

FREEMASONRY AND THE CHURCH

From time immemorial, Freemasonry has been discredited and defamed by ill-informed leaders of all denominations. Freemasons have been accused by the ill-informed of belonging to a cult or being atheists. Despite these charges there are many Freemasons that are constituents of these churches and are still members of the Craft. Every well informed Mason knows that Freemasonry is not a religion and that Freemasonry can never be substitute for the Church. I resent the unfounded charges against Freemasonry because I am a Church man, having been Christen and confirmed at a young age, and I continue to participate in the life of my Church. Freemasonry has never interfered with my commitment or devotion to my Church and never will.

As an entered apprentice you are taught to divide your time into twenty-four equal parts, which is emblematical of the 24 hours of the day, which we are taught to divide into three parts; whereby we find a part for the service of God and a distressed worthy Brother, a part for our usual vocation, and a part for refreshment and sleep. If a Mason should put Freemasonry before his Church, perhaps his priorities are open for question. (Ref Ecce Orienti Ritual) What is disturbing to me is, a Brother who has worked the chairs of his Blue Lodge, worked in the Grand Lodge as an appointed officer, was an active member with the Concordant and Appendant Bodies; Suddenly he decides that his Church affiliation interfered with him being a Mason. I wonder if this Brother really understood Masonry after all the years he had been a Mason: Did he lose that which he had found? As an entered apprentice, did he remember being asked, in whom do you put your trust? The answer was "In God". Your trust being in God, follow your conductor and fear no danger. (Ref Ecce Orienti Ritual) If a Mason is living a good life in this trying world, being a good family man, churchman and above all, living up to the tenets of his profession, there is nothing to fear being a Mason. Masons are not perfect anymore than a Non-Mason. For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (Ref Ecclesiastes 7:20) For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. (Ref Romans 3:23) Masonry make no promise that you will find salvation in the Lodge room. One should have found his salvation before he joined the Craft.

I firmly believe that if a Mason knows the philosophy and teaching of Masonry, he should be able to defend Masonry with any adversary that may confront him. Now, if a Mason has put the degree work, lectures, and burial service to memory and he cannot defend what he is talking about, he has a problem. It is impossible to recite or lecture to people not being able to defend your thoughts. The younger men today that come as an entered apprentice are intelligent perhaps more educated, and they will be curious enough to question you or challenge statements a lecturer may make. Therefore, you must have answers. Masonry has no pretension to assume a place among the religions of the world as a sectarian system of Faith and Worship, in the sense in which we distinguish Christianity from Judaism, or Judaism from Mohammendanism. In this meaning of the word, we do not and cannot speak of the Masonic religion, nor say of a man that he is not a Christian, but a Mason. Freemasonry is not Christianity, nor a substitute for it. Masonry is not intended to supersede creeds or doctrines, but teaches fundamental religious truth, not enough to do away with the necessity of the Christian scheme of salvation, but more than enough to

show, to demonstrate, that it is, in every philosophical sense of the word, a religious institution, and one also, in which the true Christian Mason will find, if he earnestly seeks for them, abundant types and shadows of his own exalted and divinely inspired faith. The tendency of all true Masonry is toward God, toward religion. If it makes any progress, its progress is to that holy end. Look at its ancient landmarks, its sublime ceremonies, its profound symbols and allegories, all inculcating religious doctrine, commanding religious observance, and teaching religious truth, and who can deny that it is eminently a religious institution? But besides, Masonry is, in all its forms, thoroughly tinged with a true devotional spirit. Masons always invoke the Blessings of the Most High upon all of our labors before we start; we demand of our neophytes a profession of trusting belief in the reverence at his awful name, while its holy law is widely opened upon our Altars. Freemasonry is thus identified with religion; and although a man may be eminently religious without being a Mason, it is impossible that a Mason can be "true and trusty" to his Order unless he is a respecter of his religion and an observer of religious principles. But the religion of Masonry is not sectarian. It admits men of every creed within its hospitable bosom, rejecting none and proving none for his peculiar faith. It is not Judaism, though there is nothing in it to offend a Jew; it is not Christianity, but there is nothing in it repugnant to the faith of a Christian. Its religion is that general one of nature and primitive revelation, handed down to us from some ancient and patriarchal priesthood, in which nomen can differ. Freemasonry inculcates the practice of virtue, but it supplies no scheme of redemption for sin. It points its disciples to the path of righteousness, but it does not claim to be: "the way, the truth, and the life". In so far, therefore, it cannot become a substitute for Christianity. (Ref Mackey's Encyclopedia, pp 728)

A Mason must therefore, observe the moral law; and if he properly understands the fundamental rules of our order, he will never act against that great inward monitor: his own conscience. Beside opening and closing our Lodges with a invocation to Deity, we also, sing hymns of praise during our opening and closing, during degree work, burial service or public function. Masons never forget to honor Deity, our creator, or to sing His praises. During the Masonic Calendar year, time is set aside to honor our deceased Brethren, whether it be the Blue Lodge with the Lodge of Sorrow, or the Concordant or Appendant bodies, some type of Memorial Service is held in their behalf. Other forms of Religious Services are: Maundy Thursday of the Feast of the Passover, and the relighting of the Candles on Easter Sunday Morning, under the Auspices of the Consistory. The Christmas Observance or Christmas Toast and Response which is held on Christmas Day one hour before high twelve, under the Auspices of the Knight Templar. The Supreme Council and the Imperial Council have a Sunday Morning Worship Service as well as a memorial Service in the evening for our deceased Brethren. We revere our deceased Brethren who labored so attentively in the quarries for the betterment of this great Order. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; and to the merciful Father above, we commend their souls. So mote it be. Amen.

Membership: Every candidate for initiation into the mysteries of Freemasonry must be qualified by certain essential conditions. These qualifications are of two kinds: Internal and External. The internal qualifications are those which lie within his own bosom. The external are

those which refer to his outward and apparent fitness. The external qualifications are Moral, Religious, Physical, and Mental. The Internal qualifications are: (1) The applicant must come of his own free will and accord. There is absolutely no solicitation for membership. His application must be purely voluntary, to which he has not been induced by persuasion of friends. (2) He must not be influenced by mercenary motives. (3) He must be prompted to the application in consequence of a favorable opinion that he entertains of the Institution. (4) He must be resolved to conform with cheerfulness to the established usages and customs of the fraternity. The External Qualifications are: The Moral. (1) The candidate only is qualified for initiation who faithfully observes the precepts of the moral law, and leads a virtuous life, so conducting himself as to receive the reward of his own conscience as well as the respect and approbation of the world. (2) The Religious. Freemasonry is exceedingly tolerant in respect to creeds, but it does not require that every candidate for initiation shall believe in the existence of God as a superintending and protecting power, and in a future life. It would seem that an active church member would be more preferable than one who swells the congregation at Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day etc. Chances are he would not be like the timber that was prepared in the forest of Lebanon, floated to Joppa, thence to Jerusalem to build that great Temple. (3) The Physical. These refer to sex, age, and bodily conformation. The candidate must be a man, not a woman; of mature age, that is having arrived at his majority, and not so old as to have sunk into dotage; and he must be in possession of all his limbs. not maimed or dismembered. (4) The Mental. This division excludes all men who are not intellectually qualified to comprehend the character of the Institution, and to partake of its responsibilities. Hence fools, idiots, libertines, and madmen are excluded. Although the landmarks do not make illiteracy a disqualification, and although it is undeniable that a large portion of the Craft in olden times was uneducated; yet there seem to be a general opinion that an incapacity to read and write well, in this day, disqualify a candidate. (5) Political. These relate to the condition of the candidate in society. The old rule required that none but those who were free born could be initiated, which of course, excluded slaves and those born in servitude; and although the Grand Lodge of England substituted free man for free born, it is undeniable that that action was a violation of a landmark; and the old rule still exists, at least in this country. (Ref Mackey's encyclopedia, pp 709-710)

Freemasonry has always had God fearing men---men of good-will as its members from the Revolutionary Days. Of the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence, fifty-two were Masons. All of the fifteen generals of the Revolutionary War were Masons; Five of them were Grand Masters. There have been fifteen Presidents who were Masons. Two served as Grand Master. Andrew Jackson the 7th President served as Grand Master of Missouri while serving as President. There have been Supreme Court Justices (Thurgood Marshall), Federal Justices of Lower Courts, State and County Judges, Senators, Congressmen, Governors, Mayors, Bishops, Clergymen, Doctors, Lawyers, and other prominent and ordinary men who are members of the Craft. For the good of the Order, these caliber of men are most desired.

Finally, the allegations against Freemasonry are beyond my comprehension. The members of Freemasonry are as Godly as a non-Mason, as

patriotic as a non-Mason, as charitable as a non-Mason, as civic minded as a non-Mason. With this credibility, Freemasons should not be judged because they are Masons; the allegations are unfounded. The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King; he will save us. (Ref Isaiah 33:22) A Mason is an honored man, if he failest, he is a man that is in honor, and understandeth not, is like the beast that perish. (Ref Psalm 39:20) We as Freemasons will continue to let kindness and Brotherly affection distinguish our conduct as Men and as Masons, this will continue until time shall be no more. For He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. (Ref 1st John 2:2)