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Address in open Lodge to W.:L.: « POTOMAC n° 5 » in the Or.: of
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Dear and WW.:BB.:,

I wish first of all to gladly thank you, and especially those having personally acted so diligently, my dear American fellow Bretheren, to have kindly invited me today to make an informal presentation to you about the topic: « Which universal perspectives for a new century? Unconventional point of view of a Freemason of Grand Orient de France » and an Officer of the Supreme Council of the 33° and last degree of the Scottish Rite in Paris.

I realize pretty well the privileged momentum it is and very modestly – as it is appropriated for true freemasons – I do not pretend to have yet found the Light I am looking for since I entered into Freemasonry, more than 38 years ago. And this despite ongoing truly open-minded efforts in order to build a bridge to Light. A bridge to Light which simply not ends with national borders and the limits of institutional Masonic bodies whatsoever throughout the world, but a bridge to overcome prejudices, to discover differences, to open my eyes and my mind to others in a confrontation of different legacies. I was indeed, and I am today, fortunate enough to have the rare opportunity to not simply meet Bretheren all over the five continents, but to stay for longer periods of time in different countries and again and again to try, with the help of Bretheren like you here today, to open doors to overcome differences which belong to the reality of our world and as a consequence also of our Masonic world. Not in view of any kind of a Masonic proselitism, but simply to try to have a modest and individual part to a dialogue between Men of good will, between Bretheren belonging each of them to specific and distinct Masonic streams which in my view are a source of richness. Why? Simply, because it contributes to the diversity of a spiritual, philosophical, philanthropical and traditional order. The Masonic Order, that has overcome the changes of time, culture, civilizations and society, an order which is not following the streams of the civil society but was through its history at the origin of many changes of the society. And being here in the Capital City of the United States of America, not far away from the capitol Hill and from the George Washington Masonic Monument of Alexandria I do not believe that it is necessary to tell much more about the major role American and by the way also some French Freemasons

played here to establish a democratic society. It is a matter of fact. It makes us also conscious of our responsibility today.

If one or the other should have been afraid to encounter today the Devil - who knows? – I will for sure deceive those. My purpose is certainly no to be provocative. If you agree with that, I shall rather try to introduce you into the French Masonic landscape and to make some proposals. Because I am of course quite familiar with that and because sharing my life with American citizens since almost six years, I realize quite well how difficult it is for some of our Brethren abroad to understand how it came in France to such a great variety of Masonic bodies and Masonic streams. I would also not hesitate to address the various difficult topics like the Landmarks and the Great Architect of the Universe in order to allow us to go deeper into this sensitive matters. And I would gladly answer any question. You could by no means have to consider any of them being embarrassing to me. We have today a unique opportunity to speak very frankly to each other and to address this issues. So feel free. It can only contribute to clarify the situation. Another sensitive issue could be women in Freemasonry. As you see I am not the kind of Bro - despite my profane activity as a career diplomat – to try to escape diplomatically the thoughts issues. The contrary. In my mind no single matter should be regarded as a kind of taboo. A reason for which I will myself expose, with your permission, some views which may be today regarded as premature or even hazardous. But since we are assembled in this privileged group today in Washington, === a strong symbol of human progress inspired by our Masonic philosophy and tradition, === I believe it is our duty to turn ourselves and our minds towards the future of our Masonic order on the turn of the 21st Century and of the Third Millennium. To do so we first need to know each other much better as we do and not to rely on others.

To be direct and to the point, first a few words over the Grand Orient de France: No it is not a communist organization! No, it has not relinquished the Great architect of the Universe. No, it has never initiated women. BUT... yes, it is the oldest traditional Masonic body in France and its very strong commitment in the establishment of Freemasonry in the early years of the United States of America is well documented. Yes it is a federation of Workings (Rites) where every single Lodge has the freedom to chose a Ritual belonging either to the French Rite = (80%) (a legacy of the old English Rite), the AASR or the Rectified Scottish Rite referring to the GAOTU(19%). YES, it is with more than 42 000 Bretheren the biggest French Masonic organization in a country which counts a total of roughly **110 000 men** being members of a Lodge. A number which may sound here ridiculous by comparison with the some 2 million Freemasons in the USA, but you have to compare that on a European scale, to consider that with the size of the French population which amounts only 60 Million people. Of course it is almost only a bit more than one tenth of the amount of Freemasons in the UK. But like the USA, Great Britain is the only country in Europe where Freemasons never where persecuted and where our Masonic order had a chance to develop out of the negative interference's of the Churches and of Politics. A situation which is by the way changing in the UK

as well today with a catholic prime Minister challenging the role of Freemasonry in the British society. This history explains why continental Europe does not total today much more than some 250.000 Freemasons. Nearly half of them are French. To be more extensive in my presentation I should also add that we have in France an additional important feminine Masonic stream since the early 20th Century. The Grande Loge Feminine de France accounts for some 10.000 Sisters and a CO-Masonry called "Droit Humain" (15.000 members) for a growing number of Bretheren (having in most cases dual membership) and a dominant number of Sisters

I shall not enter further into details now, but I am prepared to answer any question on this subject after my presentation.

{Other small sized "Grand Lodges" should be mentioned: "Grande Loge symbolique et traditionnelle "GLST) - 2500 members - former called " Nationale Opéra"; Grande Loge mixte universelle" (GLMU) – 1000 members - born out of a division of Droit Humain, 1973; "Grande loge mixte de France" (GLMF) - 1300 members -, resulting from a division of GLMU, - 800 members -"Le Rite Ancien et primitif de Memphis Misraïm" - 2000 members -, with two streams one for men and the other for women.

In percentage French Lodges represent 69% for men, 20% belong to mixed co-masonry and 11% are for women. ¾ of French Masons are men, but within 30 years the percentage of women has more than doubled raising from 10% to nearly 25%.

More specifically in France the first Masonic Lodge was created 1726. The first Masonic body was named 1728 « Grande Loge de France » before changing its name into « Grand Orient de France » 1771-1773. The same year a new « Grande Loge de France » was created again by dissident members who 1799 joined again the « Grand Orient de France », before finally a new "Grande Loge de France », which still exists with some 20.000 members today, was created in 1894.}

A great turmoil was originated 1877 as the Delegates of the Lodges of GODF voted after a fierce debate in the frame of the annual General assembly about the decision to lift the obligation to refer to the GAOTU in Lodge rituals. The motion to introduce this dramatic change was introduced by a Protestant pastor and Brother, Master of his Lodge. You must realize that this happened in the context of a French post-revolutionary society which just had conquered a separation from state and Catholic Church which used to be institutional under the Kingdom and which had shown that it was not willing to accept any kind of ecumenism with other beliefs. After the Revolution of 1789 the Catholic Church, as an institution, tried with desperate efforts to regain the temporal power and the place it had just lost in society. The signature of the Concordat of 1801 conducted to the effective excommunication of the French Freemasons accordingly to the Encyclica "In Eminenti Apostolatus Speculae" and to a radicalization of the relationships between the conservative Catholic Church and

the Grand Orient , *at this time deist in its majority but still supportive of the gains of the Revolution*. Knowing that, one should therefore consider this change in its historical context and that it was not meant, as some assert today, as a decision « to chase God out of from the Temple ». It was clearly a protective action against a specific church and rather a way to offer a chance to return to the original very liberal spirit of the Constitution of James Anderson, as it had been written 1717, thus before the changes made 1723. And of course before the extensive changes performed 1813 and completed more recently 1929 with the so called « eight fundamental obligations to be fulfilled to get recognition from the United Grand Lodge of the UK ». It is not my purpose to elaborate much more on this most sensitive issue which is a fact nobody may ignore. It is a matter of fact we have to live with and which has to be taken in account. It has unfortunately poisoned the relations between different Masonic streams and has indeed introduced a kind of Masonic equivalent to the Pope with its rules of excommunication and a kind of great Masonic Inquisitor. I noticed recently on the occasion of a Table Proceeding and Debate organized in this same Temple by WL “Benjamin B. French” Lodge that this issue is here now one of the topics you are considering.

Back to history, in France, most Bretheren simply did not care and regarded this evolution certainly with regret or sadness, but they went simply their Masonic way as usual. One body developed starting 1913 the « regular » way: GLNF, which claims some 19.000 members today. You are familiar with its members, which belong to the only Grand Lodge you officially recognize in France. We share in most places out of the City of Paris the same temples even though we of course do not work together in close tyled Lodge. And we have extended relations out of the Temple. Which does not mean that sometime Grand Masters of both streams do not have arguments. It belongs to the Game of “power”.

One has therefore to realize that Freemasonry developed this way in France as well as in several other continental European , Latin American and African countries. It is something we have to deal with. It is an issue we would be wise to try to address and not to ignore. Saying that I do not pledge for a specific Masonic discipline. I only express my concern about our division as a Freemason with an universal perspective. Why? Simply because I consider that our way of thinking is a legacy of the great philosophers and writers of the time of Enlightenment: Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Diderot and ahead of them Ephraim Chambers with his « Encyclopedia or Dictionary of Arts and Science » published 1728. It has still a lot of potentiality in itself, not only to overcome the challenges on the turn of the Millennium, but to bear great, ambitious ethic and humanistic values which are at risk. Our Masonic message is still valuable. The great and generous ideal which is to reunite people who otherwise never would have done so, is an utmost modern and strong message to our society endangered by egoism, ethnocentrism and materialism. At the same time everyone is speaking of globalization. But where are we Freemasons in this modern world? Are we not at risk to miss the real challenges of the Millennium while others are taking actively part to the mondialization?

My dear American Bretheren I feel uncomfortable for all of us today, because I am afraid we are yet collectively not anymore addressing the real issues of our contemporary time. Issues which have truly to do with our specific way of thinking. We have to be at the same time ambitious for others and humble and modest for ourselves. We have to have ambition for the progress of our society, for our fellow citizens, for our sons and daughters, for the upcoming generations. We can not simply act in looking backwards at the undoubtedly great achievements of our predecessors and at our glorious prestigious past. Of course, here in the USA, you were lucky enough to have a series of prestigious Heads of State belonging to our Brotherhood. But even here this belongs to the past and President Gerald Ford was the last one, quite a while ! And it is similar in most countries around the world. Do we not have to ask ourselves why this develops this way and what we can do to return to a greater effectiveness and visibility? Like Ill Bro. Zeldis, past Grand Commander of Israel, recently with humor said:” giving a lecture on the trestle- board is fine but a bit repetitive”; social meetings and charities are good, but can not be our main and only goal. In a modern society in which every body is more and more solicited we have to become more attractive to those people having potential influence on the evolution of society. I agree: Lodges do not have to interfere in politics and it would be wrong to do so. But does it mean that we, as Bretheren, as individuals, would have to stay silent as spectators in the profane world? Each of us has a kind of commitment whatsoever: political, religious, social, economical or what else. And as a matter of fact an entrepreneur belonging to a Lodge should not address the management challenges he is facing the same way as an average citizen or fellow entrepreneur. Referring to the ethic values we represent, we should be more sensitive to such issues our modern society generates: education, discrimination, preservation of individual rights in a computerized society, ethic rules in biotechnology, management of genetic modified organisms and of modern medicine, problems of environment as well as of aging people, youth and violence, challenges like drugs, tobacco and alcohol abuses. Young people certainly expect from us, before joining our Loges, that we do not neglect these issues. Not necessarily in our tyled Lodges but one way or the other like we deal with charity. Which means that we can respect our obligations and, as well, address the real issues of our society. And it is my personal conviction, that if we miss this goal, so we will also on the long run miss the young people who have expectations but are every day strongly solicited by other means and do not consider anymore that brotherhood and socializing, is enough motivation to join and to remain committed with our order. To do so they have plenty of other opportunities elsewhere and in more contemporary frames which fit more their expectations. But what perspective could have freemasonry without the youth joining us anymore?

On a more universal scale I must confess I have problems to understand how it comes that, because of Landmarks revisited in past decades we manage to have no kind of relationships between our specific Masonic disciplines. By comparison churches which knowingly defend dogmas, represent as well temporal and spiritual powers and

are thus supposed to be less tolerant , are in fact much more successful in improving their inter-confessional relations. Let take the example of the Roman Catholic Church, which today extends the hands of the Pope all around the world even to non-Christian churches and communities including Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. How does it come that we Freemasons remain at the turn of this century unable to conduct some kind of similar Masonic dialogue on a larger scale which would by no mean necessarily request of any Brother to change anything else but to seat around a table like we do today, speaking respectfully to each others about the serious issues of modern times and getting rid of our self-imposed rules of recognition, exclusive jurisdiction, regularity and so fort which are, in my opinion not anymore to the point. This are precisely these Rules and Regulations which made and continue to make this universal dialogue among all Freemasons barely impossible. Is it not a kind of a paradox that today the Roman Catholic Church has lifted the excommunication of Freemasons - about, which I really don't care, by the way! - but that Freemasons of different disciplines in fact excommunicate still each other? Is it a sane and normal situation we live with in which Masonic representatives may in most cases meet easier with a clergyman than with a Mason belonging to an « irregular » Grand Lodge?

Having always said that and priviledging a constructive approach, I notice in this regard that some significant changes are happening. Even in London. Pragmatism seems to gain ground. Step by step.

I have myself today of course no miraculous solution to suggest. But I am actively dealing with this issues of relationships between Bretheren of different Masonic Streams since my early years as a Mason searching for a way to overcome this splitting situation. After nearly forty years doing myself so, I feel we could easely find only a solution step by step in getting all of us more pragmatic. Having belonged as well to « regular » Grand Lodges as being today a member of GODF and Grand Officer of the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite in France, I may have some unusual ideas about this matter. I have reached the point where I think: one has simply to take in consideration that there are different Masonic streams, which reflect each of them, specific historical, sociological, cultural, religious, spiritual and national realities. We have simply to take them in account, as they are and not as they should be. No one of us is in such a situation which would entitle us to enforce a universal Masonic creed. We have to be aware that illusions conduct nowhere. We see the result today which is very frustrating to all of us. So we have to abandon any illusion or vain hope to change this diversity in order to reunify Masonic streams.

Referring again to the French case, which I know best, even the Grande Loge Nationale Française , you recognize, is in fact as French and as different of the American Masonic disciplines that I would easily consider it as even closer to all other French Masonic Bodies than to your Lodges. But since it obeys to the same Masonic Rules edited in London it makes it different and allows its members to attend your tyled Lodge meetings. This is a reality which is not at all offending to me.

Starting from this matter of fact, why should we not consider seriously to get more dynamic, more imaginative, creative and positive in order to develop a new kind of relationship which would not necessarily imply any kind of formal recognition, which would also not harm our respective rules and regulations and would not conduct to violate our solemn obligations ? Again let take the example of the Roman Catholic Church : it meets and conducts a sophisticated and ambitious dialogue with the other religious communities, but it does not perform churches services in which Ministers of different disciplines would act together. In other words it pledges in favor of ecumenism, but this kind of ecumenism does not mean confusion nor far less perjury for its Ministers.

Why could we Freemasons of different streams not act in a similar way? We have not to attend together closed Lodge Meetings which require you to respect your obligation and the Rules and Regulations of your Grand Lodge. I should not expect myself to attend such a stated communication simply because I respect your identity, your specific commitment, your discipline and your Tradition. On a reciprocal basis we may make progress in such a tolerant and open-minded spirit. Time has come to seat together, one way or the other, as we do here today, to try in joint sincere efforts to make progress in order to elaborate a new kind of relationship conducting to dialogue and finally to some form of true Masonic cooperation. It could be eased in using various existing channels: historians and scientists could join their efforts to get first a mutual better personal knowledge. And joint working Committees could be initiated in order to conduct a shared reflection **out of the Temple and without Ritual** = about such issues I mentioned before and others many which would appear to being of common interest. In my opinion it would considerably strengthen our credibility as a whole in this globalized world where our voice could count as it should be, a voice of Wisdom, Strength and Beauty. And doing so we would seriously commit ourselves collectively while preserving our single Masonic identities.

I belong in any case to this kind of candid Freemasons cultivating this beautiful utopia which makes that throughout the times, the changes in Society and the revolutions, our Masonic order, with all its different streams, survived since the 18th Century in bearing our great ideals. I have today the hope in our future, the hope in a new energy, which needs all of us, a new determination and a new approach, a new doing. This shall enable us not only to survive, which would be a passive behavior, but much more, to play an active role, may be a major one, **why not**, in our modern society of the beginning Millennium. I still hear the proposals of the Grand commander of the German Scottish Rite, Ill.: Br.: Gunter MUENZBERG, 10 years ago in Mexico: "In a world, which has changed so much, compared with the time our organization was founded, Freemasonry must come out of its shell and has to publish new time-specific and area specific programs, based on its' long term wisdom. This problem was so often proclaimed in recent decades by many far-sighted Freemasons, but not included in their strategies by the Masonic institutions. Instead of losing

oneself in formalities, the Masonic Institutions should make more aware the moral law to the people. This exoteric task would be easier to fulfill, if the different Masonic systems would bring the norms, mainly esoteric, of their attitude of mind into the form of a Magna Charta or a rule, being undogmatic and adaptable from time to time and valid for all freemasons. This could replace the diffuse Landmarks. In parallel to this task, the different Masonic organizations must develop and disseminate socio-ethical concept in their countries. Freemasonry is a political factor, whether it wants to be or not. It can not close its eyes concerning the environment and the people. The Masonic institutions....should of course not get involved in politics. This would be a blind alley, not to be pursued, because a bridge building is only possible, if such institutions remain neutral. Completely different is the situation of each single Brother. He should participate in the forming of society, in public life and especially in the forming of opinions. The Brother should make his view on the basis, laid down in our constitution, the Masonic body of thought and the theories of our rituals... The theory of principles of our rituals orientates itself more to the categorical imperative of Kant, which forbids all drivel and which requires engagement of the personality...Moving something should become our motto. A new Enlightenment which is required in our time also requires "New Charges". Duties of rejuvenation of our organization, the duty to orientate ourselves multiculturally, multinationally and multimentally, the duty to turn ourselves away from self-devotion, the duty to achieve agreements in order to form a numerically strong and diversified organization, which is attractive and so prevents itself from splitting into so-called irregularities.... Only when following these ways, will we be able to ...enter as a strong universal organization in the service of humanity. If we do nothing today, in another 10 to 20 years, the call for reformations will be heard loudly..." end quote. It was exactly ten years ago. Almost nothing happened since this desperate cry of a young and respectable far-sighted German Grand Commander of the Scottish Rite who one year before the end of the XXst century finallyresigned because confronted to the strong conservatism of his own Fellow Illust. German Bretheren . But his message still sounds today in our ears as a warning and as a legacy which gives us the directions we should go.

Let us be the brave Bretheren who are able to manage this changes faithfully, but also with courage and realism. It is worth the effort of all of us. And be sure that you could count among others in France on many Bretheren of good will in order to work together to build this new Temple of humanity.

S.m.i.b.

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