



**“Sociability, Religiosity and New Cosmovisions in Costa Rica at  
the turn of the Nineteenth to Twentieth Centuries”**

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**Palabras clave**

Sociabilidad, religiosidad, nuevas cosmovisiones, Costa Rica, masonería, Sociedad Teosófica, espiritismo

**Abstract**

This paper intends to analyze Freemasonry's role in the genesis of new cosmovisions based on its relationship with religiosity, atheism, spiritism, the Theosophy Society, co-Freemasonry and the Liberal Catholic Church (LCC) in Costa Rica during the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. What were the social practices of Freemasons' ideals regarding religiosity and the new cosmovisions? And how did they influence the enormous modernization process that the country was going through at that time? These are questions to answer through a prosopography analysis. Prosopography allows us to approach the relations between the structure and social dynamics of a group of Freemasons, as well as the social reality and the context of Costa Rica in which they took place. This not only allows us to approach Freemasonry with a greater understanding, but also to view Costa Rica as a country that was fully in the process of social changes and building cultural practices, as well as discourses.

**Resumen**

Este trabajo intenta analizar el papel de la masonería en el génesis de nuevas cosmovisiones sobre la base de su relación con la religiosidad, el ateísmo, el espiritismo, la Sociedad de Teosofía, la comasonería y la *Iglesia Católica Liberal (ICL)* en Costa Rica durante el cambio de siglo XIX-XX. ¿Cuál fue esta praxis social de los masones en relación a la religiosidad y las nuevas cosmovisiones?, ¿y cómo ésta influyó en el proceso mayor de modernización que estaba experimentando el país? Estas son las preguntas respondidas por medio de un análisis prosopográfico. La prosopografía permite acercarse a las relaciones entre la estructura y las dinámicas sociales del grupo de masones, así como a la realidad social y el contexto costarricense en que se desarrollaron. Esto no sólo permite acercarse a una mayor comprensión de los masones, sino además, a la de un país en proceso de cambios sociales en relación con la construcción de prácticas y discursos culturales.

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## “Sociability, Religiosity and New Cosmovisions in Costa Rica at the turn of the Nineteenth to Twentieth Centuries”<sup>1</sup>

Ricardo Martínez Esquivel

In this article I argue that freemasonry cannot be conceived as a monolithic political organization. It changes according to its locations and times. Freemasonry’s social phenomena go beyond the fraternity’s theoretical statutory definition. Therefore, we must understand the lodges’ social composition and their relationships with other social subjects; regardless if the latter defended, opposed or detracted from it and its members’ behavior, especially when studying their participation in several social networks. Therefore, we intend to analyze freemasonry’s role in the genesis of new cosmovisions based on its relationship with religiosity, atheism, spiritism, Theosophical Society (TS), co-freemasonry and *Liberal Catholic Church (LCC)*<sup>2</sup> in Costa Rica.

The methodology used in this paper is a prosopographical analysis. Prosopography allows us to know who the Freemasons were from a sociological perspective (characteristics and social features), but it also provides information on individuals and groups, social practices and dynamics. Hence, prosopography allows for the construction of collective biographies of freemasons’ public and associative lives. It allows us to approach the relations between the structure and social dynamics of a group of freemasons, as well as the social reality and the context of Costa Rica in which these relations took place.

The social praxis of freemasonry was related to the liberal and rational ideas that were in fashion at the time. These ideals made at least a part of freemasonry speculative from its origins in Costa Rica’s case, as it played an influential role in the introduction of modernity into the country and consequentially transformed it politically, economically and culturally. Therefore, in order to understand the public and associative life of an individual who socialized in the freemasonry of Costa Rica, one has to take into account these ideals. This not only allows us to approach freemasonry with a greater understanding, but also to approach Costa Rica as a country that was fully in the process of social change and building cultural practices as well as discourses. What were the social practices of freemason’s ideals regarding religiosity and the new cosmovisions during the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries? And how did they influence the expansive modernization process that the country was going through at that time?

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank Sylvia Hottinger for translating this paper and Kyle Jackson for revising it.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper we refer to co-freemasonry and the *Liberal Catholic Church* when dealing with the organizations created and promoted by the Theosophical Society during the presidency of Annie Besant from 1903-1933. Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine. Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001). Gregory John Tillett, “Charles Webster Leadbeater, 1854-1934: A Biographical Study” (Ph. D. Thesis in Religious Studies, University of Sydney, Australia, 1986), 591-638.

## The turn of the Nineteenth to Twentieth Centuries, Freemasonry and New Cosmovisions

Generally speaking, in different countries around the world, freemasonry has been characterized as being an atheist, anti-clerical or antireligious organization,<sup>3</sup> and the aim of this research, at least in the case of Costa Rica, is to deny this presumption<sup>4</sup>. In fact, freemasonry was a pioneer during key moments in the construction or reconstruction of collective social mentalities regarding beliefs and knowledge concerning theism, spiritualism or religion. There was a first wave of intellectual transformation with the arrival of deism brought by the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Then, a second one, which concerns this research, that came at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, a juncture during which there was also a proliferation of new ideas and sociability, especially those related to the sciences of mysticism, esotericisms and the occult.

In this context, a study of a case like Costa Rica, a country of 19729,820 mi<sup>2</sup>, and a population that varied from 120,499 to 800,875 inhabitants, according to the population census of 1864 and 1950, is a good place in which to study a juncture of crisis of social transformations, religious mentalities and cosmovisions. Although freemasonry came to Costa

<sup>3</sup> José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli, "Masonería, laicismo y anticlericalismo en la España contemporánea", in: *La modernidad religiosa: Europa latina y América Latina en perspectiva comparada*, ed. Jean Pierre Bastian (México D. F.: FCE, 2004), 122-123. Federico R. Aznar Gil, "La Iglesia Católica y la masonería: ¿incompatibilidad teológica?", in: *Masonería y Religión: Convergencias, Oposición, ¿Incompatibilidad?*, coord. Ferrer Benimeli (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 1996), 187-229. Aldo Alessandro Mola, "El problema del anticlericalismo y la masonería", in: *Masonería y Religión: Convergencias, Oposición, ¿Incompatibilidad?*, 239-251. María Eugenia Vázquez Semadeni, "Historiografía sobre la masonería en México. Breve revisión", in: *REHMLAC* 2, no. 1 (mayo-noviembre 2010 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v2/n1/rehmlac.vol2.n1-mvazquezl.pdf>. David Gueiros Vieira, "Liberalismo, masonería y protestantismo en Brasil, siglo XIX", in: *Protestantes, liberales y francmasones. Sociedades de ideas y modernidad en América Latina, siglo XIX*, ed. Bastian (México D. F.: FCE, 1990), 39-66. Felipe Santiago del Solar, "La Francmasonería en Chile: De sus orígenes hasta su institucionalización", in: *REHMLAC* 2, no. 1 (mayo-noviembre 2010 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v2/n1/rehmlac.vol2.n1-fdelsolar.pdf>. René Chanta Martínez, "Francmasonería, Iglesia y publicaciones impresas en el Salvador: La discusión, 1881", in: *AFEHC* 2003 (2008 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available [http://afehc-historia-centroamericana.org/index.php?action=fi\\_affid=2003](http://afehc-historia-centroamericana.org/index.php?action=fi_affid=2003). Roberto Armando Valdés Valle, Valdés Valle, "La Masonería y el Gobierno de Rafael Zaldívar (1876-1885)", in: *Boletín AFEHC* 37 (2008 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available [http://afehc-historia-centroamericana.org/index.php?action=fi\\_affid=1976](http://afehc-historia-centroamericana.org/index.php?action=fi_affid=1976). Ricardo Martínez Esquivel, "Masonic Societies of Ideas and their Social Representations in Costa Rica (1865-1899)", in: *CRFF Working Paper Series* 4 (2008): 1-24. Martínez Esquivel, "Conspiradores políticos y sectas misteriosas: Imaginarios sociales sobre la masonería en Costa Rica (1865-1899)", in: *Revista Estudios* 22 (2009 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://estudiosgenerales.ucr.ac.cr/estudios/no22/papers/isecl.html>

<sup>4</sup> The prosopographical analysis from the press, minutes of meetings and correspondence related to freemasonry in Costa Rica since its beginnings (1865) until 1910, allow us to conclude that during those years the organization was not reactionary regarding religious subjects and specially, related to the local Catholic Church. This can be explained by the country's context and the personality of those who joined freemasonry. Martínez Esquivel, "Documentos y discursos católicos antimasones en Costa Rica (1865-1899)", in: *REHMLAC* 1, no. 1 (mayo-noviembre 2009 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v1/n1/rehmlac.vol1.n1-543rich.pdf>. This is when the opposite seemed to be happening in most countries. (See for example to works cited in Note 2). Along these same lines, Miguel Guzmán-Stein reached the conclusion that nineteenth century freemasonry in Costa Rica was characteristically tolerant about religions and not anti-clerical. Miguel Guzmán-Stein, "Masonería, Iglesia y Estado: Las relaciones entre el Poder Civil y el Poder Eclesiástico y las formas asociativas en Costa Rica (1865-1875)", in: *REHMLAC* 1, no. 1 (mayo-noviembre 2009 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v1/n1/rehmlac.vol1.n1-mguzman.pdf>

Rica relatively late (1865), some of its members were the leaders of spiritism, co-freemasonry and LCC not only in Costa Rica, but also throughout Latin America. Prior to this, Costa Rica had become an important world base for the *Order of the Star in the East (OSE)*, an institution created with the funds of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), considered by many freemasons, theosophists, Rosicrucians and liberal Catholics the Messiah of their times.

The years that concern this research coincide with this specific juncture of crisis in the Western world<sup>5</sup>, in which modernism was at its highest moment of expansion. During this process, Western societies were gradually moving towards secularism due to the success of industrial capitalism<sup>6</sup>, the progress of science<sup>7</sup>, the development of liberalism and positivism<sup>8</sup>, the construction of nation states<sup>9</sup>, and the imperialist expansions of European powers and the United States of America<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, anarchy, atheism, deism, feminisms, rationalism and socialisms, among other tendencies were spreading into Western society<sup>11</sup>.

However, the answers provided by these novel ideas, sciences, and rationalities were insufficient for the new existential questions arising from the recently acquired knowledge during this juncture. Most of these were due to the contradictions arising from traditional religion and modernity. Therefore, between agnosticism and positivism a crisis of faith took place, as pessimism grew due to the absence of satisfactory answers, mainly among the members of intellectual circles<sup>12</sup>. Thus, looking for new options to explain the realities of their times, there were proposals to reach a consensus of religious and scientific knowledge, in which a quest for mystic and esoteric knowledge, especially from the East, took center stage<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> We refer here to Christianity and its different variations.

<sup>6</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *La era del capitalismo*, trad. García Fluixá and Carlo A. Caranci (Barcelona: Guadarrama, 1981), 372-401. T. S. Ashton, *La Revolución Industrial* (México D. F.: FCE, 1994), Chapter III.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Jacob, *Scientific Culture and the Making of the Industrial West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 131-186. Christine MacLeod, *Heroes of invention: technology, liberalism and British identity, 1750-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 59-90.

<sup>8</sup> Gillis J. Harp, *Positivist republic: Auguste Comte and the reconstruction of American liberalism, 1865-1920* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 1-70.

<sup>9</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 101-130. Ernest Gellner, *Naciones y nacionalismo* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1997 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available [http://profeinformatica.net/Ernest\\_Gellner\\_-\\_Naciones\\_y\\_na.pdf](http://profeinformatica.net/Ernest_Gellner_-_Naciones_y_na.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 84-141, 192-218 y 262-275. David Fieldhouse, *Economía e Imperio. La expansión de Europa. 1830-1914* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1990), 21-161. Wolfgang Mommsen, *La época del imperialismo*, trad. Antón Dieterich (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1998), 137-162.

<sup>11</sup> John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America (Religion and Postmodernism)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011). Jean Touchard, *Historia de las ideas políticas*, trad. Javier Pradera (Madrid: Tecnos, 2008), 510-545.

<sup>12</sup> D. H. Meyer, "American Intellectuals and the Victorian Crisis of Faith", in: *American Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (1975): 585-603. Walter Laqueur, "Fin-de-siecle: Once More with Feeling", in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 1 (1996): 5-47

<sup>13</sup> Meyer, "American Intellectuals", 585-603. Laqueur, "Fin-de-siecle", 5-47. Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 1-14. Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*, 1-48. Michael Ashcraft, *The Dawn of the New Cycle. Point Loma Theosophists and American Culture* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 1-14. Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge. Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2004), 5-26. Antonio Calvo Díaz, "Masonería y esoterismo: otra visión de la crisis moderna desde la Psicología", in: *La Masonería Española y la crisis colonial del 98*, coord. Ferrer Benimeli (Barcelona: CEHME,

Therefore, there was resurgence of deism—but with the confluence of eastern esotericism, the ideals of modernity, and the ideology of progress, materialized in the bourgeois culture<sup>14</sup> and in scientific and technological advances<sup>15</sup>. During this period, new social values were built and new social practices began<sup>16</sup>. The people that celebrated the industrial and scientific progress started to share their social concerns with those who were alarmed that this same progress might destroy human civilization. To some, Imperialism promoted Western culture through military expansion and missionary work<sup>17</sup>, while others found an innate value in Eastern cultures, probably motivated by the limits of a culture blinded by the belief in absolute truths; in a morality that could be perceived and relativized at convenience, and in a state of anxiety produced by constant and unexpected socio-economic changes<sup>18</sup>.

During those years, rationalism was used to understand and interpret supernatural, occult and spiritual events<sup>19</sup>. The power of the mind was considered the prime vehicle for understanding the unknown. For example, among the intellectual circles there was a development of societies for the study of metaphysics, magnetism, hypnosis, pluralism and

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1999), Tomo I, 21-31. Esteban Cortijo, “Masonería y Teosofía en Iberoamérica: Argentina, México y Brasil”, in: *La Masonería Española entre Europa y América*, coord. Ferrer Benimeli (Zaragoza: CEHME, 1995), Tomo I, 379-401. Jordi Pomés Vives, “Diálogo Oriente-Occidente en la España de finales del siglo XIX. El primer teosofismo español (1888-1906): un movimiento religioso heterodoxo bien integrado en los movimientos sociales de su época”, in: *HMiC: historia moderna i contemporània* 4 (2006 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://raco.cat/index.php/HMiC/article/view/53274/61304>

<sup>14</sup> Based on values such as self-control, punctuality, tidiness, hard work, conscientious, serious, respect the rights to private property, ready to postpone immediate gratifications in order to achieve long term ones, piety, believer of the truth from the Bible, strengthening home life and family honor when relating to peers, as well as being anxious to personal improvement in such a way that they could seem modern compulsive patriots. Guy Palmade, *La época de la burguesía* (México D. F.: Siglo XXI, 1976), 54-132. Norbert Elias, *El proceso de la civilización. Investigaciones sociogenéticas y psicogenéticas*, trad. Ramón García Cotarelo (México D. F.: FCE, 1989), 99-128. Ashcraft, *The Dawn of the New Cycle*, 8. Alan Rauch, *Useful knowledge: the Victorians, morality, and the march of intellect* (Durham N. C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 22-59.

<sup>15</sup> For example, at this time Darwin’s theory had just been published, naturalism, scientism and positivism were being developed. Moreover, on the teachings of Darwinism in Costa Rica at the beginning of the twentieth century see Roberto Brenes Mesén, a freemason, theosophist, anarchist, socialist spiritualist and educator. Initiated in 1905 in Libertad (Freedom) lodge, of *Hermes* lodge, Worshipful Master of *Regeneración* lodge (1918) and deputy Grand Master of the *Gran Logia de Costa Rica* (1918-1919). He was also initiated into the Theosophical lodge *Viryra* in 1908. Brenes Mesén was a freemason and theosophist until his death. Archivo de la Sociedad Teosófica en Costa Rica (ASTCR), “Rama Virya, Actas 27 de marzo de 1904 al 31 de mayo de 1908”, 156. Rafael Obregón Loria and George Bowden, *La masonería en Costa Rica* (San José: Imprenta Tormo, 1950), Tomo IV, 230-237. Meyer, “*American Intellectuals*”, 585-603. Laqueur, “Fin-de-siecle”, 5-47. Iván Molina Jiménez, *La Ciudad de los monos. Roberto Brenes Mesén, los católicos heredianos y el conflicto cultural de 1907 en Costa Rica* (San José: EUCR and EUNA, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Rauch, *Useful knowledge*, 22-59.

<sup>17</sup> Robert D. Woodberry, “The Shadow of Empire: Christian Missions, Colonial Policy, and Democracy in Postcolonial Societies” (Ph.D. Thesis in Sociology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2004 [citado el 15 de septiembre de 2009]): available <http://prc.utexas.edu/prec/en/publications/articles/2.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Meyer, “*American Intellectuals*”, 585- 603. Laqueur, “Fin-de-siecle”, 5-47. Ashcraft, *The Dawn of the New Cycle*, 1-14.

<sup>19</sup> Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 48-58. John Wame Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism and Occultism in Modern France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), 95-250.

pragmatism at the end of the nineteenth century<sup>20</sup>. At that time, there was also a renewed interest in alchemy, astrology, spirits, paranormal phenomena and magic. Readings of the Holy Scriptures were being held together with that of the Talmud, the Cabala, the Koran, the Zend-Avesta, the Bhágavad-Gītā and the Vedas, amongst other religious documents<sup>21</sup>.

At this juncture, the esoteric, the occult, and scientific progress were all integrated into the new ways of explaining realities and their mysteries. The esoteric aimed to construct better societies based on the guidance of “superior knowledge”; this integrated the development of a Christian Western culture within the framework of modern science, positivism, rationalism and secularism. In this process, ST was *avant garde*, but so were the Rosicrucian, the mystic freemasons<sup>22</sup>, co-freemasonry, the LCC and the groups of Experimental Psychology or psychic research<sup>23</sup>. Did the freemasons of Costa Rica participate of this process?

Because of this situation, it is necessary to study the beliefs and spiritualities of freemasons, since this also explains in part why and how the latter were inserted into Costa Rica’s society at a time when ideological modernization was in full evolution. What were freemasons’ religious practices at the time? Were they atheists? Spiritists?

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<sup>20</sup> A study of this case in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century is in Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club. A Story of Ideas In America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 201-434.

<sup>21</sup> The Theosophical Society was especially good at these practices. Mark Bevir, “The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition”, in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 3 (1994): 747-767. Merwin-Marie Snell, “Modern Theosophy in Its Relation to Hinduism and Buddhism”, in: *The Biblical World: “Part I”*, Vol. 5, no. 3 (1895): 200-205 y “Part II”, Vol. 5, no. 4 (1895): 259-265. Siv-Ellen Kraft, “To Mix or Not to Mix: Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism in the History of Theosophy”, in: *Numen* 49, no. 2 (2002): 142-177. Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 59-66. For the Costa Rican case see the research of Molina Jiménez, *La ciencia del momento. Astrología y espiritismo en Costa Rica durante los siglos XIX y XX* (Heredia: EUNA, 2011), 48-78. Esteban Rodríguez Dobles, “Conflictos en torno a las representaciones sociales del alma y los milagros. La confrontación entre la Iglesia Católica y la Sociedad Teosófica en Costa Rica (1904-1917)”, in: *REHMLAC* 2, no. 2 (diciembre 2010-abril 2011 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available [http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v2/n2/rehmlac\\_vol2\\_n2-erodriguez.pdf](http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v2/n2/rehmlac_vol2_n2-erodriguez.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> In Eighth Century France upon reconstructing an operative freemasonry into a speculative one included the incorporation of a growing amount of magic and occult symbolism, taken from the esoteric traditions of the Cabala, secrecy, the Templars tradition, alchemy and Rosicrucian. This magic-mystic blossoming in French freemasonry was institutionalized in *Le Régime Écossais Rectifié*, also known as *Rite Écossais Rectifié*, a masonic system developed in the 1760’s by a group of the High Bourgeoisie and aristocracy in the city of Lyon. *Le Régime Écossais Rectifié* was construed as an elitist religion for the Aristocracy, mainly noblemen, civil servants, the clergy and the newborn and prosperous bourgeoisie. Hugh B. Urban, “Elitism and Esotericism: Strategies of Secrecy and Power in South Indian Tantra and French Freemasonry”, in: *Numen* 44, no. 1 (1997): 1-38. Eric Saunier, *Encyclopédie de la Franc-maçonnerie* (Rome : La Tipografica Varese S. p. A., 2000), 738-740. Daniel Ligou, *Dictionnaire de la Franc-maçonnerie* (Paris: PUF, 2006), 1027 y 1043.

<sup>23</sup> Texts of foot notes 18 and 19. Ashcraft, *The Dawn of the New Cycle*, 1-14. Stephen Prothero, “From spiritism to Theosophy: “Uplifting” a Democratic Tradition”, in: *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 3, no. 2 (1993): 197-216. Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 67-73. Molina Jiménez, *La ciencia del momento*, 104-120. Jacob, “The Enlightenment as Lived: Late Eighteenth Century European Masonic



## Religiosity and Freemasonry

The prosopography results show 61% of the social composition of freemasonry at the time was composed of foreigners, whose most important cultural and social practices were related to religious creeds<sup>24</sup>. According to the censuses of 1883, 1892 and 1904<sup>25</sup>, the most important religious practice was Catholicism; this was 95% of the total population. Nevertheless, during the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, Protestantism increased as more immigrants came to Costa Rica, specifically those of Anglo-Saxon, Germanic and Afro-Caribbean origins<sup>26</sup>. Also, due to Chinese immigration, Buddhism rose in importance. The practice of Judaism, in those years, was also on the increase due to Jewish immigration, Sephardi and Ashkenazi alike, who socialized together in groups; some would become freemasons<sup>27</sup>.

Based on our prosopographical analysis of a sample of 694 freemasons, we have identified that 38% (226 freemasons)<sup>28</sup> practiced a religion. 100% of the identified religions

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Reformers”, in: *REHMLAC* 3, no. 1 (mayo-noviembre 2011 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available [http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v1/n1/rehmlac\\_vol3\\_n1-mjacob.pdf](http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v1/n1/rehmlac_vol3_n1-mjacob.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Martínez Esquivel, “Composición socio-ocupacional de los masones del siglo XIX”, in: *Diálogos Revista Electrónica de Historia* 8, no. 2 (agosto 2007-febrero 2008 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://historia.fcs.ucr.ac.cr/articulos/2007/vol2/6vol8n2martinez.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Oficial, *Censo General de la República de Costa Rica. 30 de noviembre de 1883*. San José: Tipografía Nacional, 1885 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]: available <http://ccp.ucr.ac.cr/bvp/censos/1883/>. Oficial, *Censo General de la República de Costa Rica. 18 de febrero de 1892* (San José: Tipografía Nacional, 1893 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available [http://ccp.ucr.ac.cr/bvp/censos/1892/pdf/poblacion\\_provincias.pdf](http://ccp.ucr.ac.cr/bvp/censos/1892/pdf/poblacion_provincias.pdf). Oficial, *Censo Municipal de San José, 1904* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1904), in: Víctor Hugo Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez, “Base de datos del censo municipal de San José de 1904” (San José: CIHAC, Universidad de Costa Rica, 1992-1997).

<sup>26</sup> Seemingly the first protestant cult or service in Costa Rica was in 1863 and was organized by William Le Lacheur and Richard Brealey, who became the first parish priest of the first protestant temple of the country built in San José: “*The Good Shepherd Church*”. Anita Gregorio Murchie, *Imported spices: a study Anglo-American settlers in Costa Rica 1821-1900* (San José: Departamento de Publicaciones del Ministerio de Cultura, Juventud y Deportes, 1981), 98-112, 174-178, 275-282 and 361-374. Wilton Nelson, *Historia del protestantismo en Costa Rica* (San José: IIEF, 1983), 65-91. Nelson, “El protestantismo en el siglo XIX”, in: *Historia General de la Iglesia en América Latina. Tomo VI. América Central*, coord. Enrique Dussel (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1985), 139-149. Eugenio Herrera Balharry, “Los inmigrantes y el poder en Costa Rica”, in: *Revista de Historia* 11 (1985 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://revistas.una.ac.cr/index.php/historia/article/view/3185>

<sup>27</sup> Bernardo Baruch Schiffman, *Judíos costarricenses* (San José: Editorial Génesis S. A., 2000). Guzmán-Stein, “La lapidaria fúnebre-masónica en Costa Rica como fuente de investigación de una comunidad inédita”, in: *REHMLAC* 1, no. 2 (diciembre 2009-abril 2010 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available [http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v1/n2/rehmlac\\_vol1\\_n2-mguzman.pdf](http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v1/n2/rehmlac_vol1_n2-mguzman.pdf). Jacobo Schifter Sikora, Gudmundson Kristjanson and Mario Solera Castro, *El judío en Costa Rica* (San José: EUNED, 1979 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://free-ebooks.net/ebook/El-Judio-en-Costa-Rica/pdf/view>

<sup>28</sup> AGLCR, *Ficheros de expedientes antiguos*. Obregón Loria and Bowden, *La masonería en Costa Rica*. Rita Bariatti Lussetti, “La inmigración italiana en Costa Rica (1821-1968)” (Tesis de Licenciatura en Historia, Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, 1987), 45-66. Bariatti Lussetti, *Italianos en América Central. De Cristóbal Colón a la Segunda Posguerra* (San José: Editorial Alma Máter, 2011), 318-337. Guzmán-Stein, “Costa Rica, España y Cuba: Antecedentes, desarrollo e impacto del movimiento de independencia en la sociedad costarricense finisecular y la masonería”, in: *La Masonería Española y la crisis colonial del 98*, Tomo II, 1041 - 1087. Guzmán-Stein, “Base de datos para la historia de la masonería en Costa Rica en el siglo XIX”, in: *La Masonería en Madrid y en España del siglo XVIII al XXI*, coord. Ferrer Benimeli (Zaragoza: CEHME, 2004), Tomo II, 1388-1389. Guzmán-Stein, “La lapidaria fúnebre-masónica”, 88-120. Herrera Balharry, *Los alemanes y el Estado cafetalero* (San José: EUNED, 1988), 110-112, 211-213. Giselle Marín Araya, “Inmigrantes españoles

were Judeo-Christian. At the time, this was the standard in Western countries,<sup>29</sup> so it is unsurprising that in Costa Rica at that time masonic rites were solely based on Judeo-Christian cosmovisions<sup>30</sup>.

The results of the said analysis show that 75.5% of the Freemasons practiced Catholic religion. At this point we should add that the organizer and leader of Central American freemasonry was a Catholic priest (Francisco Calvo). 17.5% of religious freemasons were other Christian denominations, including Anglicans (8.5%), Evangelist (8%) and Quaker (1%). Therefore, 93% of those masons identified as religious were of Christian denomination<sup>31</sup>. The majority of Anglican and Evangelists members of Costa Rica's Freemasonry belonged to the wave of American, European, and Caribbean immigration that came to Costa Rica at the end of the nineteenth century due to the construction of the Caribbean railways and the trade via the port Puerto Limón, where those religious practices were on the increase.

The importance of this Protestant social composition within masonic lodges in Costa Rica did not take the anti-masonic Catholic sector of Costa Rica unawares. During those years, two articles were printed in the Catholic press attacking freemasonry and Protestantism. In the *Eco Católico de Costa Rica* in 1883<sup>32</sup> and the *Periódico Unión Católica* in 1896<sup>33</sup>, freemasonry and Protestantism were condemned as they were considered to be the promoters of deism, free will, rationalism, liberalism and hatred towards the Catholic Church. One has to take into account previous condemnations had taken place within the context of liberalism

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en la ciudad de San José, 1850-930" (Tesis de Maestría en Historia, Universidad de Costa Rica, 2000), 142-144 y 264-267. Murchie, *Imported spices*, 143-147 y 223-331. Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez, "Base de datos del censo Municipal de San José de 1904". "Cementerio General de la ciudad de San José". "Cementerio de Extranjeros de la ciudad de San José". The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, "Ancestry.com" [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]: available <http://ancestry.com/>. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, "Family Search" [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]: available <http://familysearch.org/eng/default.asp>

<sup>29</sup> Steven Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood. Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 169-173. Manuel Hernández González, "Ilustración y masonería en el clero liberal canario del primer tercio del siglo XIX", in: *Masonería, Política y Sociedad*, coord. Ferrer Benimeli (Zaragoza: CEHME, 1989), Tomo II, 763-771. Gueiros Vieira, *O protestantismo a maçonaria e a questão Religiosa no Brasil* (Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1980), 46-49. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Brothers or Strangers? Jews and Freemasons in Nineteenth-century Germany", in: *German History* 18, no. 2 (2000): 143-161. Fernanda Santos and José Eduardo Franco, "La insoportable levedad de las fronteras: Sacerdotes y obispos católicos en la masonería portuguesa", in: *REHMLAC* 2, no. 2 (diciembre 2010-abril 2011 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v2/n2/rehmlac.vol2.n2-fsantosyefranco.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> To this we could add the most important manual in freemason training at the time in Costa Rica *Manual de Masonería. El Tejador de los Ritos Antiguo, Escocés, Francés y de Adopción* (Nueva York, 1871), by the franco-cuban Andrés Cassard, who entitled the last chapter: "Los Masones son los cristianos por excelencia" (Freemasons are Christians *par excellence*) (pages: 847-867).

<sup>31</sup> Same as Note 26.

<sup>32</sup> Archivo Histórico Arquidiocesano de la Curia Metropolitana de San José (AHACMSJ), "Relaciones entre la Masonería y el Protestantismo", in: *El Eco Católico de Costa Rica* 31 (August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1883): 243-244.

<sup>33</sup> Hemeroteca de la Biblioteca Nacional (HBN), "Masones y protestantes", in: *Periódico Unión Católica* (February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1896), 974.

due to secular reforms in the 1880s, in which Freemasonry and Protestantism were just two of many factors used against liberalism to condemn it, by papal decree, as an anathema<sup>34</sup>.

Fernando Armas Asin explains that this situation was common during the second half of the nineteenth century in Latin America because governments promoted the arrival of European immigrants and even instilled social tolerance towards different cults to ease their social integration and thus, with their “culture”, accelerated the secularization and laicism processes. Many of the leaders of these processes were freemasons or Protestants, so the Catholic Church saw these groups as threats and declared them to be their enemies<sup>35</sup>. In this case of Costa Rica, in order to encourage foreign immigration, religious tolerance had been institutionalized since the 1840s<sup>36</sup>, and although these European emigrants—mostly Protestants and in some cases freemasons—had their part in the development of modernity, they were not a determining factor, which partly explains why the anti-liberal Catholic press at the time devoted only two articles linking freemasonry to Protestantism.

Finally, among the 7% of Jewish freemasons, thirteen were Sephardi and four Ashkenazi. Most Jewish Freemasons were merchants and belonged mainly to lodges in cities that had ports<sup>37</sup>. This is a prime example of the wide social networks established by Jews in the Caribbean, as well as their use of freemasonry as a space of sociability and social insertion<sup>38</sup>.

Concerning Jewish participation in Costa Rica at that time, we find a reference in the anti-liberal Catholic press. This reference appeared in an article of the *Periódico Unión Católica* in 1891. Paraphrasing Léo Taxil, the article pointed out that freemasonry: “ha sido ella [la masonería] organizada y recibe toda su dirección de los judíos, al menos en su parte más alta y secreta. La Masonería, como dice un escritor, es carne y hueso del talmudismo [sic]”<sup>39</sup>, (*freemasonry*) *has been organized and received all its directives from the Jews, at least in its highest and most secret spheres. Freemasonry, as a writer says is the Talmudism [sic] made flesh and blood*). Later on, one could add that a few years earlier, in 1885, Luis

<sup>34</sup> Esteban Sánchez Solano, “La identificación del desarticulador del mundo católico: el liberalismo, la masonería y el protestantismo en la prensa católica en Costa Rica (1880-1900)”, in: *REHMLAC* 2, no. 2 (diciembre 2010-abril 2011 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available [http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v2/n2/rehmlac\\_vol2\\_n2-esanchez.pdf](http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v2/n2/rehmlac_vol2_n2-esanchez.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Fernando Armas Asin, “Radicalismo liberal, modernización y tolerancia religiosa en el siglo XIX Latinoamericano” (paper presented at *19th. International Congress of Historical Sciences*, Oslo, August 6-13, 2000 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://oslo2000.uio.no/program/papers/s17/s17-asin.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Daniel Isaac Montero Segura, “La evolución de la tolerancia religiosa en Costa Rica durante los siglos XIX y XX” (Tesis de Licenciatura en Historia, Universidad de Costa Rica, 1978), 86-88. Henry Duarte Cavaría, “El Artículo 75 de la Constitución Política a la Luz de los Convenios Internacionales y la jurisprudencia de la Sala Constitucional” (Tesis de Maestría en Derecho Constitucional, Universidad Estatal a Distancia de Costa Rica [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://uned.ac.cr/posgrados/recursos/documents/Libertadculto.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Martínez Esquivel, “Sociabilidad moderna, impugnación católica y redes masónicas en la Ciudad de Puntarenas (1870-1951)”, in: *De Puerto a Región: El Pacífico Central y Sur de Costa Rica 1821-2007*, eds. Oriester Abarca Hernández, Jorge Bartels Villanueva and Juan José Marín Hernández (San José: SIEDIN, 2010), 105-142. Martínez Esquivel, “Sociedades de ideas en Puerto Limón durante la década de 1890”, in: *Revista Intercambio. Revista sobre Centroamérica y el Caribe* 7 (2009 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available [http://ciicla.ucr.ac.cr/revista\\_intercambio/006\\_007/007.pdf](http://ciicla.ucr.ac.cr/revista_intercambio/006_007/007.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Guzmán-Stein, “La lapidaria fúnebre-masónica”, 88-120.

<sup>39</sup> HBN, *Periódico Unión Católica* (February 22<sup>th</sup>, 1891).

Hidalgo, a priest, had already depicted freemasonry as, “talleres al alma de la sinagoga del Anticristo”<sup>40</sup>, (*the workshops of the Antichrist’s synagogue for the soul*) in a letter to the Bishop Bernardo Augusto Thiel Hoffman (1880–1901) after being expelled from the country. However, these anti-Semitic and anti-masonic discourses were reproductions coming from abroad, tiny samples and out of context of Costa Rica’s reality, in which the Jews were only 7% of freemasonry. Additionally, one might add that this anti-Semitic and anti-masonic discourse had been constructed in Spain, France and Italy during the end of the nineteenth century by magazines subscribed to the *Unión Antimasonica* (*Antimasonic Union*), at a time in which many Jews started to socialize in Freemasonry<sup>41</sup>.

### **Atheism or theism in Costa Rica’s freemasonry?**

At the beginning of his ministry, Bishop Thiel pointed out that the main challenge of the Catholic Church in Costa Rica was to evangelize society’s skeptics. This skepticism, which worried the prelate, was due to the growing proliferation of ideas and sociabilites of modernity, from which many—like freemasonry—had already been condemned by the Papacy. Therefore, the Catholic press organized in 1883 became the tool par excellence with which to point out misdemeanors made by Costa Rica’s civil society.

Thus in May 1883, *El Eco Católico de Costa Rica* printed the following text: “la Francmasonería es la negación de Dios. La manifestación palpable del dios humanidad es el Estado. El Estado ateo es el dios de la Masonería. De modo que sin tener Masonería oficial tenemos un mundo de principios masónicos aplicados entre nosotros”<sup>42</sup> (*Freemasonry is the negation of God. The tangible demonstration of god humanity is the State. The god of the atheist state is freemasonry. Therefore although there is no official freemasonry we live in a world that applies masonic principles among us*). That same newspaper in July of that year said: “los sistemas enemigos de la religión son el materialismo, el ateísmo y el deísmo. La Francmasonería no es más que el deísmo, el materialismo y el ateísmo organizados en sistema”<sup>43</sup> (*The systems that are enemies of religion are materialism, atheism and deism. Freemasonry is nothing else other than deism, materialism and atheism organized within a system*). Those previous associations made by the Catholic press of Costa Rica that year were striking, because according to their definition, without its Christian origins, freemasonry wouldn’t be freemasonry; and if its focus was to promote free thinking and rationalism, it did so without casting aside its belief in a divine being.

Putting the Catholic press’ detracting purposes aside and taking into account the reforms of theist masonic requirements made by the *Grand Orient de France* in 1877<sup>44</sup>, it would be of interest to question whether among the freemasons of Costa Rica there had been atheists, or at least proofs of atheism. First of all, we must clarify that although Costa Rica’s Freemasonry was recognized by *United Grand Lodge of England*<sup>45</sup> and did not practice the

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<sup>40</sup> AHACMSJ, Fondos Antiguos (Box, Volume, Pages): 325, 1, 82-85.

<sup>41</sup> Ferrer Benimeli, *El contubernio judeo-masónico-comunista: del satanismo al escándalo de la P-2* (Madrid: Istmo, 1982), 135-210. Javier Domínguez Arribas, *El enemigo judeo-masónico en la propaganda franquista (1936 - 1945)* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2009), 51-66.

*Rite Français*, seemingly some Freemasons who had been initiated outside of the country, people from Costa Rica and foreigners alike, practiced this type of rite prior to belonging to a local masonic lodge<sup>46</sup>.

On the other hand, one cannot put aside Andersons Constitution that established that: “A Mason is obliged by his Tenure, to obey the moral law; and if he rightly understands the Art, he will never be a stupid Atheist nor an irreligious Libertine.”<sup>47</sup> In accordance with those lines, at that time, the *Estatutos Civiles de la Masonería de Centro América (Civil Status of Central America’s Freemasonry)* (1884) determined that: “para que los principios de la Fraternidad sean eficaces, la Masonería recomienda a sus miembros el respeto a la fe religiosa (...), mientras que ellas tengan por base la moral”<sup>48</sup> (*in order for the principals of Freemasonry to be efficient, Freemasonry recommends that its members respect religious faith (...) in so far as it has a moral foundation*). The latter was also visible in the program the *Union Fraternal* lodge adopted in the city of San José in 1883, since it also stipulates that religion:

La Masonería no exige de sus miembros la abjuración de sus principios religiosos, ni osa penetrar en sus dogmas peculiares: bástale saber que el aspirante profesa una religión, y que cree en Dios, en su justicia y en la vida eterna. Las puertas de la Masonería jamás se abren para admitir a un ateo que niega la existencia del Supremo Hacedor<sup>49</sup>.

*(Freemasonry does not demand its members to foreswear their religious principle, nor does it dare delve into peculiar dogmas: suffice to know that the candidate practices a religion, and that he believes in God, in justice and in Eternal Life. The doors of Freemasonry are never opened to admit an atheist who denies the existence of the Supreme Maker).*

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<sup>42</sup> AHACMSJ, *El Eco Católico de Costa Rica* 12 (May 31<sup>th</sup>, 1883): 91. Regarding the latter we must explain that after seven years of no masonic activity in Costa Rica, it took two months to get reorganized. Martínez Esquivel, “Modernity and Freemasonry in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Central America” (paper presented at *Liberalism and Religion: Secularisation and the Public Sphere in the Americas*, London, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available [http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/4146/1/LIA%2C\\_Modernity\\_and\\_Freemasonry%2C\\_Martinez%2C\\_18\\_04\\_12.pdf](http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/4146/1/LIA%2C_Modernity_and_Freemasonry%2C_Martinez%2C_18_04_12.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> AHACMSJ, *El Eco Católico de Costa Rica* 28 (July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1883): 219-220.

<sup>44</sup> Under Charles Louis Napoléon Bonaparte (1850-1870), French freemasonry organized an intense anticlerical propaganda campaign, that became an anti-religious, clearly anti-Catholic, to such extent that in 1877 all theist requirements were eliminated, thus degenerating the old guild of masons into what was the most opposite of what real freemasonry was: the acceptance of atheists into the organization.

<sup>45</sup> This freemasonry has been characteristically of a Christian tradition, has had state recognition and high social status, even today, the Grand Masters are members of the elites, ranging from relatives of the nobility to political groups.

<sup>46</sup> Lorenzo Montufar Rivera, *Memorias autografiadas* (San José: Lil S. A., 1988), 239.

<sup>47</sup> In: “Concerning God and Religion”. *Andersons Constitution* can be achieved in almost any language throughout the *Web*.

<sup>48</sup> Archivo Gran Logia de Costa Rica (AGLCR), *Estatutos Civiles de la Masonería de Centro América*, Artículo 4, Capítulo 2: “Principios y objetos de la sociedad”.

<sup>49</sup> AGLCR, “Acta de tenida de organización de la Respetable Logia *Unión Fraternal* 19, 9 de marzo de 1883”. Published in Obregón Loria and Bowden, *La masonería en Costa Rica* (San José: Trejos Hermanos, 1938), Tomo II, 83.

This last text, on one hand, speaks of “God”, although with an ecumenical posture, in a Christian way (an anthropomorphic being and a creator), which makes sense when one considers the significance of the Catholic religion in Costa Rica during those years<sup>50</sup>. On the other hand, a categorical “never” signals that Freemasonry is not for atheists. Due to these statutory reasons, one can presume that, since its origins, the majority of freemasons in the world rejected atheism.

Within the context of Freemasonry being demonized on behalf of the Catholic press of Costa Rica, a prime example is a letter written to the *Gran Oriente y Supremo Consejo Centro Americano (GOSCCA)* in 1890 by the Freemason Leoncio Audrain Bovet<sup>51</sup>.

This text, romantic in style, one could equivocally understand it as being closer to an atheist cosmivision than to a theist one, when in reality it was an early manifestation of deism, not only because it exalts reason, but also for its metaphysical and mystical discourse manifested as follows:

La razón, que es Dios, la razón, que es la inteligencia, la razón, que es la sabiduría, no puede sucumbir ante el mal, que es la ignorancia, la mala fe y la cobardía. Recojamos todos los eslabones sueltos de nuestra mística cadena: clasifiquemos los que están sanos y fuertes: desechemos los oxidados y repongamos éstos con nuevos que haremos forjar; entrabémoslos todos y de asegurarse es que, por pequeña que quede, resistirá bien los embates del enemigo negro. Sus eslabones son sólidos, fuertes, ligados con la soldadura de nuestro corazón<sup>52</sup>.

*(Reason, which is God, reason which is intelligence, reason, that is wisdom, cannot succumb to evil, which is ignorance, wickedness and cowardice. Let us collect the loose links of our chain of mysticism: let us classify those that are healthy and strong, let us discard those that are rusty and replace them with new ones that we will forge the links together joining them and insuring, no matter how small, that it will resist the battering attacks of the black enemy, Its links are solid, string, linked with the welding of our heart).*

In spite of the above, the question remains: were atheists able to associate with Costa Rica’s freemasonry at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries? In answer to this question, we have found the case of a Cuban Juan Rojas, who belonged to the *Progreso* lodge in the city of Cartago in 1873. According to the municipal census of San José in 1904, Rojas

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<sup>50</sup> José Daniel Gil Zúñiga, *El culto a la Virgen de los Ángeles (1824-1935). Una aproximación a la mentalidad religiosa en Costa Rica* (Alajuela: MHJS, 2004), 9-40. Alfonso González Ortega, *Vida cotidiana en la Costa Rica del siglo XIX* (San José: EUCR, 1997), 26-67. Rodríguez Dobles, “Reconsiderando el Período Liberal: Mentalidad y Sociabilidad. Propuesta teórica para un estudio de las sociedades de creencias católicas y sus conflictividades ante la modernidad en Costa Rica, 1870-1935”, in: *Revista Estudios* 22 (2009 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://estudiosgenerales.ucr.ac.cr/estudios/no22/papers/ise2.html>

<sup>51</sup> A Franco-Cuban Merchant initiated in *Unión Fraternal* lodge of San José, on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1883, with his brother, Constant Audrain Bovet, a banker, initiated on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1883. AGLCR, “Actas de tenidas de la Respetable Logia *Unión Fraternal* 19 (1883-1887)”. At the time he wrote that letter he was a member of the *Regeneración* lodge of San José.

<sup>52</sup> AGLCR, “Actas de tenidas de la Respetable Logia *Regeneración* (1888-1899)”, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1890.

declared himself<sup>53</sup> to be an atheist, but this can be explained because at that time he had retired from Freemasonry<sup>54</sup>.

Therefore, the sources that analyzed the Freemasons in Costa Rica, generally speaking, do not provide any proof of atheism, with the exception of the case previously mentioned<sup>55</sup>.

### Freemasonry and Spiritism

A first event observed as a possible development of Spiritualist practices in Costa Rica took place in 1874, during a peak time of the conflict of “confirms case”<sup>56</sup>, between the Grand Master of the *GOSCCA*, the suspended priest Francisco Calvo, and the vicar capitular Domingo Rivas. At that time, the vicar capitular, in keeping with the Vatican and the concordat’s instructions, recalled the papal condemnations of rationalism and freemasonry and warned against the proliferation of Spiritualist circles and the circulation of French Spiritualist Allan Kardec’s (1804–1869) books in Costa Rica<sup>57</sup>.

Therefore, another situation of interest to analyze is whether there were any links between freemasonry and spiritism in Costa Rica<sup>58</sup>; we shall approach this subject in so far as our sources allow us to do so. The problems we have observed with these sources is that neither attendance lists nor minutes of the meetings were kept, unlike in the masonic and Theosophy lodges.

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<sup>53</sup> Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez, “Base de datos del censo municipal de San José de 1904”. Moreover, to expand on atheism early twentieth century in the city of San José, it can consult Molina Jiménez, “Ateísmo y descreimiento en la ciudad de San José (Costa Rica) a inicios del siglo XX. Una aproximación preliminar”, in: *Estudios Ibero-Americanos* XXX, no. 2 (2004): 39-48; or its actualized version in Molina Jiménez, *Moradas y discursos. Cultura y política en la Costa Rica de los siglos XIX y XX* (Heredia: EUNA, 2010), 109-125.

<sup>54</sup> AGLCR, *Informe Anual de la Gran Logia de Costa Rica 1903* (San José: Imprenta Alsina, 1904), 66-69.

<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, upon revision of the registration of members of Freemasonry in Guatemala and El Salvador at the end of the nineteenth century there are five interesting cases. Five out of the 302 Freemasons in those countries at the time, when asked what religion did they profess, they answered: deism, answered Filadelfo Quintana; rationalism, answered the men from El Salvador, the merchant Pedro Bruni, as well as the lawyers Antonio Grimaldi and Francisco Galindo; while the journalist from El Salvador Baltazar Estupinian answered: freethinker. The fact these freemasons didn’t declare a religion doesn’t mean they were atheists. Archivo del Supremo Consejo Centroamericano del Grado 33 de Guatemala (ASCCG33), *Registro Masónico del Supremo Consejo Centro-Americano* (Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala, 1888-1899), (Numbers, Pages): 47, 1; 410, 160; 415, 165; 416, 166; 486, 236.

<sup>56</sup> Guzmán-Stein, “La ‘Cuestión Confirma’ y la represión ideológica: El debate entre el clero reaccionario, el clero liberal y masón y la autoridad vaticana en Costa Rica (1870-1880)” (paper presented at *I Simposio Internacional de Historia de la Masonería Latinoamericana y Caribeña*, La Habana, December 5-8, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> Víctor Manuel Sanabria Martínez, *La primera vacante de la Diócesis de San José 1871- 1880* (San José: ECR, 1973), 199 - 208. Ricardo Blanco Segura, 1884. *El Estado, la Iglesia y las Reformas liberales* (San José: ECR, 1984), 137-141. On the other hand, for more on Kardec see Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith*, 95-172.

<sup>58</sup> This in so far as it did happen in different places. Yolia Tortolero Cervantes, *El Espiritismo Seduce a Francisco I. Madero* (México D. F.: Conaculta/Fonca 2003). Gilberto Loaiza Cano, “Cultura política popular y espiritismo. Colombia, siglo XIX”, in: *Revista Historia y Espacio* 32 (enero-junio 2009 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://historiayespacio.com/rev32/pdf/Rev%2032%20Cultura%20politica%20popular%20y%20espiritismo.pdf>. Marcelo Freitas Gil, “Trabalhadores, Maçonaria e Espiritismo em Pelotas: 1877-1937”, in: *REHMLAC* 3, no. 1 (mayo-noviembre 2011 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available [http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v3/n1/rehmlac\\_vol3\\_n1-mgil.pdf](http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v3/n1/rehmlac_vol3_n1-mgil.pdf)

Also, in a society as Catholic as Costa Rica's was at the time, those meetings must have taken place clandestinely and in secret<sup>59</sup>. Nevertheless, there are three kinds of sources that can shed some light on masonic participation in the development of spiritism during the years that concern this paper. The first source is the press, which covered spiritism at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>60</sup>. The second source is the *Sociedad de Estudios Psíquicos (Society of Psychic Studies)* in San José in 1892<sup>61</sup>. The third source is the minutes of the TS in Costa Rica from 1904–1910<sup>62</sup>, since these documents have allowed determining in other researches<sup>63</sup> the participation of freemasons and theosophists not only in spiritism sessions, but also in necromantic ones<sup>64</sup>.

Regarding the press at the time, there are articles that are disparaging and apologetic of spiritism during the 1890's<sup>65</sup>. The first type of article came from the Catholic press<sup>66</sup> and was part of a strong anti-liberal campaign in Costa Rica. This campaign, when it included freemasonry, represented being at the origins of the liberal judicial reforms that took place in the 1880's<sup>67</sup>, demonizing it as anti-Church and closely associating it with the development of spiritism<sup>68</sup>. These anti-masonic and anti-Spiritualist articles were answered by *El Grano de*

<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, since the end of the nineteenth century, but especially in the twentieth century it was possible to identify who were the members of spiritism circles. Chester Urbina Gaitán, ““El Grano de Arena”, Filosofía y dogmatismo católico en Costa Rica (1896-1899)”, in: *Revista Reflexiones* 90, no. 1 (2011): 135-143. Molina Jiménez, *La ciencia del momento*, 230-232.

<sup>60</sup> HBN, *El Grano de Arena* (1896-1899); *El Instructor* (1904); *Revista Vïrya Estudios de Teosofía, Hermetismo, Orientalismo Psicología* (1908-1916); *Claros de luna* (1921-1925).

<sup>61</sup> Archivo Nacional de Costa Rica (ANCR), Serie Gobernación, Libro 45. 299, Folio 11-11v, “Actas de Fundación de la Sociedad de Estudios Psíquicos” (setiembre 1892). We thank Professor at the University of Costa Rica, Esteban Rodríguez Dobles, by facilitating this source.

<sup>62</sup> ASTCR, “Rama Vïrya, Actas 27 de marzo de 1904 al 31 de mayo de 1908”; “Rama Vïrya, Actas 14 de junio de 1908 al 3 de marzo de 1912”.

<sup>63</sup> Martínez Esquivel, “La masonería y el establecimiento de la Sociedad Teosófica en Costa Rica (1904-1910)”, in: *La Masonería Española: Represión y Exilios*, coord. Ferrer Benimeli (CEHME, Gobierno de Aragón, Departamento de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2011), Tomo I, 369-392.

<sup>64</sup> Here we could add that since the end of the 1870s necromantic companies started coming to Costa Rica but sadly we have not been able to identify the participation of freemasons during the period of study of this paper, but we don't eliminate that possibility either. Urbina Gaitán, “Circo, nigromancia y prestidigitación en San José (1867-1914). Una aproximación desde la historia social”, in: *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 95 (2002 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/redalyc/pdf/153/15309509.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> Regarding the years covered in this paper, these types of publications ended in 1896.

<sup>66</sup> In 1890, after seven years of silence, the Catholic press was part of the public sphere of Costa Rica's society. After having had some numbers of the *Eco Católico de Costa Rica* censored by the State in 1883 and some judicial reforms took place such as the secularization of educations and the approval of secular marriages and divorce. Martínez Esquivel, “Documentos y discursos católicos”, 135-154.

<sup>67</sup> Sanabria Martínez, *Bernardo Augusto Thiel* (San José: ECR, 1982), 151-192. Blanco Segura, *1884*, 122-141. Miguel Picado Gatgens, *La Iglesia costarricense entre Dios y el César* (San José: DEI, 1989), 41-69. Claudio Vargas Arias, *El Liberalismo, la Iglesia y el Estado en Costa Rica* (San José: Editorial Guayacán, 1990), 142-149. Orlando Salazar Mora, *El Apogeo de la República Liberal en Costa Rica 1870-1914* (San José: EUCR, 1998), 245-281. Obregón Loria and Bowden, *La masonería en Costa Rica*, Tomo II, 56-61. Edgar Solano Muñoz, “Entre lo simbólico y lo real: las leyes anticlericales de 1884 en Costa Rica”, in: *Revista de Historia* 29 (1994 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://revistas.una.ac.cr/index.php/historia/article/view/3428/3286>

<sup>68</sup> For example, on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1896, *Periodico Union Católica* in an article “Spirtists and freemasons” asserted: “Los demonios aprecian mucho a los masones: los consideran como preciosos auxiliares en la guerra que hacen a la Iglesia Católica” (*The devils really appreciate freemasons: they consider them valuable auxiliaries in their war against the Catholic Church*). HBN, *Periódico Unión Católica* (February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1896):



*Arena* (*A Grain of Sand*, 1896–1899),<sup>69</sup> the self-proclaimed defender and promoter of the Spiritualist practices of Costa Rica. This newspaper was at first edited by the barber Domingo Núñez, and then by the makers of religious images Agustín Ramos y Pedro Pérez M.<sup>70</sup>, who, by the way, had no masonic links<sup>71</sup>.

Regarding the *Sociedad de Estudios Psíquicos* in 1892: Among its 23 members—all men—four have been identified as active freemasons belonging to the *Regeneración* lodge in San José<sup>72</sup>. These were two Spanish brothers, Francisco y Joaquín Gil Mayorga, the leader of the *Sociedad de Trabajadores* (*Workers Society*), a mechanic Gregorio Soto Quirós, and Policromio Ramírez, of whom we have been unable to obtain further information<sup>73</sup>. This is all that has been found of the so-called *Sociedad de Estudios Psíquicos*.

In view of our limited sources, the best way to evaluate Costa Rica's freemason participation in the development of spiritism during this period is to research masonic, theosophical and spiritualist sources pertaining to the first ten years of the twentieth century. Hence, we have applied a prosopography analysis to the members of Costa Rica's Freemasonry in those years, since it determined a minimum participation of freemasons in Spiritualist circles<sup>74</sup> that included individuals that were part of the group during those years in question. The best example we've managed to identify is *Círculo Franklin* (*Franklin's Circle*) in San José, since in 1906 it had five freemasons among its 30 members, two of them active and two retired from Costa Rica's freemasonry. These four had been initiated in the 1890's. Among the freemasons who were still active, there was the bookkeeper that had been initiated in the *Regeneración* lodge in 1892, José Antonio Castro Quesada, who in 1906 was already the Grand Master of *Gran Logia de Costa Rica* (*Grand Lodge of Costa Rica*) and member of the Theosophical Society (TS)<sup>75</sup>. The other freemason, Cecil Vernol Lindo Morales<sup>76</sup>, was a merchant from Jamaica, a Jew of Sephardi origins who had been initiated in 1898 in the *La*

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145-146. To these we could add the following article of José L. Calderón in: AHACMSJ, "Conferencia sobre el espiritismo", *El Mensajero del Clero* (November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1897): 188-194. On the above see the reasearch of Gil Zúñiga, *El culto a la Virgen de los Ángeles*, 20-21.

<sup>69</sup> Urbina Gaitán, "El Grano de Arena", 135-143.

<sup>70</sup> Molina Jiménez, "Espiritistas de fin de siglo", *La Nación* (February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012): 7.

<sup>71</sup> AGLCR, "Registro de firmas de la Respetable Logia *Unión Fraternal* 19 (1883-1887)".

<sup>72</sup> AGLCR, *Ficheros de expedientes antiguos*. AGLCR, "Registros de firmas de logias: *Esperanza* 2 (1871-1874); *Unión Fraternal* 19 (1883-1887); *Regeneración* 6 (1888-1900); *Unión Fraternal* 9 (1891-1900); *La Luz* 12 (1897-1900); *Libertad* 15 (1898-1900); *Phoenix* 5 (1899-1900)". Obregón Loria and Bowden, *La masonería en Costa Rica*.

<sup>73</sup> To these we could add the freemasons related to members to the *Sociedad de Estudios Psíquicos*. For example the following were belonged to this society: Adolfo M. Boza, Pedro P. Boza y Ramón Boza, family of freemasons Adán Nicolás Boza Mckellar and Andrés Boza Cano.

<sup>74</sup> AGLCR, *Informe Anual de la Gran Logia de Costa Rica 1901* (San José: Imprenta de José Canalías, 1902), 40-42. *Informe Anual de la Gran Logia de Costa Rica 1903*, 66-69. *Procedimientos de la Gran Logia de Costa Rica 1905* (San José: Imprenta de Avelino Alsina, 1906), 40-42. *Anuario de la Gran Logia de Costa Rica 1906* (San José: Imprenta de Avelino Alsina, 1906), 50-58. *Anuario de la Gran Logia de Costa Rica 1922-1923* (San José: Imprenta de Avelino Alsina, 1924), 89-111. Molina Jiménez, *La ciencia del momento*, 229-233.

<sup>75</sup> Obregón Loria and Bowden, *La masonería en Costa Rica*, Tomo IV, 77-78. Martínez Esquivel, "La masonería y el establecimiento de la Sociedad Teosófica", 384-385.

<sup>76</sup> AGLCR, *Anuario GLCR 1906*, 50-58. Molina Jiménez, *La ciencia del momento*, 229.

*Luz (The Light)* lodge. We could add the case of the former freemason, the writer Andrés Boza Cano, a member of the Spiritualist circle *Claros de Luna* in San Jose in 1911<sup>77</sup>.

The development of masonic, spiritualist circles, experimental psychology groups or psychic research, and TS activities between 1890 and 1910 show that Costa Rica was part of that juncture in which the Western world was in a crisis of traditional faith and searching for new existential answers. The participation of freemasons in such organizations included those stubbornly searching for “superior knowledge”, socializing and moving from one space to another. Nevertheless, the link of freemasonry-spiritism at the beginning of the twentieth century was weak; seemingly if there was any at the end of the nineteenth century, it was even weaker still.

### **Freemasonry and the organization of esoteric societies**

Along those lines of ideological change, another important event happened in 1904 when a group of freemasons, including the Grand Master of the *Gran Logia de Costa Rica* (GLCR), Spanish painter Tomás Povedano y Arcos, started the first Theosophy Society lodge of Central America<sup>78</sup>. This Theosophy lodge was called *Viryá*, and became part of a network of associative units that began in New York in 1875 and was founded by a Russian, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, an American lawyer and former officer called Henry Steel Olcott, and an Irishman, a lawyer, named William Quan Judge. *Viryá* was created at a time when TS was in full international expansion, mainly in Latin America and Western Europe and under the direction of the English woman Annie Besant (1847–1933), an important promoter of feminism, co-freemasonry, and the *Liberal Catholic Church* (LCC), and a follower of Juddi Krisnamurti as the awaited Messiah<sup>79</sup>.

The organization of a society that depicted itself as one of humanistic learning—essentially in the same way that freemasonry had been doing since the eighteenth century<sup>80</sup>—and promoted the study of literatures, religions, philosophies, and oriental sciences, without leaving aside the latest scientific discoveries, as well as psychic powers<sup>81</sup>, was unusual due to several factors.

The first factor that deserves to be analyzed was a contextual one, for since its beginning, the TS at Costa Rica gathered an important number of young anarchists who were

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<sup>77</sup> AGLCR, “Actas de tenidas de la logia *Unión Fraternal* 19 (1883-1887)”. Molina Jiménez, *La ciencia del momento*, 231.

<sup>78</sup> Martínez Esquivel, “La masonería y el establecimiento de la Sociedad Teosófica”, 384-385.

<sup>79</sup> Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 1-14. Tillett, “Charles Webster Leadbeater”, 591-638. Mary Lutyens, *Vida y Muerte de Krishnamurti*, trad. Armando Clavier (Barcelona: Editorial Kairos, 2006).

<sup>80</sup> Jacob, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Facts and Fictions* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 1-70. This feature of freemasonry as “a school for educating citizens” has been preserved among many masonries through history, see for example Pedro Álvarez Lázaro, who analyzed the case in Spain during the latter years of the nineteenth century. Pedro Álvarez Lázaro, *La masonería, escuela de formación del ciudadano. La educación interna de los masones españoles en el último tercio del siglo XIX* (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 1998).

<sup>81</sup> Martínez Esquivel, “La masonería y el establecimiento de la Sociedad Teosófica”, 369-392.

educators and writers known as the radical generation<sup>82</sup>. These young people were graduates at university level in Chile and were critical of the consequences of the liberal policies Costa Rica had developed in the nineteenth century. Among those old reformers there had been some freemasons, which may have explained the young radicals' lack of interest towards initiation. In fact, the only exception to this was the versatile Roberto Brenes Mesén, a freemason, theosophist, spiritualist, co-freemason, Catholic liberal, anarchist, social democrat and a member of *Order of the Star in the East (OSE)*<sup>83</sup>.

This nineteenth-century model of liberalism was economically based in the coffee export. Politically it was developing at the same time that the nation-state was being formed. This period was full of contradictions among the political, economic and cultural interests of the elites. On one hand, there was much interest in the creation of citizenship<sup>84</sup>; while on the other, there was political and social economic exclusion and marginalization. The economic system was guided by the possibilities of export, thus helping a group of families to strengthen economically and politically, but also allowed for the expansion of underemployment and unemployment, as well as underdevelopment for the majority of the population in the cities<sup>85</sup>. And although there was substantial economic growth and an important modernization process, there was no significant improvement in the life of many; poverty rather went on the increase<sup>86</sup>. In spite of these conditions, the State didn't manage to guide or increase the revenue for the neediest sectors of society. Public wealth was submitted to exports, and even when these were negative, public expense wasn't diminished and created only an increase of debt<sup>87</sup>.

Therefore, confronted with modernity's contradictions came a generation of young radical intellectual, whose main feature was their initiation into theosophy. In Costa Rica,

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<sup>82</sup> Urbina Gaytán, "Teosofía, intelectuales y sociedad en Costa Rica (1908-1929)", in: *Ciencias Sociales* 88 (2000): 139-144. Gerardo Morales García, *Cultura oligárquica y nueva intelectualidad en Costa Rica: 1880-1914* (Heredia, Costa Rica: EUNA, 1995).

<sup>83</sup> María Eugenia Dengo, *Roberto Brenes Mesén* (San José: UNED, 2002). Carlos Bermejo Martínez, *Roberto Brenes Mesén. Conductor e ideólogo de la Costa Rica de 1900-1947* (Heredia: EUNA, 2002). Molina Jiménez, *La Ciudad de los monos*. Gerardo Mora Burgos, "Roberto Brenes Mesén: Mito y realidad", in: *Revista de Filosofía* XXXVII, no. 93 (1999): 413-420.

<sup>84</sup> Hugo Vargas González, "Procesos electorales y luchas de poder en Costa Rica. Estudio sobre el origen del sistema de partidos (1821-1902)" (Tesis de Licenciatura en Historia, Universidad de Costa Rica, 1996).

<sup>85</sup> Ronny Viales Hurtado, "Construcción, trayectoria y límites del régimen liberal de bienestar en Costa Rica. 1870-1940", in: *Número especial de Diálogos 9º Congreso de Historia Centroamericano* [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]: available <http://historia.fcs.ucr.ac.cr/articulos/2008/especial2008/articulos/05-Economia/60.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> This contradiction between economic growth and modernization, on one hand, while on the other, there is underdevelopment, was common on Latin American countries that applied an economic model guided by exports and that were dependent on the international markets in the nineteenth century. Morales García, *Cultura oligárquica y nueva intelectualidad*, 36-43. Patricia Fumero Vargas, "Centroamérica: desarrollo desigual y conflicto social 1870-1930", in: *Serie de Cuadernos de Historia de la Cultura* 13 (San José: EUCR, 2004), 1-26. Javier Rodríguez Sancho, "El Estado en Costa Rica, la iniciativa pública y privada frente al problema de la pobreza urbana. San José (1890-1930)", in: *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos* 26, no. 2 (2000 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/pdf/152/15226203.pdf>. To expand on this contradiction in Latin America, it can consult: Bradford Burns, *The Poverty of Progress: Latin American in the Nineteenth Century* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>87</sup> Viales Hurtado, "Construcción, trayectoria y límites del régimen liberal", 1411-1413.

many of them also became leaders of *Workers' Movement*, *Feminist League* and *Communist Party* organized in 1931<sup>88</sup>.

Secondly, another important factor to take into account was that the TS had a large number of freemasons. In fact 55% of the members of Theosophy lodges in Costa Rica were made up of freemasons, amongst whom 35% were already freemasons before their initiation as theosophists and 20% became freemasons afterwards. It is also of interest to note that many of these theosophist freemasons started to have the same humanistic and mystic aims at those sought in masonic lodges, but in the company of their wives and even with their sons and daughters<sup>89</sup>. They even organized with their wives the first lodge of *Le Droit Humain* in 1919, under the leadership of the Costa Rican educator and writer, José Basileo Acuña Zeledón, an important international member of co-freemasonry, of the TS, and future bishop of the LCC for Central America and Colombia (1937–1962). The arrival of co-freemasonry in Costa Rica in 1919 is worth mentioning as it placed Costa Rica at the *avant garde* of the organization within the whole of Latin America, for prior to that, only Argentina had co-freemasonry, and only since 1912<sup>90</sup>.

Nevertheless, the fact that freemasons had been the organizers of TS was not welcomed by the rest of Costa Rica's society. At first, it was the brethren of these same freemasons who denounced the theosophists' freemasons, for according to the former, the latter were going against the rationalists' principles of freemasonry. To this, the theosophists defended their posture in several meetings arguing that if the masons believed in the archetype of the "Great Architect of the Universe" and the immortality of the soul, then masonic rationality didn't make any sense<sup>91</sup>. Additionally, the secular press started to brand theosophy as a fraud and a group that practice occult sciences<sup>92</sup>. This was the beginning of the condemnation by the local Catholic Church from the pulpit and the press, which reached such an extent that Costa Rica's Bishop John Gaspar Stork Werthv excommunicated the theosophists in 1917<sup>93</sup>, in pretty much the same way his predecessors, Bishops Anselmo Llorente y Lafuente (1851–1871) and Thiel, had excommunicated the freemasons in 1867 and 1881, respectively<sup>94</sup>.

One of the situations that bothered the freemasons, Catholics and citizens of Costa Rica in general was the ecumenical dynamics of the TS studies. According to many, the

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<sup>88</sup> Morales García, *Cultura oligárquica y nueva intelectualidad*. Mario Oliva Medina, *Artisanos y obreros costarricenses 1880-1914* (San José: EUNED, 2006). Rodríguez Dobles, "Los debates periodísticos entre las sociedades de creencias: católicos, teósofos y espiritistas en la Costa Rica del cambio de siglo (1892-1935)" (paper presented at *XIII Symposium Internacional de Historia de la Masonería Española*. Gibraltar, Cádiz, América y la masonería. *Constitucionalismo y libertad de prensa, 1812-2012*, Gibraltar, United Kingdom, October 11-13, 2012).

<sup>89</sup> Martínez Esquivel, "La masonería y el establecimiento de la Sociedad Teosófica", 383-385.

<sup>90</sup> *The Eastern Order of International Co-Freemasonry* [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]: available <http://comasonic.net/>

<sup>91</sup> Tomás Povedano de Arcos, *Mirando a la Verdad. Conferencia dada en la Resp. Log. Hermes, No. 7, de San José de Costa Rica, por el H. Tomás Povedano, en contestación á los de las RR. HH. Vicente L. y Jorge V.* (San José: Imprenta Avelino Alsina, ¿1904?).

<sup>92</sup> Rodríguez Dobles, "Conflictos en torno a las representaciones sociales del alma y los milagros", 95-110.

<sup>93</sup> Rodríguez Dobles, "Los debates periodísticos entre las sociedades de creencias".

<sup>94</sup> Martínez Esquivel, "Documentos y discursos católicos", 135-154.

“theosophist doctrine” became an amalgamation of religious syncretism while what theosophy had been promoting was anti-syncretism<sup>95</sup>. Theosophists’ social dynamics consisted in looking for “rational and logical” answers to the existential problems of its members through esoteric, metaphysic and theosophist discussions based on a detailed comparative study of religions, philosophies and sciences, mentioning subjects like hypnotism, spiritism and like what were the causes of man’s degradation and of evil among men<sup>96</sup>. However, the main subjects of discussion amongst the theosophists were the miracles, the soul, and the transmutation of the holy form during mass, which made sense in such a Catholic society as that of Costa Rica<sup>97</sup>.

A third factor which deserves certain comments is the correspondence between freemasonry and the Theosophical Society and the contacts these two had with the sciences of the occult and the proliferation of spiritualists’ circles. If both societies were, according to their bylaws, against these practices<sup>98</sup>, socially they were represented otherwise, possibly due to the members’ behavior and to fragments of some of their texts that conveyed their affinity for the occult.

Regarding social representations that linked freemasonry, theosophy and spiritism, the Catholic Church bears quite of a bit of the responsibility due to its constant fight against everything that was considered dangerous and harmful for the salvation of the faithful. It had used pejorative and condemning arguments as a repetitive relational strategy<sup>99</sup>. That is to say, regarding these associative models born from modernity, the Church’s discourse was one of condemnation of these spaces using the same arguments and associating them as if they were one and the same<sup>100</sup>.

But if we go beyond social representations, we’ll see in freemasons’ and theosophists’ behavior that there had been a relation with the esoteric, the mystic, the occult, the paranormal and the spiritual. In Costa Rica’s case, as we have seen, the decade of the 1870s was a period of significant diffusion of the French Spiritualist Allan Kardec. Other examples include the inventions found in Léo Taxil’s works and the works of the American soldier Albert Pike<sup>101</sup>,

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<sup>95</sup> Rodríguez Dobles, “Conflictos en torno a las representaciones sociales del alma y los milagros”, 96-98.

<sup>96</sup> Martínez Esquivel, “La masonería y el establecimiento de la Sociedad Teosófica”, 369-392.

<sup>97</sup> Rodríguez Dobles, “Conflictos en torno a las representaciones sociales del alma y los milagros”, 85-110.

<sup>98</sup> ASTCR, “Artículo 11 de la Base Sexta del Reglamento de Vírya”. AGLCR, *Procedimientos de la Gran Logia de Costa Rica 1905*.

<sup>99</sup> Martínez Esquivel, “Conspiradores políticos y sectas misteriosas”, 13-32. Rodríguez Dobles, “Los debates periodísticos entre las sociedades de creencias”.

<sup>100</sup> Sánchez Solano, “La identificación del desarticulador del mundo católico”, 34-52.

<sup>101</sup> Albert Pike, Sovereign Grand Commander *The Supreme Council, 33° Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction* (1859-1891), from Charleston en South Carolina, distinguished himself for writing several books on masonic esoteric rites as well as others that he rescued from India’s mystic. And although Ike’s influence on freemasonry worldwide was minimum, we know he was friends with the lawyer from Guatemala Lorenzo Montúfar Rivera and the American doctor Charles Wellington Fitch, as he collaborated in masonic activities in Central America at the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, since 1872 Montúfar moved around Central America as a representative of the *The Supreme Council 33°*. “Scottish Rite masonry in Guatemala and the Supreme Council of Costa Rica”, *Official Bulletins The Supreme Council, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction of United States of America 7* (September 26, 1885): 549-550, 667 y 671. Edwin A. Sherman, *Of the Brief History of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (California: Carruth & Carruth Printers, 1890), 192. William L. Boyden, *Bibliography of the Writings of Albert Pike* (Washington D. C.

such as *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Freemasonry*, in which the chapter on degree 19 inspired many freemasons to look for answers that surpassed those offered by traditional religion and positive science<sup>102</sup>. To Pike's text we could add *Manual de Masonería. El Tejedor de los Ritos Antiguo, Escocés, Francés y de Adopción (Manual by Freemasonry. The knitter/weaver of the Old Scottish Rite, French and of Adoption)* by the French-Cuban Andrés Cassard, whom in his Volume II promoted the study of the esotericism, of the Persians, the Brahmans, the Egyptians and the Greeks, amongst other cultures as well as studies of the Cabala<sup>103</sup>. Freemasons started to seek ways of instructing themselves in mystic and esoteric knowledge and were initiated in the TS as we have mentioned. They attended necromantic sessions and participated in the organization of the first spiritualist and experimental psychology studies societies in the Costa Rica of the fin de siècle.

Another association organized in those years that had certain importance was the *Order of the Star in the East (OSE)* (1911–1927). This organization was created with the aim to pave the way for the next Messiah, personified in Jiddu Krishnamurti, an adolescent from the south of Brahmanian India<sup>104</sup>, much like how the TS had its seat in Adyar, India. Immediately after its organization, the *OSE* created a network of followers in Costa Rica, making it the base for this society in Latin America<sup>105</sup>. In fact, it was normal for distinguished politicians and intellectuals of Costa Rica to wear the symbolic star on their suits, even for the President of the Republic, like the military dictator Federico Tinoco Granados (1917–1919), who was the husband of a renowned leader of theosophists and co-freemasonry of Costa Rica. Tinoco was deposed by a military coup, led by the theosophist and freemason Julio Acosta García (1920–1924). In this movement, we find the curious case of the Costa Rican script writer, Sidney Field Povedano, a member of the *OSE*, who became a personal friend of Krishnamurti<sup>106</sup> when he moved to California at the beginning of the 1920s. Filed Povedano was the grandchild of Povedano Arcos, and son of the US merchant and freemason Walter J. Field, one of the founders of TS at Costa Rica. The *OSE* was dissolved by Krishnamurti

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: Supreme Council 33°, 1921), 57. Cowles, *Supreme Council 33rd Degree*, 578-581. John H. Cowles, *Supreme Council 33rd Degree Or Mother Council of the World of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, Southern Jurisdiction, United States of America* (Kentucky: The Standard Printing Co., 1931), 578-581. Walter Lee Brown, *A Life of Albert Pike* (Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1997). Albert Pike, *Indo-Aryan Deities and Worship as Contained in the Rig-Veda* (City: Kessinger Publishing, 1997). Pike, *Lectures of the Arya* (City: Kessinger Publishing, 1997). Charles Christopher Verscheure, *19th Century Esotericism in Europe and Albert Pike's Work on the Scottish Rite Degrees of Freemasonry* (Kelowna, St. George's Lodge 41, 2005). Martínez Esquivel, "Un estudio comparado del establecimiento de logias masónicas en Costa Rica y Guatemala (1865-1903)", in: *Número especial de Diálogos 9º Congreso de Historia Centroamericano* (2008 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://historia.fcs.ucr.ac.cr/articulos/2008/especial2008/articulos/07-regional/100.pdf>

<sup>102</sup> Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Freemasonry* (City: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2002 [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]): available <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/19447/pg19447.html>

<sup>103</sup> Cassard, *Manual de Masonería*, Tomo II.

<sup>104</sup> Roland Vernon, *A Star in the East: Krishnamurti, the Invention of a Messiah* (Palgrave for St. Martin's Press, 2001). Lutyens, *Vida y Muerte de Krishnamurti*, 17-36.

<sup>105</sup> In September 1912, the leader of the TS in Costa Rica and ex-Grand Master of the *GLCR* (1905 and 1907), Povedano y Arcos, was informed that had been appointed secretary to the Central organization of the *OSE*. ASTCR. "Historia de la Sociedad Teosófica desde su fundación" (mimeographed: 20-21) without more data, 19.

<sup>106</sup> Sidney Field Povedano, *El Cantor y la Canción (Memorias de una amistad)*, trad. Quintina González and Margarita B. Vda. de Martín del Campo (Mexico D. F.: Editorial Orión, 1988).

himself in 1927, an event that brought about a crisis within the TS that ended up in series of schisms in Theosophy<sup>107</sup>.

Finally<sup>108</sup>, a last event to take into account in the expansion of new esoteric societies in Costa Rica was the foundation of the *Liberal Catholic Church (LCC)* in 1916. This institution, under the auspices of TS, was organized within the co-freemasonry in London, England. The first bishop of the ICL was an English Anglican Catholic priest, also a theosophist and a freemason, James Wedgwood. Among its first bishops were the proclaimed clairvoyant, occultist, English Anglican priest Charles Webster Leadbeater, three English Anglican priests, theosophists and freemasons; the theosophist, freemason and Rosicrucian, Annie Besant's daughter, the English woman Mabel Besant-Scott; the Costa Rican theosophist, freemason and poet José Basileo Acuña Zeledón (Picture 1).

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<sup>107</sup> Vernon, *A Star in the East: Krishnamurti*. Lutyens, *Vida y Muerte de Krishnamurti*, 99-108.

<sup>108</sup> Tillett, "Charles Webster Leadbeater, 1854-1934", 591-638.

**Picture 1**  
**Bishops of the *Liberal Catholic Church* (year unknown)**



Seated from left to right: Exc. Rev. Robert King, Rt. Rev. James Ingall Wedgwood, Rt. Rev. Frederick Samuel Willoughby, Rt. Rev. Rupert Gauntlett, Dean Seaton. Standing: José Basileo Acuña (later bishop), Reginald Farrer, three unidentified servants, Theodore Bell, Unidentified priest.

Source: *The Liberal Catholic Church. Province of The United States* [cited June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013]: available <http://www.thelccusa.org/about/history.html>

The *LCC* started out as a religious hybrid with elements taken from Catholicism blended with those of Theosophy, in which the influence of the deceased Madame Blavatsky was more than evident. According to its organizers, in their new liturgy, they experienced Christ alive and studied theosophy and reincarnation in depth<sup>109</sup>. Therefore, this new ecclesiastical institution's project was very well suited for such a Catholic society as Costa Rica's. While there was crisis of faith in the traditional religion, new answers were needed for the new existential questions asked. Also, this Theosophist reinterpretation of Catholicism made the freemasons and theosophists of Costa Rica exteriorize their worries and criticisms towards the Catholic Church's institution and authority and papal infallibility, albeit not

<sup>109</sup> Tillett, "Charles Webster Leadbeater, 1854-1934", 591-638. José Basileo Acuña Zeledón, *La Iglesia Católica Liberal: su historia, sus principios y sus fines* (San José: Imprenta Alsina, 1927). Acuña Zeledón, *Obras completas*, comp. Peggy Von Mayer (San José: EUCR, 2011), Tomos I-V.



towards Catholic faith and its teachings. The Catholic clergy of Costa Rica understood this posture; therefore, as we've mentioned before, Bishop Stork swiftly condemned theosophy, Besant, co-freemasonry and Liberal Catholicism.

Between 1926 and 1927, José Basileo Acuña Zeledón wrote and published two essays to spread the teachings of theosophy, co-freemasonry and Liberal Catholicism to the Spanish-speaking world<sup>110</sup>. The second of them was published by Alsina Press, property of the Spanish freemason Avelino Alsina Lloveras, who was renowned for his publications of texts on freemasonry, theosophy and esoteric subjects in general during a period of wide exposure to the public sphere in Costa Rica<sup>111</sup>. In fact, in that year, *LCC* already had centers in the cities of Chicago, New York—where the Comisison for the *LCC* in Latin America was based—Washington, London, Paris, Huizen, Sidney, Auckland, Port Elizabeth, Adyar, California and San José of Costa Rica. The latter two became platforms for the institution in the American continent.

After observing the diverse ways in which different esoteric societies started having links with freemasonry, we still have to answer why a person who had started out as a freemason would also join as a theosophist, participate in spiritism or convert to Liberal Catholicism. What consistent principles did he find among these possibilities? What answers did he find? What social needs did he satisfy?

A first answer could be that the abstract or theoretic principles that existed in those societies, which were confronted with social inequalities resulting from modernity in political, economic, cultural or religious spheres, could be very attractive to people at that time. Nevertheless, since freemasonry had requirements upon entry, by definition it became a restricted suffrage society; furthermore it had inner societal hierarchies. And although theosophy did not have any racial, socio-economic, or gender requirements upon initiation, in practice it was unable to avoid internal hierarchies. This may have been due to its inheriting pre-modern structures of lodges, or as a result of the fact that some of its members were identified as being elected with “latent psychic powers”. Also, the contradictions in theosophy’s discourse on equality overlapped with co-freemasonry, while the *LCC* inherited also the restricted suffrage vices of Christianity.

Another common denominator in these organizations was their constant motivation to study in order to complete the education and intellectual growth of its members in several subjects. At this juncture of a crisis of faith in traditional religions, they combined the limitations of positive science to explain several existential questions, as well as the evil of the world, to motivate many people to join these organizations. This was a moment in which “the world had grown geographically” and Western society had a better understanding of knowledge of the exotic from the Orient. Therefore, the chance to part take in the development of novel answers, offered by these societies, could be the reason that people, mainly the intellectual elite, wanted to be initiated in them.

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<sup>110</sup> Acuña Zeledón, *La Sociedad Teosófica y el Movimiento Teosófico* (San José: Imprenta María y Lines, 1926) y *La Iglesia Católica Liberal*.

<sup>111</sup> Molina Jiménez and Steven Palmer, *La Voluntad Radiante. Cultura impresa, magia y medicina en Costa Rica* (San José: EUNED, 2004), 21-60.

A third characteristic of these societies that we believe attracted people to these gatherings was an anti-sectarian discourse, especially regarding religion and politics, since in their social practices they often behaved like religious or political groupings. This was important as people found new options without the distastefulness of established institutions, though this was not the objective of these new organizations—with the obvious exception of the *LCC*. The belief in a being, power or superior knowledge and the immortality of the soul; the self-definitions of the centers of humanistic education, which were looking for truth and ethical and spiritual growth of its members; the dynamics of fraternity and brotherhood; the voting processes in which nearly the whole electorate could be potentially chosen; the criticisms of some social evils; utopic speeches on improved societies; these groups helped satisfy the social needs of many people that the religious and political institutions were not able to cater for. Those societies were then able to symbolically or manifestly represent what was considered civilized and modern at the time.

## Conclusions

The prosopography done to the freemasons determine that they practiced five different religions, but they were all Judeo-Christian. How was it possible to manage ecumenical sociability in Costa Rica, a country in which Catholicism was present in all social relations? The answer to this can be found in three situations.

First, sociability granted modernity to freemasonry and allowed individuals of multiple militant ideas, creeds and sociability to intermingle. Second, the analogous discourses of tolerance and religious ecumenism of the masonic lodges and the liberal thoughts of the time. And third, the type of economic and intellectual relationships developed by many members of the country's elite, that even allowed them to become related to foreigners from the English-speaking world and the Caribbean, who generally were followers of Judeo-Christian religions other than Catholicism or Judaism. These types of relationships were common among many members of freemasonry in Costa Rica. Finally, it is necessary to point out that it is not possible to confirm that at that time there were atheists among the freemasons, in the same way it is possible to do so with the followers of organized religions. Nevertheless, freemasons took part in the genesis of new ideas that started the first manifestations of atheism in Costa Rica's society at the beginning twentieth century. Thus, even though there is no list of practitioners of spiritism or necromancy, due to the prosopography results on freemasons at the end of the twentieth century, freemasons are revealed to have participated in the first spiritualist circles in the country.

This was the behavior of those who were in the midst of a crisis of traditional faith in the Western world. It motivated individuals, mainly those belonging to intellectual circles, to look for new, complementary or different answers to the existential and spiritual questions of the time. Thus, at a juncture in which we observe the first secular manifestations of spiritual and cultural life in Costa Rica<sup>112</sup>, freemasonry worked well as a new option, and thanks to its

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<sup>112</sup> Morales García, *Cultura oligárquica y nueva intelectualidad en Costa Rica*, 71.

deism and ecumenism, its civilian features, and its principle of intellectual learning of mystic and esoteric knowledge. In fact, beyond detractors' representations of freemasonry as a civil religion or a cult to reason or to the devil himself, socially this society was represented as an ethical-spiritual experience or a philosophical doctrine. For example, an interesting op-ed of 1892 was found in the daily *El Herald*. This newspaper, directed by the writer Pío Víquez, who was neither a freemason nor anti-masonic, considered freemasonry just another possibility among many when confronted with extreme and contradictory beliefs like Christianity and atheism, as can be seen here:

Si en Costa Rica hay católicos, sea en hora buena, y que esos católicos vayan á [sic] misa; si en Costa Rica hay protestantes, sea en hora buena, y que esos disidentes vayan á [sic] orar á [sic] su capilla iconoclasta; si en Costa Rica hay masones, sea en hora buena, y que los masones se ciñan el mandil; si en Costa Rica hay ateos, sea en hora buena, y que esos locos vayan á [sic] donde les de [sic] su gana. Pero luego que esos católicos, protestantes, masones y ateos hayan hecho á [sic] su devoción los mimos del caso por allá en sus círculos ó [sic] grupos de simpatía y unidad de conciencia, que se presenten en la plaza pública como un solo hombre á [sic] sustentar la ley que es base del orden y la felicidad de todos<sup>113</sup>.

*(If in Costa Rica there are Catholics, congratulations and may those Catholics go to mass; if in Costa Rica there are Protestants, congratulations, and may those dissidents go to pray at their iconoclast chapel; if in Costa Rica there are freemasons, congratulations and may these masons tighten their aprons; if in Costa Rica there are atheists, congratulations and may these madmen go wherever they please. But of course after those Catholics, Protestants, freemasons and atheists have practiced the devotions of their cases in their circle or groups of sympathy and unity of conscious, may they present themselves on the public square as one man who obeys the law, which is the basis of order and happiness to all).*

In this text, what is of interest is not only Víquez's discourse representing freemasonry, but that once again, he expressed his proposal of the previous year (1891) of the need to erect "nuevo templo a Dios con los materiales modernos" (*a new temple to God with modern materials*)<sup>114</sup>, a sentence that exemplifies and expresses the intellectual feeling of those days.

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<sup>113</sup> HBN, *El Herald* (February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1892): 2.

<sup>114</sup> Pío Víquez, *Miscelánea* (San José: Tipografía Nacional, 1903), reproduced in: Morales García, *Cultura oligárquica y nueva intelectualidad*, 83.

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