they profile us and return ideas like a placebo to conform us?

To this I found an answer in our teaching that freedom of thought is not speaking, but inner discernment in silence and choosing with conscience, listening and working our inner rough stone.

Each blow of the mallet on the chisel dispels the digital mirages.

Otherwise, freedom will dissolve into digital leisure, where we will believe we are connected to everything and we will only move away from ourselves.

Finally, I want to focus on two risks of global virtuality: self-censorship and intolerance

Today freedom of thought suffers not only from censorship but also from self-censorship: on social networks many remain silent for fear of attacks and harassment of both their people and their ideas.

There are "virtual lynchings" that also have real consequences, damaging reputations and jobs, creating social isolation and inciting violence, certainly impoverishing public debate and pluralism by fueling radical intolerance on a global scale.

A critical factor is the irresponsible anonymity that in mass networks facilitates aggression without consequences.

In our opinion, users must identify themselves in a transparent way, there is responsibility in what is said, so they must be educated for digital citizenship with critical thinking and tolerance.

It is vital to promote a "technological ethic" so that bots do not distort trends that transform the digital space into a terrain of manipulation.

Companies must assume a commitment to virtual corporate responsibility.

Finally, I express good news, freedom of thought will prevail, our duty is to make this moment in history the least traumatic for humanity.

Laws and goodwill are not enough: it requires active and constant commitment, including concrete actions.

I dare to try the proposal to incorporate critical thinking as a transversal education: to question sources, contrast data and promote respectful debates in various areas and at the same time protect the diversity of opinions and support those who ethically express different ideas, even in the face of censorship or reprisals, real or virtual.

We wander in the illusion of virtual reality believing that we are looking for freedom, when in truth it is patiently waiting for us inside to make us truly free.

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FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND PEACE CONNECTED WITH FREEMASONRY

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Abstract:

Freemasonry is an institution that promotes the integral evolution of human beings. Therefore, it has always fostered harmony and brotherhood without distinction of any kind. Through the election, training, and intervention of its members, it has been present in the defense of individual and collective freedoms, and has supported the protection of human rights. Through the implementation of its principles, it has promoted democracy and mediated in the resolution of conflicts at several key moments in history. Today, this institution continues its expansion around the world, promoting ideas of equality, progress, and philanthropy to achieve the full realization of mankind.

Keywords: freemasonry, human rights, freedom, democracy.

Resumen:

La masonería es una institución que promueve la evolución integral del ser humano. Como tal, ha fomentado siempre la armonía y fraternidad sin distinciones de ningún tipo. Mediante la elección, formación e intervención de muchos de sus miembros, se ha hecho presente en la defensa de libertades individuales y colectivas, y ha impulsado la protección de los derechos humanos. Mediante el cumplimiento de los principios que la rigen, ha promovido la democracia y mediado en la resolución de conflictos en varios momentos claves de la historia. En la actualidad, esta institución continúa expandiéndose alrededor del mundo, impulsando ideas de igualdad, progreso y filantropía para lograr la plena realización de la humanidad.

Palabras clave: masonería, derechos humanos, libertad, democracia.

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Introduction

Freemasonry has always been a promoter of ethical and philosophical ideals, promoting the absolute freedom of man through the permanent search for knowledge that leads to wisdom and spiritual development. In his doctrine he proclaims the *love of humanity* and *the unity of the Whole: Everything is One* in its Reality, in its Essence and intimate and fundamental Substance: the balance of the universe flows through the intimate and harmonious union of all the elements that compose and inhabit it.

They are fundamental principles that define the Masonic Order: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, which can be perceived whenever a true Mason is present.

From what has been mentioned so far, it is not difficult to imagine (or infer) that such noble ideas as those of freedom of expression, democracy and peace; or those for the promotion and defense of the rights that every human being deserves are linked to a progressive and timeless institution such as Freemasonry.

1. Freemasonry: building a temple to the virtues from its beginnings

Our narrative journey can begin in the seventeenth century, when operational builders' guilds evolved, incorporating into their ranks members who did not necessarily have experience in construction, but who shared the same values and principles: in this way speculative Freemasonry was born². It adopted a more formal structure, and became a secret society that promoted fraternity, the search for knowledge and the progress of humanity. This new form of Freemasonry was based on philosophical and ethical principles, and was organized into lodges, where members met periodically to discuss topics of common interest and perform symbolic rituals, through which they transmitted teachings and values. Freemasonry was characterized by its commitment to freedom of thought, religious tolerance, and equality among human beings.

It is worth noting that this Masonic moment coincided with the historical period of the Enlightenment, a cultural and intellectual movement that emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This movement maintained that the use of reason should be the basis of thought, and that from observation reality could be known "clearly" (GAYUBA, 2017).

Freemasonry thus managed to propose a social model that was both doctrinaire and more social and open. Based on human qualities, which could well be

achieved through a personal religion, the methodical symbolist tradition remained unchanged, although subordinated in each society to the symbols rooted throughout history. In order to reconvert or integrate them definitively. Freemasonry was transformed into an institution, a variety of civic-religious entity whose greatest commitment was to the achievement of ethical ends, capable of being propagated throughout all regions of the world.

The so-called Freemasonry, from then on, was generally going to show itself respectful of all creeds and confessions, affirming as fundamental principles, together with tolerance, respect for justice, the ideal of goodness, as well as love of culture (MARTÍN-ALBO, 2024).

The Constitution of the Freemasons or Anderson's Constitutions, published in 1723, stated:

Although, in former times, Masons were obliged, in every country, to practise the corresponding religion, whatever it may be, it is now considered more expedient that no other religion should be imposed on them, except that on which all men agree, leaving them all liberty as to their particular opinions. It is therefore sufficient that they should be good and loyal men, honest and upright, whatever the confessions or convictions that distinguish them.

The Mason is a subject who is peaceful before the civil powers, wherever he resides or works; he must never be involved in plots or conspiracies against the peace and prosperity of the nation, nor behave incorrectly towards subordinate magistrates, because war, bloodshed, and insurrections have at all times been fatal to Masonry (Constitutions of ANDERSON, 1723).

These lines show the clarity with which the Order expressed its ideas about freedom of opinion and in favor of peace.

It was the promulgation of these truly universal principles (which constitute the essence of *humanism*, and the perfect application of which would remove all differences between men, all causes of strife and enmity, and make Harmony reign everywhere), in Anderson's book, which attracted a growing number of sympathies and occasioned their rapid expansion and diffusion in all countries (LAVAGNINI, 1973).

Of the various manifestations of Freedom, freedom of expression of thought is indispensable for the intellectual and moral growth of the human being, because it allows the imagination and intelligence to take flight – the cause and origin of all human creation – and because it helps us to overcome preconceptions and dogmatism, to understand that truth arises from discussion and the exchange of ideas. that understanding is the basis of Tolerance (5)

According to Garchitorena (2020), for Freemasonry, a direct daughter of Humanism, freedom of expression is the inescapable consequence of freedom of conscience which, in turn, is a right inherent to our human condition. Thus, the enemies of freedom of expression are no longer just censorship or reprisals, or worse, self-censorship, but the lack of capacity to debate, typical of those who lack critical thinking. Consequently, claiming and promoting freedom of expression today involves both enshrining it in law and, in fact, which implies not only putting an end to the obstacles imposed on us from the outside but also to the limitations that we impose on ourselves every time we renounce, consciously or unconsciously, to rationally analyze the facts and issues. in short, to think. Taking responsibility for both our actions and our words, assuming their consequences, is part of freedom of expression, because that makes free people living in society. Progress, personal and social, is not only possible, but desirable, because not to aspire to it is to waste that distinctive feature of the human being which is his ability to imagine and create, in all fields, supported by reason, without ignoring faith and appealing to hope, that inner strength that in these postmodern times seems to be lacking in many.

2. Freemasonry and Human Rights: Links to Democracy and the Search for Peace.

What has been mentioned in previous paragraphs puts us in context about how much Freemasonry had to do with the birth of great basic documents for human coexistence:

- the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 (after the French Revolution);
- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (after the Second World War), which has its antecedents in the English Declaration of Rights of 1689, the Constitution of Philadelphia of July 21, 1774, of Virginia of 1776 and, of course, the aforementioned Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen drafted in 1789, after the French Revolution.

All this has its roots in ideas that reflected the values advocated by Freemasons and Encyclopedists such as Denis Diderot and Jean D'Alambert, or such illustrious Freemasons as Voltaire and Benjamin Franklin.

The contribution of Freemasonry to the Declaration of Human Rights has been decisive for its achievement and development: from the principles from which it emanates to the legal articulation of the text that has the value of international legislation. Through the United Nations and the Committees that supervise compliance with the different treaties, agreements have been reached that guarantee the development of human rights in all countries.

To highlight the conjunction of the relationship between Freemasonry and human rights, Brother Santiago Castellá is quoted, who, in a work on this same subject, indicates that "the content of the repeated Universal Declaration of 1948 was explained by Brother Rene Cassin, with the metaphor of a temple. He compared the Declaration to a temple formed by an atrium, which was the preamble, where the unity of the entire human family was proclaimed, foundations that were articles 1 and 2, where the ideas of liberty, equality and non-discrimination, fraternity and solidarity were established as basic principles; On these foundations stood 4 columns representing various categories of rights. In this way, a great temple was built that would be at the same time the space for human development in freedom and the temple that would welcome all humanity under the solid foundations of human rights." (MOYÁ, 2024).

The contributions of Freemasonry to the construction of citizenship (public freedoms, secularization, democracy, etc.) would be incomplete without its important participation in the development of human rights and pacifism. The creation of the human rights leagues (France, 1898 and Spain, 1923)

was one of the most powerful axes of action of European Freemasonry, since the Freemasons were first-rate members and many lodges helped their material organization. Mobilizations around these principles were completed through press campaigns, political petitions, and lawsuits. Within this humanistic spirit, Freemasonry also revealed itself as a mobilizing agent of the most contemporary pacifism. The world wars demanded the creation of a front against the war in which, through multiple political sensitivities, the problem of peace would be solved through law and international arbitration. Here, too, the Freemasons were present, they were decisive elements in the implementation of the League of Nations and they supported an integral and juridical pacifism that is the basis of the most recent international law embodied by the United Nations (MARTÍN, 2024).

According to Reinalter (1989):

The common structural notes of Freemasonry represent a specific reaction to the system of enlightened absolutism.³ The democratic potential existing in the lodges begins to develop, manifesting itself not only in the leveling of estates, in the realization of social equality in the lodges and in the principle of humanity, but also in the autonomy of their organization and administration. In which relatively marked forms of opinion formation can be recognized, and in an open confession in favor of democracy. This democratic potential is manifested in the ways in which opinion is constituted within the lodges, since all the members possessed the ultimate decision-making capacity. Considering the right to vote of all members and the principle of majority decision, the positions of the lodges, their commissions, committees and assemblies and their legislation constituted the transcript (representation) of a system of republican administration. This administrative and organizational autonomy has to be considered as an important democratic element of the bourgeois society that was then being born. The statutes of Freemasonry, which differ

scarcely in their essential points, were oriented, as far as their fundamental principles are concerned, to the equality of rights of all its members. Important decisions, such as the reception of new members and the change of bylaws, were matters that were decided by all members at assemblies that took place regularly. The statutes were to ensure imposition-free communication and equality for all members. They also regulated the election of officials and the conduct of the sessions. These democratic germs are very remarkable if we take into account that they did not exist in other social and political sectors in a society that was still absolutist and feudal.

The adoption and proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights did not happen by chance. For centuries, Freemasonry was working to elevate the citizen to the condition of a free man with equal rights before the law, and fraternal because from that fraternity the union between different peoples is born. The principles of the French Revolution, liberty, equality and fraternity, on which our ideals are based, are universalized with this Declaration, from which the entire doctrine of human rights and modern democracies draw directly (CASTELLÁ, 2008).

How important can freedom of expression be in a democratic process?

In my opinion, a concise and direct answer to this question, from the perspective of Freemasonry, can be found in what Sarthou (2020) wrote:

It is very easy to think that democracy is to abide by the will of the majority and it is more difficult to understand that democracy consists of respecting the freedom of dissent of those who are circumstantially in the minority. No one ever knows what the historical paths that societies are going to follow will be. And it often happens that an idea was very minuscule and a minority ends up being the essential thought of an entire society.

History shows us that the principles of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity are fundamental to achieve the

common good: through freedom of expression democracy can be achieved and human beings can enjoy the same rights, in many cases not without first enduring times of struggle, until the long-awaited peace is achieved.

In this order of ideas, I cannot fail to mention some historical periods, such as that of the independence feat, in which men such as Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Simón Bolívar, José de San Martín, Bernardo O'Higgins, Francisco Miranda, Antonio Nariño, to name a few, were protagonists.

Among those illustrious men the figure of General Francisco Miranda soon stood out. Born in the mid-eighteenth century in Caracas, Miranda was considered the freethinking figure par excellence and of greater prestige for his outstanding military performances. Initiated in London in the Masonic ideals, he began to work on the Independence of America from that city organizing a lodge that he called the rational knights or Lautaro lodge. In it, and with all the caution that the circumstances of the time allowed, those who years later would actively participate in the Independence of the colonies would have to pass. From Bolívar, San Martín, O'Higgins, Villamil, Carreras to José de Sucre, among others, he began a commitment to the formation of lodges in various points and latitudes of the American geography (MARTÍN-ALBO, 2024).

According to Taha (2018), it was precisely in a Masonic Lodge that the movement for the Independence of Brazil and the concept of the Sovereign Nation was created, through Masons and illustrious Brazilians of history such as Joaquim Gonçalves Ledo and José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva, along with one of the best-known Brazilian Freemasons: Dom Pedro I. In the historical context, the Perseverança Masonic Lodge of Paranaguá worked for the Independence of Brazil, for the Proclamation of the Republic and for the abolition of slavery, being a pioneer in the liberation of slaves in Paraná. Likewise, several articles mention as key the role of Freemasons Luiz Gama and Joaquim Nabuco in the process of abolition of slavery in Brazil.

According to Chamorro and Zaputovich (2023), it is known that almost the entire American War of Independence was carried out under the direction of well-known Freemasons. The exception was Paraguay, where political ideas arrived relatively late, due to the Mediterranean, far from the ports where goods, men and ideas docked. However, among one of the precursors of American Independence was the Paraguayan priest Juan Pablo Fretes – closely linked to O'Higgins – who was initiated in Europe and frequented the Masonic circles where independence projects were incubated. There are also sources that mention José Félix Bogado, San Martín's lieutenant, as another initiate in Freemasonry.

And in wars that humanity had to endure... could the condition of being a Freemason be influential?

During the end of the War of the Triple Alliance: between the Brazilian and Argentine officers there were numerous initiates in Freemasonry. The presidents of the belligerent countries and the commanders of these armies were distinguished members of Freemasonry in their respective countries: Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Bartolomé Mitre, Venancio Flores, Luís Alves de Lima e Silva (Duke of Caxias), Manuel Luís Osorio and others. The main diplomats sent to negotiate the end of the war were respectable Masonic dignitaries: José Roque Pérez, for Argentina; and José María Da Silva Paranhos, for Brazil. Masonic influences were decisive in deciding what the provisional government that would be installed in Paraguay would be, in short, it would be a diplomatic agreement covered by the agreement of brotherhoods (CHAMORRO & ZAPUTOVICH, 2023).

At the end of the Chaco War: the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Boundaries between the Republics of Bolivia and Paraguay, was signed by Bolivia, Eduardo Diez de Medina and Enrique Finot; and for Paraguay, the Freemasons Cecilio Báez and José Félix Estigarribia (CHAMORRO and ZAPUTOVICH, 2023).

In relation to Winston Churchill's participation in the Second World War, John Maurer (2020) wrote:

Churchill never attempted to minimize the danger or difficulty involved in fighting for the destruction of Hitler's tyranny. He fully understood that, by putting the regime of a great-power adversary on the ropes, victory would come at a terribly high price in lost lives, squandered resources, and bombed cities. However, the resounding failure of the policy of appeasement forced Britain to go to war against a well-

armed enemy, driven by a ferocious leader and regime. In weighing the strategic options before Britain, Churchill recognized that a lasting peace required nothing less than the ultimate destruction of a great evil. Churchill warned that the world would either move toward a promising and prosperous future or sink into a dark, sinister, and perverted new era. By staying in the fight in 1940, Britain, under Churchill's leadership, championed the cause of freedom and bought time for American democracy to rescue the Old World from a monstrous tyranny. The odds favored Churchill in this strategic gamble only because Roosevelt was president. Had Roosevelt made a different decision, opting for Hemispheric Defense rather than a transatlantic alliance, Churchill and Britain would have lost.

Let us remember that both Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt were initiated Freemasons by the United Grand Lodge of England and by the Grand Lodge of the State of New York, respectively.

We can affirm that the idea of "perpetual peace", present in the Masonic Constitutions of 1723, is not purely theoretical, but a foundation that has served as a guide for the defense of the freedom of peoples. And from a current perspective, the following lines synthesize, in my opinion, the reality that as Masons we must carry day by day: "Our obligations, as peacemakers, reach all spheres in which we operate in society and become more urgent every time a human right is violated or the dignity of a human being is degraded" (Santibañez Ibarra, 2025).

Conclusion

The link between the ideas proposed and promoted by Freemasonry and the concepts of freedom of thought and expression, human rights, democracy and peace is very marked in the literature.

In Freemasonry, freedom is not only a political or social condition, but it is an internal victory, which is achieved only through self-knowledge and personal work; This value is only attainable when we free ourselves from the preconceived ideas and dogmas that are imposed on us, from the earliest age, in the society we live in.

The defence of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity are part of the duties that we have imposed on ourselves as a rule in our oaths and it is our commitment to society.

Freemasonry is an initiatory organization whose purpose is the perfection of the human being through the transformation of the individual conscience, and through this achieve the transformation of the collective consciousness, which makes possible the propagation of the virtues found, worked on and achieved to all spheres of a society and to all corners of the world.

There is no more coherent Masonic task than to put into practice in a real and effective way what we have historically devised and contributed to society, from the point of view of values, among which are human rights. It is a matter of each one of us putting these principles and values into action, in our small plot. We must keep in mind that our Masonic commitment requires us, today more than ever, to take the side of those who suffer especially, in this case refugees, that they first find our understanding, and then our support and help in any of the facets in which we may situate ourselves (MOYÁ, 2024)

Ending this outline, I rejoice in internalizing the powerful words written in the preface to the work of Dear Brother Aldo Lavagnini, the Apprentice's Manual, and I hope that it will lead us to reflect and dimension the role of Freemasonry for humanity:

To all the workers of Peace, Harmony and Solidarity, in whatever field they work, go with this book the Message of a common desire that will make effective, in a not too distant future, peace, harmony, solidarity, well-being and prosperity on the entire surface of the earth. We write these words while the memory of the fratricidal war that bloodied the countryside and cities of Spain still lingers, while the struggle in the Far East is still going on, while in Europe dark threats and deep fears have not yet dissipated. But, behind these shadows and these dark clouds we see from now on the clear and luminous beginning of a new splendid Dawn, in which all the desires, ideals and aspirations for progress that have matured and are maturing in these darker periods must be faced and shine.

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SUBSTANTIVE DEMOCRACY AS AN ASPIRATION FOR MASONIC BEHAVIOR IN PROFANE LIFE

David Quitano Díaz ¹

Abstract:

This document analyzes the transition from a procedural (or minimal) democracy to a substantive democracy. It argues that the procedural model, fundamentally centered on elections and voting, while essential for the peaceful renewal of power, is insufficient. This approach has generated a "passive" or "ratifying" citizenry and has caused distrust and disaffection by failing to solve structural problems like corruption or inequality. The text proposes the need for a substantive democracy, defined as a dimension that expands citizen participation beyond the vote, allowing the citizenry to influence the "what" of public agendas and not just the "how". As a proposal for this transition, "citizen participation observatories" are suggested. Finally, the article links this aspiration to Masonic behavior, arguing that a Mason, as a "social constructor", has a duty to be an active agent of substantive democracy in profane life, combating apathy and actively participating in policy design.

Keywords: Substantive Democracy, Procedural Democracy, Electoral Democracy, Citizen Participation.

Resumen:

Este documento analiza la transición de una democracia procedimental (o mínima) a una democracia sustantiva. Sostiene que el modelo procedimental, centrado fundamentalmente en las elecciones y el voto, aunque esencial para la renovación pacífica del poder, resulta insuficiente. Este enfoque ha generado una ciudadanía "pasiva" o "refrendaria" y ha provocado desconfianza y desafección, al no resolver problemas estructurales como la corrupción o la desigualdad. El texto propone la necesidad de una democracia sustantiva, definida como una dimensión que amplía la participación ciudadana más allá del voto, permitiendo a la ciudadanía incidir en el "qué" de las agendas públicas y no solo en el "cómo". Como propuesta para esta transición, se sugieren los "observatorios de participación ciudadana". Finalmente, el artículo vincula esta aspiración con el comportamiento masónico, argumentando que un Masón, como "constructor social", tiene el deber de ser un agente activo de la democracia sustantiva en la vida profana, combatiendo la apatía y participando activamente en el diseño de políticas.

Palabras clave: Democracia Sustantiva. Democracia Procedimental, Democracia Electoral, Participación Ciudadana.

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1. Introduction

Elections have become the cornerstone of liberal democracies, as history says, pushed by the august Masonic institution. The -now. Institutionalized participation of citizens has allowed the renewal of public power to be generated in a peaceful and legal manner. The electoral aspect has given public life an important space for citizen inclusion and has allowed the modernization of democracy itself in the sense of guaranteeing and, where appropriate, expanding the range of political rights of society.

It is not possible to understand the formation of the Mexican State without necessarily referring to the development of the elections that had their first points of confrontation in the Masonic order, such as the positions of the York Rite against the Scots, which has been outlined by the roadmap in the way of doing politics in our country. The uniqueness of each electoral process has had a considerable impact not only in the political space but also in the economic, academic and even cultural sectors.

And it is precisely elections that feed the so-called procedural or minimal democracy, which supports the thesis that the exercise of political-electoral rights, specifically the vote, are the minimum indispensable for a democratic regime to exist, rights that, in turn, have historically been processed through elections as the most basic form of citizen participation. In this dimension, it would be understood that only through free and competitive elections could a democracy exist, to which is added, in addition, a network of electoral institutions designed to organize and monitor the legal course of procedures.

However, democratic development itself has indicated the need for a broader dimension, which transcends the electoral aspect and the basic rights of citizens. This is substantive or maximalist democracy, which for the purposes of this research will be based on the postulates of a *sustainable democracy*¹; that is, a dimension that allows expanding the participation of citizens in politics and allows them to be provided (beyond voting) with mechanisms of public impact. This dimension does not dispense with the formal aspect of elections, but rather broadens the scope of citizen participation by providing it with more tools for public advocacy.

The challenges facing democratic development at the global level have made it necessary to have a combined perspective, which allows the correct interweaving of a procedural dimension with a substantive one. This is thanks to a series of problems that have made Western citizens distrust political

regimes, specifically that of representative democracies.

In this order of ideas, the following hypothesis is presented: the transition from an electoral democracy to a substantive democracy contributes to a change in civic culture due to the appreciation of representative models, thereby generating a better citizen disposition in elections, but also to promote new public spaces for participation. At this point, it is essential to ask: What is the political route to move from an electoral democracy to an effective democracy of citizenship and thereby improve public trust?

Although the answer does not pretend to be univocal and much less to constitute a magic formula for the solution of the problem, it is maintained that it is possible to move towards an effective model under the integral participation of political actors, essentially of the citizenry under a new model of civic culture that contemplates various mechanisms of inclusion, promotion of social capital and strengthening of interpersonal trust, aspects that can be structured under the so-called "observatories of citizen participation", nodal part and proposal of this article.

Such observatories can be constituted as organizations of collective thought that channel the procedures of a formal democracy into a broader sphere. It is essential to maintain that observatories of citizen participation do not presuppose the displacement of elections as a form of social involvement. On the contrary, it is a way to rescue the value of democracy in the face of the advent of a problem that undermines the original ideals of freedom and equality.

2. Development

The influence of Freemasonry on Latin American democracy is profound and dates back to the independence movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The contribution did not come from Freemasonry as a unified political organization, but from the principles and concepts that its members (many of whom were the liberators and reformers themselves) adopted from the Enlightenment and discussed in the lodges, which in a certain way the order has been blurring and allowing itself to be an active participant in democracy in the formal sense. Using Masonic symbolism, we can specify the following:

- Procedural Democracy is the Rite: It is the "how", the set of rules, procedures and forms that we give ourselves to function in an orderly manner. It is the ritual in the

¹ In the terminology proposed by Christian Welzel, which will be analyzed in this project.

lodge. It is essential, but it is not the end in itself.

- Substantive Democracy is Labor (the "Work"): It is the application of these principles in the profane world. This is the behavior to which its title alludes. It is the "what". It is the social construction, the "polishing of the stone" of society.

2.1. Democracy in its formal sense.

When talking about democracy, Bobbio (2014) argued, it should be considered by a set of rules (primary or fundamental) that establish *who* is authorized to make collective decisions and under what *procedures*. And this is so, because as the Italian author says, "every social group needs to make decisions that are binding on all members of the group in order to look after their own survival, both internally and externally".

Hence, the acceptance of a decision made by individuals requires that it be based on rules that establish who are the individuals authorized to make the decisions that are binding on all members of the group, and with what procedures. In relation to the subjects called upon to make collective decisions, Bobbio pointed out that "a democratic regime is characterized by the attribution of this power (which as authorized by the fundamental law becomes a right) to a very large number of members of the group." And, as far as the modality of the decision is concerned, the fundamental rule of democracy, he tells us, is "the rule on the basis of which decisions approved by at least the majority of those who must make the decision are considered collective and therefore binding on the whole group." Thus, according to this author, if a decision taken by the majority is valid, a decision taken unanimously is all the more valid.

It is important to specify, as Giovanni Sartori (2003) already stated, that "the term democracy has always indicated a political entity, a form of State and government", which shows the variety of meanings that the term can have. That is why, in this section, we will address what democracy is in its formal meaning. Thus, taking up Bobbio (1997), he always maintained that "democracy has always been understood as a method or a set of rules of procedure for the constitution of the government and for the formation of political decisions", which expresses an essentially procedural and not substantial meaning. However, the acceptance of these rules presupposes the tendency to favor some values that characterize the democratic ideal, and that is that democracy implies the use of electoral processes to decide which citizens will be entrusted with the basic tasks of government.

Its representative character implies (ACE Project, n.d.) from a positive approach, demanding that

citizens have been able to intervene in political decisions through representatives elected by universal, free, equal, direct and secret suffrage (principle of 'one person, one vote'). And from a negative perspective, the predominance of decisions made in this way over other forms of direct government or assembly-type would not be feasible in unusually large and complex societies. Regardless of whether the political system is presidential or parliamentary, elected representatives exercise legislative and executive powers (the judiciary also in some systems that follow the common law tradition), subject to the controls established by the constitution, respecting fundamental rights and public freedom, with the limits that determine the separation between powers and the constitutional form of each of them.

2.1.2 Rules of the democratic game.

According to Bobbio (1997), in contemporary political theory there are democratic "rules of the game", among which are:

1. The highest political body: to which the legislative function is assigned and which must be made up of members elected directly or indirectly, with first or second degree elections, by the people;
2. Other institutions with elected leaders, such as local government bodies or the head of state;
3. All citizens must be voters, that is, those who have reached the age of majority without distinction of any kind;
4. Equal vote for the entire electorate;
5. The entire electorate must be free to vote according to its own opinion formed as freely as possible, that is, that there is a free contest of political groups that compete to form national representation;
6. To be free also in the sense of being in a position to have real alternatives;
7. For the election of representatives and for the decisions of the supreme political body, the principle of numerical majority applies, even though various forms of majority can be established according to criteria of opportunity that cannot be defined once and for all;
8. No decision taken by a majority should limit the rights of the minority, in particular the right to become, all things being equal, a majority;
9. The governing body must enjoy the confidence of parliament or the head of the

executive branch who is himself elected by the people.

The rules referred to above, Bobbio tells us, establish how the political decision should be reached, but not what should be decided. However, it can be stated that from the perspective of what, these rules of the democratic game exclude decisions that in some way would contribute to rendering one or more rules of the game null and void. Also, at this point, it is imperative to mention that it is not possible to establish how many of the aforementioned rules must be observed in order for a regime to be called democratic. Derived from the above, it is argued that the modern democratic regime has been born thanks to the invention and consolidation of elections; these have been configured as the gateway for citizens to the public sphere and have been able to outline the channels of their participation through their maximum political expression: the vote. Through this instrument, citizens have organized public power in a free, legal and peaceful manner. Therefore, the exercise of voting becomes, in the first instance, a genuinely democratic expression. The electoral expression of democracy gives citizens, in its minimum conception, the legal aspect of participation; an expression that has been shaped thanks to the theoretical and historical basis of the *power of the people*; therefore, this power has been exercised through a legal instrument that allows the election, democratically, of those who will make up the public power.

Thus, "with democracy we do not mean that we govern ourselves; when we say or think that we live in a democracy, what we have in mind is something very different: that our state and government that organize our lives derive their legitimacy from us and that we have a reasonable chance of forcing them to remain so" (Dunn, 2014, p. 34). In this situation, elections comply with the highest principle of the *power of the people*, yes, but a power expressed through the institutional channels of a State of Law. However, the "simple" fact of expressing a vote does not ensure, in essence, the automatic creation of a democracy; There may be elections in an authoritarian regime that only seeks to legitimize those who the leader or group in power considers so. In view of this, it is essential that the elections take place in a space of plurality, freedom and equal conditions, both for citizens and for those who aspire to power.

In this way, elections – by themselves – do not generate democracy, they are a fundamental part of it and without their existence the emptiness of modern politics is clear. Although there are other constitutional methods of control of public power, such as the padlocks established in political constitutions, elections allow the inclusion of citizens in the formation of these

powers. Elections are based on the premise "that it is inevitable to give a certain decision-making power to an individual or group of individuals, given the impossibility of an entire society being able to reach such decisions unanimously, adequately, and in a timely manner" (Crespo, 2015, p. 12). The electoral advance in the construction of checks and balances has been constituted as a parallel development to democracy itself; It is even possible to glimpse that the political and institutional characteristics of elections have come to indicate the diagnosis of democracy and, of course, of citizen behavior. Moreover, the characterization of an electoral system delineates the democratic model, that is, the way in which popular representatives are elected affects the development of important actors for public life, as is the case of political parties.

2.2. The importance of elections and their aspects.

However, the importance of elections lies in three aspects (*International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, 2017), namely:

- They are not just elections, but they are part of a process.
- They determine leadership, and whether it is continuity or alternation in that leadership.
- Even *flawed* elections can have the value of institutionalizing electoral integrity, provided that subsequent electoral processes reinforce key democratic/electoral principles.

Electoral periods are therefore understood as the moment of selection, campaign, mobilization and voting of the candidates of a party; then, the announcement of the results. Nonetheless, the election is only one moment in a larger election cycle that involves many modifications to the rules, decisions, and activities that take place even long before the voting and counting itself. However, one of the most complete expressions of electoral democracy is that which is based on the representative model, on the way in which the popular will elects the representatives of the public powers. It was representative democracy that opened the doors of citizenship, through elections, to a form of collective advocacy organized through institutions.

But to think of a representative model is to think, at the same time, of the relationship between representative and represented, the link by which the vote has been instituted. Under this consideration, it is pertinent to recall Edmund Burke's *Address to the Electors of Bristol*, where it is argued that "the happiness and glory of a representative should consist in living in the closest union, the most intimate correspondence and unreserved communication with

his constituents. His desires must have great weight for him, his opinion maximum respect, his affairs incessant attention."²

The outline of this idea contemplates the importance of the representative relationship in the formation of democracy and maximizes the relevance of elections to channel the vote of citizens. And this was a long process, but necessary, in the formation of democracies. The idea of casting a vote by which representatives would be elected was a nodal (but immobile) feature in the development of modern democracies. It is true, the procedures were perfected in the face of political evolution itself, but citizen advocacy was it was forged by a single way: the electoral one. The original configuration of elections could be very different from the contemporary perception of democracy. The casting of the vote and the electoral engineering applied to transform it into positions of popular representation has modulated the advance of formal democracy, from the expansion of the right to vote to the establishment of institutional and autonomous arbitrators, elections have advanced to guarantee the maxim of the representative model: to express the popular will through elected representatives.

This formal dimension induced in citizens, in the first instance, the public responsibility to be able to elect their representatives, as a way of exercising their political rights. The main contribution of the electoral sphere is to introduce citizens into a sphere of political participation, a participation that, although it has been considered passive, has made it possible to institutionalize the legitimacy of public power. However, the mere casting of the vote in elections only brings results for the renewal of public offices (institutional-organizational sphere) but not changes in the form of political participation (institutional-axiological sphere). For this reason, an additional aspect in the procedural dimension is that of public responsibility. This additional dimension of the vote occurs because "the very fact that the rulers, subject to the periodic ratification of their positions, know that the electorate can at any time withdraw its favor from them, obliges them to some extent to moderate themselves in the exercise of power and to take into account the opinion and demands of their constituents" (Crespo, 2015, p. 14).

This condition of checks and balances that elections have had has made the citizen an actor increasingly interested in participating through the vote because he knows that democracy, in addition to demanding the transformation of public power, can create channels of public responsibility for those who

are elected. Even so, electoral democracy shapes in the citizen an idea of ratified decision, that is, it is about the acceptance or not of those who are nominated for the political contest and, subsequently, when they are elected, the citizens limit themselves to ratifying or not a political agenda. But this is one of the first fruits of the formal representative model: to give the citizen a role of passive participation, who observes, analyzes and endorses his attitude towards public affairs.

This is because elections inevitably mark a moment in time when an old order or set of rulers is confirmed, or there is circulation in governing coalitions, either within or between parties, as new leaders enter government. This makes them turning points. Under this consideration, it is necessary to point out that the representative democratic model must outline the electoral behavior of the citizen and, in this condition, sets the guidelines of a given political culture. For this reason, it is indicated that electoral democracy has defined the behavior of citizens, creating a ratifying disposition of the public sphere. In this way, elections have shaped a culture regarding the *how* of democracy: how it is organized, how representatives are elected, how votes are transformed into seats, and so on. This formula is what has determined the times, the forms and the degree to which citizens have elected their representatives. The formula of *how* is also linked to the public responsibility to which representatives are subjected, since elections provide citizens with an evaluation tool, instrumented through voting. In this sense, "elections in democratic countries are held with a regular periodicity, which allows citizens to make an evaluation of the role of their representative (or president, when applicable), and thus replace him or her with another candidate" (Crespo, 2015, p. 15). This question of evaluation of democracy has had relevant constitutional channels as in the case of reelection, an element to be analyzed at another time.

2.3 Main functions of Democracy.

In general, elections in democracies serve four main functions (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2017). These help identify the most critical questions to understand why and how elections are important. They are:

1. Legitimation.
2. Accountability exercise.
3. Elect 'representatives'.
4. Voice exercise, adding preferences.

Therefore, the point to be taken into account is that of the role of citizens in electoral democracies, those that due to their structure have been configured

² Speech delivered on November 3, 1794.

under formal mechanisms and of limited public impact. It is necessary to indicate that, although the procedural aspect contained in the elections opens the door to citizen participation, there must be mechanisms that expand that capacity for formal decision-making. Thus, "citizen participation is constituted as the raw material par excellence of the political process" as well as "an *input* that must be maximized all the time to obtain the best results in terms of the vitality of the political community and the generation of public goods and institutions with incentives for accountability". (Díaz Aldret, 2017)

It is also an ambiguous concept, as Díaz Aldret (2017) explains; since it is flanked by contradictory approaches from which it is justified. And it is that, the author tells us, "on the one hand there are the ideals that sustain the democratic form of government and that lead to the expectation that governments respond to the demands and needs of citizens (that is, that they are *accountable*), and on the other there are the principles of rational-bureaucratic organization that translate into the expectation that the government's decision-making processes are guided by technical-professional considerations and are aligned with the objectives of effectiveness and efficiency in the use of public resources."

However, the electoral route should not be demerited in democratic life; The elections managed to shape the long-awaited transitions from authoritarian to democratic models through the vote of the citizens. In fact, the nodal point that distinguishes democratic regimes lies precisely in free, plural and competitive elections, since "we must not forget that the minimum formal criterion on the basis of which a democracy is distinguished from a non-democracy is represented by universal, equal and free suffrage" (Bovero, 2012, p. 12).

The procedural conception of democracy has allowed not only the transformation of the political regime but has also encouraged the modernization of the representative model. The elections consolidated the democratic regime and have become a primary benchmark for measuring its quality. Today a liberal democracy would be unthinkable without elections, without the competitiveness of political parties and the expansion of the plural margin (with independent candidacies) but, above all, a liberal regime would be unimaginable without the participation of citizens.

Finally, it is necessary to specify that an electoral democracy must consider fundamental aspects, especially those on which the liberal regime is based: freedom and equality, principles necessary for the peaceful transformation of public power. Contemplating these principles, such as guaranteeing a free and universal vote, will have an impact on the

construction of a democratic link between citizenship and the political community, a link that will build, in turn, a certain civic culture.

In short, electoral democracy has been a system that has made it possible to expand the channels of citizen participation, it is true; but this scale of participation has only contemplated passive ways of citizen incidence. In addition, the representative model has created an endorsing citizenship, where participation accepts the *how* of public affairs, where candidates are pre-established by political parties and, in their case, independent candidates; but this formal dimension has left aside the *what* in the elaboration of public agendas, a situation that requires a more dynamic participation in public spaces. It can be argued that citizen participation is the process through which citizens, who do not hold public positions or functions, seek to share to some degree the decisions on matters that affect them with government actors and influence them. In other words, the concept of "citizen participation" includes any form of collective action, vindication or response to calls made by the government to influence public policy decisions. In other words, citizen participation implies a willingness to advocate.

It is important to point out, with good cause, that representative democracy does not is up for debate. Elections have allowed the transformation of public power and have created in citizens an incipient interest in demanding their rights. Likewise, the elections have allowed the configuration of a plural and competitive system that, together with constitutional reforms, modernize democracy, in an expansion and strengthening of political rights. Thanks to the elections, the alternation takes place in a peaceful and institutional manner. Beyond this consideration, the very transition of democracies, the expansion of political rights and an increasingly informed citizenry – coupled with the maelstrom of globalization – has laid the foundations for the transformation of citizenship; This issue must be absorbed by the procedural sphere, in order to adapt the institutional channels to the contextual expression that occurs in society; otherwise, a space of distrust towards politics may be incurred. The way in which political institutions adapt to democratic development will invariably have an impact on citizens' perception of the way in which *public affairs* are administered; in this way, formal democracy has not been sufficient to guarantee the full incorporation of citizens in decision-making, that is, "many of the really existing democracies do not create the material and institutional conditions to make citizenship effective" (Ramírez Sáiz, 2012, p. 12).

2.4 Electoral Game according to Bovero

In this situation, the little or no adequacy of the institutions belonging to the representative model has brought with it worrying levels of citizen dissatisfaction³, a condition that has not only affected the electoral model in particular but has also extended to the political system in general. That is why electoral democracy, by itself, has not responded to the citizens' clamor, since the mere fact of expressing the vote has not solved the social problems of the States. And while it is true that democracy is not a messianic system, it is essential that it encompasses spheres beyond electoral processes, where not only the how but the *what* of the public agenda is decided. Here it is important to recapitulate what Bovero (2012 [a]) points out that it is necessary for the electoral game to be considered democratic, and that is, it depends, above all, on the satisfaction of the formal conditions *set forth by the first five rules: those that establish who participates in the game and how it must be developed*.

In this regard, Bovero begins by specifying that, in the first place, suffrage must be *universal*, and this is so only when the universe of voters includes all the recipients of the decisions of those elected. Likewise, that the universe of voters coincides with the universe of those eligible. Secondly, the Italian author specifies, the electoral game must be fair, and will be considered as such only if each elector has one vote – the aforementioned author emphasizes that only one and one – like any other, and if each of the votes has the same impact as the others on the composition of the college of elected representatives. Continuing on this argument, Bovero specifies that, thirdly, the electoral game must be *free*, so that the decision of the vote of each voter can mature to protect from distorting interferences, that is, in a context that allows for a balanced comparative examination of the opinions, proposals, and programs of the various groups of candidates. In this regard, the aforementioned author explains that it is the subjective freedom of the voting citizen, which will not be considered satisfied if the plurality of sources of political information, as well as free access to them, is not guaranteed.

Finally, the fourth place refers to the fact that the game must also be free in the sense that the selection of the voter can be exercised with respect to alternatives that are really different from each other, that is, of a wide enough range of options to allow each one to recognize himself in a precise political orientation. In this case, Michelangelo Bovero states that it is objective freedom, which cannot be considered as satisfied except when it is protected and

favored by the legal system, and is effectively present in the public arena, the pluralism of parties and political movements. In this way, the selection of the voter will be less free the more limited the range of alternatives.

In addition to what Bovero specifies, it should be alluded to that in order to ensure that democratic processes have a certain degree of quality, it is imperative that the administrative bodies that govern and control the rules of the electoral game have sufficient institutional guarantees that allow them to decide and act independently. These guarantees translate into the legitimacy of the elections as well as of the political system itself; since, it must be said, the deficit of independence in the electoral organization negatively affects the credibility of the political system, since, as W. J. M. Mackenzie (1962) said, "There is no system, no matter how noble it may be, that inspires confidence if it is applied by men who are under the direct orders of the government and with the authority to decide on questions of fact or law that arise". Thus, the proposal of this work lies, precisely, in the necessary transition from a formal or procedural democracy to a substantive one, which allows citizens to influence public decision-making beyond the casting of suffrage; This transition could be made through the creation of spaces for collective decision-making in order to maximize efficiency in public accountability channels.

3. Conclusions

The transitions to democracy allowed the advent of new forms of political participation. The representative model based on elections inaugurated political rights and called for pluralism and free competition among a diversity of actors. The first democratic manifestations also allowed the media to be open, which have enjoyed full freedom and autonomy in the face of the authoritarian decisions of yesteryear. These conditions of freedom, primitive if you will, had an impact on the public opinion of the citizenry and allowed the development of a new form of political culture, based on the free determination of political-electoral decisions.

However, democratic aspirations were broadened to other areas of the public sphere, since they not only promised a peaceful and institutional change in power (an issue that has managed to evolve peacefully and institutionally) but, in addition, they declared the end of social inequality, bet on the defense of justice and projected a better quality of life for the country. Citizens continued to trust these promises, but from an

³ According to the Latinobarómetro 2023 Report, 38% of the population in Mexico prefers democracy as a

government regime, 10 percentage points less than in 2016.

electoral perspective, waiting for a change not only in the way of governing but also in the way of doing politics itself. These public hopes were fuelled, in turn, by globalization, in a maelstrom of information and new technologies that, to some extent, allowed for the sharing of more and more expressions of discontent with democracy around the Western world. This generated a rejection of anything that denoted the issue of the public and, in the face of the marked disinterest of public representatives, the citizens withdrew their support for democracy. This attitude brought, at first, disaffection with the elections and with it, abstentionism characterized the democratic political culture.

In Mexico, the phenomenon of discontent became stronger due to structural phenomena such as corruption and violence, as representative democracy and its actors were unable to stop the advance of these problems, to which others were added of course. For these reasons, formal democracy lagged behind by not contemplating channels adequate to a new social reality, not only with a referendum model of participation but also with one that would allow for open, plural and effective action by citizens. At that moment came the critical juncture of citizen distrust. With this turning point, the rethinking of the future of democracy has become constant, where a new form of citizen participation is sought that actively decides the *what* of government agendas and is not only limited to endorsing the policies of the government in power. This new way of seeing democracy will make it possible to work under the principles of inclusion, social capital, interpersonal trust and citizen training, because as analyzed in this document, only with comprehensive strategies will it be possible to improve the quality of democracy and influence the solution of community problems.

In the particular case of the approach, the Mason, by oath and principle, is a "social builder". He cannot be a "passive citizen" or merely a "referendum", who only votes (procedural democracy).

The Mason has the *duty* to be an agent of substantive democracy. Their "job" in the profane world is precisely to combat disaffection, corruption and mistrust, not waiting for elections, but actively participating in the design of the "what". Where the "aspiration of Masonic behavior" is, therefore, the antithesis of apathy and abstentionism. It is the embodiment of the active citizenship that this document establishes.

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THE ROLE OF BENEFICENCE AND CHARITY IN THE MASONIC BODIES OF THE INTER-AMERICAN MASONIC CONFEDERATION: An Empirical Analysis

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Abstract:

This article presents an exploratory analysis of the charitable practices adopted by Masonic powers affiliated with the Confederation of Inter-American Freemasonry (CMI). Based on data collected through a questionnaire administered to 30 Masonic powers, we inquired about the formalization of these actions in their constitutions, those responsible for their implementation, their interest in charitable structures at the confederation level, their areas of interest, and the concrete actions taken. The results indicate a strong institutionalization of charitable work, with the Grand Hospitaller as the main responsible party (60% of responses), and a significant interest in collaboration at the CMI level (80% of powers). The areas of action are diverse, with education/scholarships and children/childhood (four mentions each) standing out, followed by vulnerable groups/elderly (three mentions). This research serves as a basis for future investigations on the social impact of Freemasonry in Latin America and highlights the need for greater coordination among the powers to maximize the reach of philanthropic actions.

Keywords: Freemasonry; Charity; Philanthropy; CMI; Statistical Analysis; Social Responsibility.

Resumen:

Este artículo presenta un análisis exploratorio de las prácticas caritativas y benéficas adoptadas por las potencias masónicas afiliadas a la Confederación Masónica Interamericana (CMI). Basándonos en datos recogidos a través de un cuestionario aplicado a poderes masónicos afiliados con un total de 30 encuestados, preguntamos sobre la formalización de estas acciones en sus constituciones, los responsables de su ejecución, el interés en las estructuras benéficas a nivel de confederación, las áreas de interés y las acciones concretas llevadas a cabo. Los resultados indican una fuerte institucionalización de la beneficencia, con la figura del Gran Hospitalario como principal responsable (60% de las respuestas), y un interés significativo en la colaboración a nivel del CMI (80% de las autoridades). Las áreas de actividad son diversas, con énfasis en educación/becas y niños/infancia (4 menciones cada uno), seguidas de grupos vulnerables/ancianos (3 menciones). Esta investigación sirve como base para futuras investigaciones sobre el impacto social de la masonería dentro de los poderes masónicos afiliados al CMI y destaca la necesidad de una mayor coordinación entre los poderes para maximizar el alcance de las acciones filantrópicas.

Palabras clave: Masonería; Beneficencia; Caridad; Filantropía; CMI; Análisis estadístico; Responsabilidad social.

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1. Introduction

Freemasonry, as one of the oldest and most influential fraternal societies in the world, has in its fundamental principles the practice of beneficence and charity [1]. Historically, Masonic Lodges and Grand Bodies have played an active role in supporting their members and society at large through various philanthropic initiatives. However, the extent and nature of these activities can vary significantly between different Masonic Grand Bodies, especially in a context as vast and culturally diverse as that of the Confederation of Inter-American Freemasonry (CMI). [2]

The word beneficence originates from the Latin *beneficentia*, being the action of doing something willingly, seeking to help others, this beneficence can result in spiritual and material benefit. Charity, in turn, finds its root in the Latin word *caritas*, being recognized as the practice of helping those who are in an unfavorable situation [3]. This activity is based on feelings of tenderness and love, constituting a very strong and innate principle in humanity.

The Inter-American Masonic Confederation (CMI), founded on April 14, 1947, is a non-profit organization that brings together Masonic Grand Bodies of the Americas and Europe, with the objective of promoting universal fraternity and understanding between its members and society in general [4]. Its creation represents an effort of union and cooperation between Masonic Grand Bodies, establishing an important milestone for the coordination of philanthropic activities on a regional scale.

This study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by providing an empirical view of beneficence and charitable practices within the Masonic Grand Bodies of the CMI. Through the analysis of a questionnaire applied to several Grand Lodges and Grand Orients, we intend to answer the following research question: How are the practices of beneficence and charity structured, formalized and executed within the scope of the Masonic Grand Bodies of the Inter-American Masonic Confederation (IMC), and how do these actions align with their normative precepts and institutional interests?

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for assessing the social impact of Freemasonry and for identifying opportunities for collaboration and optimization of philanthropic actions at a broader level. The relevance of this study is justified by the need to systematically document and analyze Masonic charitable practices, contributing to the development of more effective strategies of social responsibility within the scope of the CMI.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1. Principles of Freemasonry and Beneficence

The Masonic Grand Bodies of the Inter-American Masonic Confederation (CMI) have as their moral duty the cultivation of the virtues of universal fraternity and the practice of beneficence and charity as principles of social cohesion [1]. Beneficence and charity are fundamental pillars of Freemasonry, reflecting its commitment to social well-being and helping others, seeking to make humanity happy.

The meaning of the words beneficence and charity, as presented earlier, has significant conceptual depth. In the Masonic context, beneficence is understood as the help that brings us the truth and, progressing in the scale of wisdom that Masonic knowledge provides, everyone through it can achieve the principle of justice from which the virtue of charity emanates, which is love for others [5].

2.2. Masonic Values and the Practice of Charity

Those who intend to exercise Masonic values must be guided to the practice of sensitive charity, not that impersonal and indifferent charity, whether in relation to that person who knocks on the door of the refectory and the hospital to be fed and healed, or to the one who waits on the street or at home for justice, welcome and liberation [6]. Masonic values are expressed in what it proposes, in the experience it provides so that each Freemason can exercise his beneficence, in an intelligent way, so that society can effectively benefit from his help.

The social action of the Masonic Grand Bodies linked to the CMI inhabits, therefore, this aesthetic field of cultivation and manifestation of values. In all social actions, however, there must be planning, so that the possible help does not turn into harm to those who receive it.

2.3. Masonic Ethics and Approaches to Beneficence

Each Masonic Grand Body, by its own identity, defines how it will act in matters of beneficence and charity [8]. There are currents that understand that this is a fundamental point of Masonic activity, in such a way that several Grand Bodies have created structures for the exercise of these functions. Others recognize the importance of these issues, but maintain an official line of non-action, considering that Freemasonry is not a charitable institution and that beneficence is not an essential function of the Order.

In these Grand Bodies, initiatives are individual or short-range, and engagement may be limited. Regardless of the approach, beneficence and charity are widely recognized as part of the activity and ethics of Freemasonry, and many Grand Bodies reserve the

right to monitor, support, manage, and execute all activities and any projects they deem necessary.

2.4. Beneficence in Freemasonry: Concepts and Practices

Numerous Masonic Grand Bodies linked to the CMI express in their constitutions, in the article on "Purposes of the Entity", the commitment to exercise beneficence in its broad meaning [10]. This widespread acceptance of beneficence is indicative of the role assigned to lodges and the Masonic order as a whole, reflecting the Order's traditional sympathy for the Republican values of fraternity, equality, and liberty.

Externally, although the Masonic Lodges and Grand Bodies carry out social actions, they do not have sufficient resources to undertake philanthropic actions of great social scope on a macro-social scale. On the internal level, charitable actions refer especially to the assistance of members, their spouses and descendants, and their actions are also guided by the values of fraternity, liberty and equality [11].

2.5. Charity in Freemasonry: Definitions and Applications

Charity is to Beneficence what morality is to Law [12]. If the first means help to the needy, the second represents the set of norms that regulate and discipline social life.

In its most elementary reality, the essential idea of charity is to benefit people in need [6]. Thus, religious institutions, traditional depositories of charities, are points of social identification, traditionally based on solidarity, whether national, regional or local. Immediate help is the object of the intent, aiming to respond to the needs of the most needy.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study is characterized as an exploratory research of quantitative and qualitative nature, using a cross-sectional design to investigate the practices of beneficence and charity in the Masonic Grand Bodies of the CMI. The methodological approach adopted combines descriptive statistical analysis with content analysis for the open-ended responses, allowing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon studied [13].

3.2. Population and Sample

The target population of this study comprises all the Masonic Grand Bodies affiliated to the Confederation of Inter-American Freemasonry (WCC).

The sample was constituted by convenience, including 30 Masonic Grand Bodies that voluntarily responded to the survey questionnaire. Although it is not a probabilistic sample, it represents a significant portion of the Grand Bodies active in the CMI, providing valuable insights into charitable practices in the region [13].

3.3. Data Collection Instrument

The data for this study were obtained through a structured online questionnaire, through the Google Form platform, specifically developed to collect information on the practices of beneficence and charity in Masonic Grand Bodies. The questionnaire was designed to address the following aspects:

1. Formalization of beneficence and philanthropy in constitutional documents.
2. Organizational structure for the management of charitable actions.
3. Interest in confederative charitable initiatives.
4. Areas of interest for charitable actions.
5. Types of concrete actions taken.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed electronically to the Masonic Grand Bodies affiliated to the CMI through official communication channels. The data collection period extended to three months, allowing adequate time for the Grand Bodies to respond reflexively and completely.

3.5. Data Processing and Analysis

The analysis was performed using descriptive statistical techniques to quantify the responses and identify patterns. For the open-ended questions, such as the areas of interest and concrete actions, a content analysis approach was employed, grouping similar answers into thematic categories through inductive coding [14].

3.6. Methodological limitations

It is important to recognize the limitations of this study. First, the convenience sample may not be fully representative of all the Masonic Grand Bodies of the CMI. Second, the data are self-reported, which can introduce social desirability bias. Third, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal inferences. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the practices of beneficence in Inter-American Freemasonry [15].

4. Results

4.1. Formalization of Beneficence in Constitutional Documents

An analysis of the responses revealed that the vast majority of Masonic Grand Bodies (100% of the 30 responses) have in their constitutions and/or general regulations explicit mentions of beneficence and/or philanthropy. This finding underlines the intrinsic importance that charity and helping one's neighbor possess for Masonic identity and operation, not only as an ideal, but as a formally established precept [16].

4.2. Charitable Officers

The figure of the Grand Hospitaller emerged as the main official responsible for the charitable and charitable actions in the Masonic Grand Bodies of the CMI. In 18 of the responses (60%), this position was explicitly mentioned. Other officers or commissions, such as the Grand Secretary of Benefits and Social Assistance or Charitable Committees, were also cited, indicating an organizational structure dedicated to these activities. The centrality of the Grand Hospitaller reflects a long-standing Masonic tradition, where this officer is the link between the Lodge and the needs of its members and the community.

4.3. Interest in CMI Level Charitable Structures

Interest in establishing or participating in a charity and/or philanthropy structure at the CMI level is remarkably high. Approximately 80% of the Masonic Grand Bodies that responded to the questionnaire expressed positive interest in this collaboration. This data suggests a recognition of the need and potential for coordinated, larger-scale actions that could transcend national boundaries and maximize the impact of Masonic philanthropic initiatives in the region where the CMI operates [18].

4.4. Areas of Interest for Charitable Actions

The areas of interest for charitable and philanthropic actions are diverse, reflecting the breadth of social needs and the Masonic commitment to human welfare. The most frequently mentioned categories include:

- Education/Scholarships: 4 mentions, indicating a strong focus on intellectual development and empowering individuals.
- Children/Childhood: 4 mentions, showing the concern for the future and the protection of the youngest.

- Vulnerable Groups/Elderly: 3 mentions, covering support for populations at social risk, including the elderly and homeless people.
- Health: 2 mentions, with initiatives aimed at access to medical care and health promotion.
- Natural Disasters: 2 mentions, highlighting the readiness to act in emergencies and calamities.

Other areas, such as food and support for Freemasons and their families, were also mentioned, demonstrating the scope of philanthropic concerns [19].

4.5. Concrete actions taken

The concrete actions of beneficence and charity reported by the Masonic Grand Bodies are varied and demonstrate the practical engagement with Masonic principles. The most common actions include:

- **Educational Programs:** 4 mentions, ranging from the granting of scholarships to the support of schools and literacy projects.
- **Support for Needy Institutions:** 3 mentions, referring to donations and volunteering in nursing homes, shelters and halfway houses.
- **Support for Freemasons/Families:** 2 mentions, with initiatives such as relief funds and support houses for members of the fraternity and their dependents.
- **Food Distribution:** 2 mentions, addressing the food security of needy communities.
- **Health Actions:** 2 mentions, including health programs, vaccination campaigns and support for hospitals.

These actions illustrate the active commitment of Masonic Grand Bodies to translate their ideals into tangible benefits to society [20].

5. Discussion

The results of this research reinforce the centrality of beneficence and charity in Inter-American Freemasonry. The formalization of these practices in constitutional documents and the designation of specific officers, such as the Great Hospitaller, demonstrate a well-established structure for the management of philanthropic actions. This suggests that beneficence is not a peripheral activity, but a fundamental pillar of Masonic identity, rooted in its principles and regulations [21].

The high interest in a charity structure at the IMC level is a promising indicator. He points to the potential for synergy and an expanded impact, if the Masonic Grand Bodies manage to coordinate their efforts in larger and more comprehensive projects. Such

collaboration could optimize resources, share best practices, and address societal challenges more effectively across the region [22].

Areas of interest and concrete actions reveal a focus on basic social needs and human development. The emphasis on education and health, along with support for vulnerable groups and response to natural disasters, aligns Masonic activities with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), even if indirectly. This demonstrates the continued relevance of Freemasonry as an agent of social transformation [23].

It is important to note the limitations of this study, which is based on a limited number of responses and self-reported data. Future research could benefit from a larger sample, complementary data collection methods (such as interviews and case studies), and a more in-depth analysis of the real impact of philanthropic actions. In addition, the cultural and socioeconomic diversity of the Inter-American region suggests that the local nuances of charitable practices could be explored in greater detail [24].

6. Social Action Programs

Social Action Programs play a significant role in the CMI Masonic Grand Bodies that responded to the questionnaire. Each Masonic Power of the CMI fulfills its role in this area, organizing and promoting Masonic participation in charitable and charitable works, or other activities of a charitable nature. Naturally, the scope and scope of these projects are limited by the size, geographical coverage and Workload of the Brothers of these Grand Bodies [25].

6.1. Charitable Initiatives

The Inter-American Masonic Confederation (CMI) formally recommends to its member Grand Bodies the implementation of a Beneficence Committee and its officialization as a charitable entity. Among the activities contemplated, the following stand out: assistance to siblings in need or in a situation of illness, living in their own or partner institutions; structuring of national aid and solidarity programs for the population in general. The CMI should envision the future formation of a centralized financial institution, with strict compliance and governance rules, directed by a committee of the Confederation. This entity would facilitate the transfer of funds to supranational charitable campaigns of the member Grand Bodies, for the benefit of the community [26].

6.2. Charitable Projects

The responding Masonic Grand Bodies give due attention and have responsibilities related to Beneficence and charity. Not all Masonic Grand Bodies

formalize their charitable actions in the same way. Charitable actions are inherent in Freemasonry, regardless of formal recognition by other Masonic Grand Bodies.

7. Challenges Faced

These are challenges faced by Freemasonry: to take care of charity, to do what is useful to the Brothers of each country, and to give help to those who are in a situation of social vulnerability, in situations of loss and even sick. The practice of fulfilling these tasks in each country of the Community of Grand Lodges and Grand Orients presents, however, some difficulties, arising from specificities of various types (formal, procedural, cultural and economic): In many countries, Grand Lodges or Grand Orients do not operate directly in charitable or charitable activities and do not control any domestic foundations. The Grand Lodges or Grand Orients serve only as intermediaries between Brothers, society and the official institutions of the State in their countries, sending them contributions [28].

7.1. Sustainability of Actions

The sustainability of charitable and charitable actions is a crucial issue for Masonic Grand Bodies. Ensuring the continuity and effectiveness of these initiatives requires careful planning, efficient management of resources, and the ability to adapt to different contexts. Transparency in administration and the search for diverse sources of funding are essential elements to ensure that charitable actions can last and generate a positive impact in the long term. The administrative and maintenance costs of charitable and charitable actions should not compromise their execution, and efficiency in management is essential to maximize the reach and impact of these activities [29].

7.2. Public Perception of Freemasonry

The presence of Freemasonry in the media raises many questions and often provokes adverse opinions. Historically, the low-key nature of Freemasonry has contributed to the creation of myths and misconceptions about its purposes and activities. To mitigate misinformation and promote more accurate understanding, Freemasonry has sought greater openness and communication with the general public. Although works of fiction can sometimes portray secret societies in a distorted way, it is important to distinguish these depictions from the reality of Freemasonry, which is dedicated to principles of fraternity, morality, and beneficence.

8. Conclusion

This study provided an insight into the practices of beneficence and charity among the Masonic Grand Bodies of the Confederation of Inter-American Freemasonry that responded to the proposed questionnaire. The findings confirm Freemasonry's deep dedication to philanthropy, evidenced by its institutional formalization, the designation of specific officers, and the diversity of its actions. Interest in collaboration at the confederation level paves the way for a future of greater impact and coordination in Masonic charitable initiatives [30].

It is recommended that the CMI actively explore the possibilities of creating or strengthening a coordination structure for charitable actions, taking advantage of the interest expressed by the Grand Bodies. This would not only expand the reach and effectiveness of the initiatives, but would also reinforce the role of Freemasonry as a positive and active force in the social development of Latin America [31].

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THE MOSAIC PAVEMENT: Democratic Foundations and Strategies with Justice, Freedom of Expression, and Freedom of Thought

Rubens Ricardo Franz ¹

Abstract:

This article examines democracy, justice, human rights, and freedom of expression and thought as pillars that guide our policies and practices, driving the construction of a more just, fraternal society that is conscious of its historical role. From a Masonic perspective, democracy is understood as a mosaic pavement: a collective, plural, and imperfect work whose strength lies precisely in the encounter—and confrontation—of diverse ideas. In the face of the advance of authoritarianism, populism fueled by the “horseshoe effect,” network manipulation, and organized disinformation, this article proposes a critical reflection that distinguishes freedom of speech from freedom of reach, reinforces the vital role of civil society, and highlights the need to protect human cognitive autonomy. It argues that defending freedom of expression and thought, within a democratic environment sustained by the rule of law, human rights, and impartial justice, does not require a return to censorship, but rather balanced decisions, active social participation, ethical and solid institutions, more counter-speech, and greater democratic maturity.

Keywords: Democracy; Justice; Human rights; Freedom of expression; Freedom of thought; Cognitive autonomy; Civil society; Disinformation; Authoritarianism; Counter-speech; Democratic maturity; Masonic perspective.

Resumen:

Este artículo examina la democracia, la justicia, los derechos humanos y la libertad de expresión y de pensamiento como pilares que orientan nuestras políticas y prácticas, impulsando la construcción de una sociedad más justa, fraterna y consciente de su papel histórico. Desde una perspectiva masónica, se sostiene que la democracia debe ser comprendida como un pavimento de mosaico: una obra colectiva, plural e imperfecta, cuya fuerza reside precisamente en el encuentro —y en el contraste— de ideas diversas. Ante el avance del autoritarismo, del populismo que se alimenta del “efecto herradura”, de la manipulación de redes y de la desinformación organizada, se propone una reflexión crítica que diferencia la libertad de expresión de la libertad de alcance, refuerza el papel vital de la sociedad civil y destaca la necesidad de proteger la autonomía cognitiva humana. Se argumenta que la defensa de la libertad de expresión y de pensamiento, en un entorno democrático sustentado por el Estado de derecho, los derechos humanos y una justicia imparcial, no exige el retorno de la censura, sino decisiones equilibradas, con participación de la sociedad, instituciones éticas y sólidas, mayor contra discurso y una madurez democrática más profunda.

Palabras clave: Democracia; Justicia; Derechos humanos; Libertad de expresión; Libertad de pensamiento; Autonomía cognitiva; Sociedad civil; Desinformación; Autoritarismo; Contra discurso; Madurez democrática; Perspectiva masónica.

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1. Introduction – Freemasonry, Humanism, and the Mosaic Pavement

The Masonic tradition is constituted as an ethical and philosophical matrix founded on the premise that virtue does not represent a passive state, but rather a habit cultivated through the repeated practice of good and the guidance of reason. This matrix understands the human being as an intrinsically political and social entity, whose fulfillment and happiness depend on the balance between individual self-improvement—achieved through discipline, self-knowledge, and the pursuit of truth—and collective commitment to justice, solidarity, and peaceful coexistence. By conceiving morality as a true “science of conduct,” Freemasonry offers a philosophical framework aimed at human improvement, using ethics as an instrument for harmonizing social relations and promoting a universal fraternity that transcends institutions.

In this context, and within the scope of the Interamerican Masonic Confederation (CMI), its statutes strategically emphasize, within its “Ideals and Principles,” that Freemasonry defines itself as a philosophical and humanitarian movement that seeks the integral improvement of humanity through respect for dignity, the promotion of peace, and social justice, operating independently of political parties or religious dogmas. Grounded in the principle of the “Great Architect of the Universe,” the institution preserves freedom of conscience and rejects fanaticism, while consecrating labor as a social duty and defending the trinomial Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Thus, by combating exploitation and intolerance, Freemasonry assumes an ethical commitment to reason and to the universal validity of Human Rights, positioning itself as an active agent in the construction of a global fraternity among all peoples, without distinction of race or belief.

Through Masonic knowledge, we encounter the Mosaic Pavement, which assumes a symbolic and dialectical meaning of great relevance. It represents the antinomies and dualities that structure the universe and human existence, demonstrating that the harmony of life depends on a conscious balance between such contrasts. Dialectically, the mosaic functions as an emblem of unity in diversity, symbolizing fraternity among individuals of different origins, beliefs, and perspectives. Its dividing lines delineate the “narrow path” of tolerance and rectitude, calling upon the initiate to rise above profane dichotomies to achieve wiser, fairer, and more peaceful coexistence.

The democratic metaphor present in the Mosaic Pavement reinforces this interpretation. Just as the floor is composed of black and white tiles that preserve their identities without merging, democracy presupposes the coexistence of different currents of thought, ideologies, beliefs, and divergent interests

that share the same institutional space. The mortar that binds these pieces symbolizes the social pact—or the Constitution—that transforms diversity into order, preventing plurality from turning into chaos and ensuring the stability of the whole. It is therefore a symbolic representation of democratic coexistence, in which difference is not suppressed but integrated into a common project.

In the contemporary scenario, society is challenged by a hyperconnected and complex reality in which issues such as artificial intelligence, technological acceleration, and the fragility of democracies impose new ethical, social, and institutional dilemmas. This context demands a profound review of the practices, structures, and modes of action of civil organizations, including Masonic ones, adopting a strategic approach that articulates tradition and contemporaneity. This implies training leaders capable of promoting integration between different generations and of occupying spaces of public influence in a qualified manner.

The creation of integrated forums, the strengthening of institutional dialogue, and transparent communication with society—acting on strategic issues of common concern—constitute essential elements of the commitment to the peaceful development of humanity. Thus, contemporary Interamerican Freemasonry is defined by the effort to convert its symbolic heritage into social effectiveness, ensuring that the values of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity transcend abstraction and become concrete instruments of transformation for the future.

2. Democracy as Plural Construction

Democracy can be understood as a plural construction founded on human dignity, freedom of conscience, and respect for the diversity of thought. In the postulates of the Interamerican Masonic Confederation, the relationship between Freemasonry, democracy, and public life reveals an ethical and humanistic conception of politics, understood as the art of guiding the State through reason and morality. From this perspective, democracy is not based on the elimination of conflict, but on the institutionalization of dissent as a civilizational condition, allowing human plurality to manifest itself without coercion and ensuring that freedom remains a structuring element of social life.

Democratic effectiveness occurs through discursive processes in which public norms and decisions achieve legitimacy only when rationally justified within a free, inclusive, and symmetrical public sphere. In the Latin American context, democracy remains a dynamic process, marked by advances and setbacks, as well as persistent tensions between

participation, representation, and social inclusion. Historical experiences such as dictatorships, populism, autocracy, and contemporary forms of authoritarianism reveal institutional fragilities and structural inequalities, often exploited through strategies of personalism, polarization, and internal erosion of institutions. Contemporary authoritarianism, to a large extent, does not impose itself through abrupt ruptures, but through the gradual erosion of democratic guarantees—expressed in the co-optation of legislative and judicial branches and oversight bodies, the weakening of the press, censorship incompatible with the constitutional order, and the systematic dissemination of disinformation, often driven by actors legitimized by the electoral process itself.

Faced with these challenges, preserving a plural democracy requires renewing the social pact, strengthening institutions, and transforming dissent into constructive dialogue. It is about reaffirming democracy as a human project under constant construction, guided by the defense of freedom, equality, and dignity that underpin collective life.

3. The Evolution of Human Dignity

The conception of human rights finds an important historical milestone in the Universal Declaration of 1948, which established a common ethical standard for all peoples by dissociating individual protection from geographic or ideological boundaries. However, the transition from this idealism to legal pragmatism was consolidated with the European Convention of 1950. By establishing jurisdictional mechanisms under the aegis of the European Court, the regional system transformed rhetorical abstractions into subjective rights subject to judicial protection, harmonizing the UN's normative universalism with a robust regionalism that reaffirms dignity as the supreme and non-negotiable value of the contemporary order.

In the American context, the protection of fundamental rights, outlined in the San José Pact, deepens this paradigm by asserting that such prerogatives do not derive from state citizenship, but are inherent attributes of the human condition itself. The jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court operates under the logic of the indivisibility of civil, political, and socioeconomic rights, imposing on States a complementary conventional duty of protection. Under this regime, state sovereignty is subordinated to the commitment to guarantee integrity and freedom in an effective and transnational manner, ensuring that social justice and democratic institutions are inseparable pillars of human dignity.

Within the context of the CMI, the historical milestone dates to the First Inter-American Conference of Freemasonry, held in Montevideo, Uruguay, from April 14 to 20, 1947. At that meeting, the participating powers decided to establish the Interamerican Masonic Confederation (CMI), which subsequently led to the approval of a declaration that, throughout its historical trajectory, highlights a fundamental principle: "...Freemasonry recognizes the need to work for the universal validity of Human Rights."

Contemporary times, however, impose new challenges to individual autonomy in the face of increasingly sophisticated algorithmic manipulation and digital surveillance. As Daniel Joyce argues, the network is not a neutral channel, but an infrastructure that shapes human experience, requiring freedom on the internet to be recognized as a multidimensional right. A new legal paradigm is therefore imperative—one that recognizes access to communication and connectivity as pillars of dignity, preventing technology from fragmenting free will and the private sphere.

Finally, the realization of these rights finds in organized civil society its most resilient driving force, transcending the role of observer to act as a protagonist in democratic transformations. Through strategic networks, civil society organizations can coordinate in an integrated manner and, together with ethical, professional, investigative journalism, ensure public transparency and document violations. By pressuring for legislative reforms and monitoring compliance with laws and norms, these actors not only protect existing standards, but also actively participate in the formulation of new guarantees, consolidating citizen participation as a non-negotiable foundation of the rule of law.

4. The Architecture of Freedom: Thought and Expression as Inalienable Rights in the Digital Age

Freedom of thought and expression constitutes the indispensable foundation of any democratic order. When this right is restricted, constitutions become mere symbolic artifacts devoid of normative force. Democracy, unlike authoritarian regimes, recognizes its own imperfections and is structured around the collective search for answers. It is a dynamic system, sustained by the clash of ideas, the coexistence of plural interests, and the continuous contestation of evolving narratives.

In *Voltaire on Liberty*, David Wootton presents Voltaire's political philosophy as an uncompromising defense of freedom as a natural and inalienable right, incompatible with any form of slavery or absolute submission. For Voltaire, authentic political freedom consists in depending exclusively on laws, not on the arbitrariness of individuals or despotic powers. He

therefore considers illegitimate any government that allows detention without trial, arbitrary confiscation, or violations of personal and property integrity. The English model is praised as a concrete example of institutional guarantees—individual security, trial by jury, freedom of the press, and religious tolerance. Voltaire even legitimizes rebellion against tyrants, asserting that in the face of oppression, the people possess an “undeniable right” of resistance. His central message remains clear: freedom requires protection against arbitrariness through the rule of law and justifies active resistance against any authority that reduces individuals to servitude.

The centrality of freedom of expression finds legal consecration in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which elevates it to the status of a universal human right. In the twenty-first century, however, these right faces unprecedented challenges. The power to silence no longer depends solely on direct state censorship, but also on technological architectures capable of amplifying, distorting, or rendering invisible discourse on a global scale. Defending democracy today therefore requires rethinking its foundations in light of these new forms of domination, whether or not associated with state power.

The work of John Locke, particularly the *Second Treatise of Government*, provides a robust argument by situating freedom in self-ownership, the foundation of intellectual autonomy and expression. For Locke, each individual possesses inalienable property over their person, their mind, and the fruits of their labor—a principle that, in the contemporary digital context, can be extended to the protection of data, creations, and content produced through intellectual effort. Freedom, for Locke, is not the absence of rules, but protection against arbitrary will, which translates into the defense of privacy, autonomy over personal information, and the rejection of opaque mechanisms of surveillance or moderation. In his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke argues that external coercion is incapable of transforming internal convictions: truth prevails through persuasion and evidence, not force. Thus, opinions that do not violate the rights of others should not be suppressed. The State must limit itself to preserving property and collective security, acting through known and consented laws. When this pact is broken—whether through excessive surveillance, undue control, or invasion of freedoms—the right of resistance emerges, which in the contemporary digital environment may manifest, for example, through migration to alternative platforms or the use of decentralized technologies. In sum, freedom of thought and expression is inalienable because the human mind is intrinsically immune to physical

coercion; it is the role of political power to guarantee the civil sphere, not to shape consciences.

In *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill develops a powerful defense of unrestricted freedom of thought and expression. For Mill, silencing an opinion harms not only the present generation but also future ones, including those who disagree with it. Mill structures his argument around four pillars: 1. human fallibility in censoring an opinion, since it may be true—denying it amounts to presuming certainty; 2. the possibility that false opinions may contain portions of truth, which can only be integrated through the confrontation of divergent perspectives; 3. the risk that truths accepted without challenge become dead dogmas, devoid of rational understanding; and 4. the loss of vitality of beliefs when they are not subjected to continuous debate, turning into mere formalities incapable of guiding conduct. Mill admits a strict limit: freedom ceases when expression becomes direct incitement to concrete harm, clearly distinguishing speech from action. Thus, freedom of expression is indispensable to the intellectual and moral flourishing of humanity, since only the free clash of ideas allows for the discovery, refinement, and revitalization of truth.

In *The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defense of Truth*, Jonathan Rauch shifts the focus of freedom of expression from the individual to the social system that organizes the production of knowledge. The “Constitution of Knowledge” functions as an institutional structure that transforms disagreement into reliable facts through impersonal rules: “no final say”—no claim is immune to revision—and “no personal authority”—validation depends on public, replicable verification, not individual prestige. Universities, the press, and courts form this reality-based community. Rauch identifies a contemporary epistemic crisis marked by two simultaneous attacks: disinformation, which dissolves the boundary between fact and fiction, and cancel culture, which restricts dissent through social coercion. Although counterintuitive, allowing the circulation of erroneous or offensive ideas within a system regulated by epistemic norms is, according to Rauch, the most effective method ever developed to produce reliable knowledge and sustain democracy. Protecting freedom of expression therefore means preserving the institutional environment in which productive disagreement generates shared truth.

5. Strategies for Preserving Democracy and Freedom of Expression

Preserving democracy and freedom of expression requires an articulated set of institutional, cultural, and technological strategies capable of strengthening the public sphere and protecting

individual autonomy. Combined, they form an ecosystem capable of sustaining open, resilient societies committed to truth and freedom:

1. Civic education: a) Implement educational programs that teach democratic values, the importance of freedom of expression, and the functioning of institutions; b) Encourage spaces for debate where different opinions can be expressed, promoting tolerance and respect.
2. Strengthening democratic institutions: a) Promote transparency in government actions to increase public trust; b) Preserve the democratic system by overseeing the State and defending the Constitution and legislation; c) Guarantee the quality and independence of the judiciary, acting according to the legal framework so that it may serve as a guardian of rights and freedoms.
3. Oversight of the media ecosystem: a) Encourage diversity of voices in the media, ensuring representation of different perspectives; b) Create media literacy programs to help the population identify and combat disinformation.
4. Citizen participation: a) Create channels for active public participation in the political process, such as public hearings and popular consultations; b) Foster movements that defend human rights and social justice.
5. Protection of human rights: a) Implement laws that protect human rights, including freedom of expression and the right of assembly; b) Create independent bodies to monitor and report human rights violations.
6. Promotion of ethical and moral values: a) Develop campaigns that promote ethics, morality, and solidarity, combating corruption and institutional distrust; b) Encourage policies that strengthen the family structure without restricting the diversity of family arrangements.
7. Combating social exclusion: a) Implement policies aimed at reducing social and economic inequalities, promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups; b) Ensure that everyone has access to information and resources necessary to participate actively in society.

6. Conclusion – Reuniting with Freedom and the Organization of Democratic Society

Democracy, understood as a mosaic pavement, requires constant maintenance. It is sustained not only by constitutional norms or international declarations,

but by the vigilant and organized action of civil society. In contexts of political destabilization, extreme polarization, and institutional and informational manipulation, preserving freedom of expression and thought becomes a collective civic duty, not merely an abstract legal prerogative.

The first dimension of this democratic self-defense is **civic education**. History shows that no democracy survives where citizens are unaware of how institutions function or of the ethical foundations of democratic regimes. Teaching how to debate is, in this sense, as important as teaching how to vote.

At the same time, **strengthening democratic institutions** is a non-negotiable condition. Government transparency, accountability mechanisms, and the effective independence of the branches of government—under unwavering respect for the Constitution—constitute structural barriers against the capture of the State by authoritarian projects. Without reliable institutions, freedom of expression loses its political function and degenerates into mere rhetoric without practical consequences.

Another central axis lies in **monitoring the media ecosystem**. Supporting a free, plural, and economically sustainable press preserves democracy's factual infrastructure. At the same time, combating disinformation must not take the form of state censorship, but rather media literacy, enabling citizens to distinguish journalism from opinion and manipulation. A society with a mature information base drastically reduces the corrosive power of deceptive campaigns.

Active citizen participation completes this framework. Resilient democracies create institutional channels for social listening—public hearings, popular consultations, participatory councils—and recognize the historical role of social movements in expanding rights. When the population is excluded from decision-making processes, frustration becomes fertile ground for authoritarian solutions that promise efficiency at the expense of freedom.

Protecting democracy also requires the uncompromising **defense of human rights**. Protective laws, combined with independent monitoring bodies, ensure that freedom of expression is neither selective nor conditional upon political convenience. A democracy that tolerates abuses against minorities, majorities, or dissidents weakens the very principle that legitimizes it.

Finally, the **promotion of ethical values, moral integrity, and social inclusion** constitutes the invisible mortar of this democratic pavement. Awareness campaigns, anti-corruption efforts, and the strengthening of social bonds—including policies that support families—reduce institutional distrust and

social resentment. Inclusion policies and equitable access to information ensure that freedom of expression is not a privilege of the few, but a right effectively exercised by all.

Thus, reuniting with freedom in the twenty-first century requires more than resistance to state or algorithmic censors. It demands an organized, educated society, ethically committed and institutionally vigilant. Freedom of expression is not preserved by imposing silence on error, but by actively constructing an environment in which error can be confronted, corrected, and overcome without fear. Only in this way will democracy cease to be an abstract promise and become a daily practice of responsible citizenship.

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