

The Freemasons: an Endangered Old Boys' Club?

The late Dr. L. Praamsma called Freemasonry a "pseudo- church." Was he right? Do Christians compromise their faith when they join the masons? Or should they feel free to become members, because the organization appears to be only a friendly fraternity, with the sole purpose of serving God and seeking the happiness of mankind? These are the questions I aim to answer in this article.

The constitution

Freemasonry is unlike any other fraternal organization. Its constitution shows its extraordinary character and its acceptance of all religions as equally true. Dr. James Anderson (1684-1739), a Scottish Presbyterian minister, wrote the *Book of Constitutions*, published in 1723 and revised in 1738, which contains the rules and regulations adopted for the government of Freemasonry, as well as its history. Numerous editions have been issued after the death of Anderson. His work as a historian is considered erroneous and defective even by the Freemasons. Masonic scholar Edward L. Hawkins observed that "no Masonic writer would now venture to quote Anderson as authority for the history of the order anterior to the eighteenth century."

The first statement in Anderson's constitution had far-reaching consequences. It declared: "Tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them [the members of the Brotherhood] to that Religion to which all men agree, leaving their particular opinion to themselves."

Sister organizations

Since Freemasons do not allow women to join their ranks, Robert Morris, an American Mason, organized the Order of Eastern Star (OES) to accommodate women who felt excluded from the male-dominated organization. Although the OES is not controlled by the Masons, a Master Mason must serve as patron of each Eastern Star chapter and be present at each initiation. In this respect the OES is closely akin to Masonry and often uses Masonic lodges for their meeting places. The general motto of the OES is: "We have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him." The instruction for new OES candidates states:

We are not part of the Masonic institution, yet we are connected with Masonry by intimate and tender ties.... To us are given all the advantages of the society, its shield of protection, its hand of relief, and its voice of sympathy. The only Masonic privilege denied to us is visiting the lodge. Women cannot be made Masons.

A lodge for girls not old enough to join to OES was also founded, to make them feel part of the Masonic movement. The International Order of Job's Daughters was organized in 1921 in Omaha, Nebraska. Its membership is limited to girls between the ages of twelve

and twenty. To become a member, the applicant must be within the stated age limit, be of good repute, and have the required Masonic relationship. And she must promise to observe the laws and rules of Job's Daughters as long as she is a member. The motto of the order is "Virtue is a quality which highly adorns womanhood."

Rituals and symbols

Freemasonry is known for its rituals and symbols, which, although many Masons deny it, are obviously religious in nature. Blue is the colour of Freemasonry. It symbolizes universal friendship and benevolence "as it is the color of the vault of heaven, which embraces and covers the whole globe" and thus reminds every mason that "these virtues should be equally as extensive." A Mason is said to be properly attired when he wears white leather gloves, a white apron, and the jewel of his Masonic rank. The gloves are often dispensed with, except on public occasions. The lodge members meet in a windowless building to prevent any eavesdropping. The main room is square. Its most important piece of furniture is the altar, which features a Bible and a square and a compass. The Encyclopedia of Freemasonry notes that the altar is the most holy place of the lodge. It is called "an altar of sacrifice, for on it the candidate [one who is ready for initiation into the lodge] is directed to lay his passions and vices as an oblation to the Deity, while he offers up the thoughts of a pure heart as a fitting incense to the Grand Architect of the Universe." Over the chair of the lodge master, a large "G" is suspended; it stands for either Geometry or God, depending on one's interpretation.

Much of the instruction to new members is given orally. There is a law that forbids such instruction to be written, as they are considered "secret doctrines" and may not be divulged to "common people." Hence they must be secured "from the unhallowed gaze of the profane." As one highly placed Mason told Stephen Knight, "Truth, to the initiate, is not for everyone; pearls must not be thrown before the swine."

Although Freemasons deny it and even have a home page and discussion group on the Internet, Freemasonry is still a secret society. Freemason scholars state that secrecy and silence constitute the very essence of all Masonic character. For example, in 1981 the United Grand Lodge of England issued a warning reminding the members of the ban on discussing internal affairs with outsiders.

Remember the Ancient Charge, "Behaviour in Presence of Strangers, Not Masons": You shall be cautious in your words and carriage, that the most penetrating stranger shall not be able to discover or find out what is not proper to be intimated; and sometimes you shall divert a discourse, and manage it prudently for the honour of the worshipful fraternity.

The secret nature of Freemasonry and its perceived inherent elitism in lodge membership have not helped the Masons in their desire to swell their ranks.

The institution of oath-taking, accompanied by penalties, as a requirement for a part of the initiation ceremonies is still today a bone of contention. However, very little is known

about the origin of this ritual. Dr. Harris, in *Masonic Discourses*, describes the oath as "an obligation, covenant, and promises, exacted previously to the specialties of the Order, and our means of recognizing each other; that they shall be kept from the knowledge of the world, lest their original intent should be thwarted." But the oath required of a candidate for initiation is rather blood-curdling. As he rests his right hand on the Bible, square and compass, he repeats the oath and ends it with these grim words:

To all of this and these I solemnly and sincerely promise and swear without equivocation, mental reservation, or secret evasion in me whatever, binding myself under no less penalty than having my throat cut from end to end, my tongue torn out by its roots, and my body buried in the rough sands of the sea, a cabletow length from shore, where the tide ebbs and flows twice in 24 hours, should I knowingly or willingly violate my solemn obligation as an apprentice. So help me God and enable me to keep steadfast in the due performance of the same.

One major objection to Freemasonry is this demand of an oath for the preservation of secrets. The taking of an oath is a very serious matter, as it is an appeal to God, the searcher of the hearts, for the truth we say. And if the truth is not said, the curse of the Almighty God is brought upon us. How can a Christian agree to this Masonic ritual? This is a frivolous obligation as any researcher can discover all he wants about the secret passwords, rituals and passwords of the lodge. The Church and the state may require an oath for some solemn reasons, but no one should be pressured into a promise to self-destruct, to keep secrets of a society and to call upon God as a witness to keep secrets safe in an organization. Dr. K. Schilder correctly asserted that Masonic secrets conflict with Christian morality. He furthermore observed that this vow to secrecy also drives a wedge between husband and wife as Freemasonry is a male organization.

Masons have their own funeral rites. Their deceased brother is attired with all his Masonic regalia for the wake and the service. His fellow lodge members gather around the casket wearing their Masonic apparel and conduct a brief religious committal ceremony. According to the *Masonic Encyclopedia*, Masons believe that this present life is a preparatory and probationary state for the life to come. In this life Masons construct a spiritual temple and worship the Great Architect for whom this temple is built. When life is ended, a Mason will go to a higher and newer one, a second temple and a purer lodge. According to Masonic teaching, death then is the symbol of initiation into the lodge completed, perfected and consummated. Belief in the resurrection is called "an indispensable portion of the religious faith of Masonry." But this belief in the resurrection is not based on the resurrection of Christ. It is a belief in the restoration to life as taught in ancient pagan mysteries.

Freemasons are expected to support their church. And once a year, some mainline denominations in England and North America even host a Freemasons' service. These services feature sermons on Masonic subjects, delivered before Masons only. But this

tradition is not known in continental Europe. Mainline Protestant churches don't see any conflict in dual membership. For example, the Church of England has been a stronghold of Freemasonry for more than two hundred years. Rev. Walton Hannah, an Anglican clergyman, charged that the Church of England "dares not offend or provoke thousands of influential and often financially substantial laymen by enquiring into the religious implications of Freemasonry."

Membership

Lodge membership is not open to every male. No Mason may invite an outsider to join. The initiative must come from him and two sponsors from within Freemasonry. At least, this is the official teaching. However, in reality Masons do recruit "candidates" whom they know personally. A committee investigates all new candidates and all the lodge members must vote on each candidate. A blackball is used in a Masonic ballot by those who do not wish a candidate to be admitted. If the latter is "blackballed," he is rejected, since the vote must be unanimous.

Freemasonry's charity is limited to the membership. It goes no further than "You'll scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Its benevolence is limited to the Mason, his wife, his family and his connections. Interestingly, Freemasonry claims that this in accordance with the claims of the Apostle Paul, who would do good "especially to those who are of the household." But it does not quote the complete text, which adds "of the faith" (Galatians 6:10, KJV) This is cultic Scripture twisting. And if a candidate can't afford to pay for the initiation fees and subscription to his Lodge, as well as to the Masonic charities, he is not welcome.

Freemasonry: a pseudo-church

As I examined the beliefs and practices of Freemasonry, the only conclusion I could draw was: Freemasonry is a "pseudo- church" which promotes a bland, neutral, non-confessional religion. The Masonic Encyclopedia contends that it is "an eminently religious institution." It also says that "the religion of Masonry is not sectarian. It admits men of every creed... rejecting none and approving none for his peculiar faith.... It inculcates the practice of virtue, but it supplies no *scheme of redemption for sin.*" According Freemasonry no religion is false; all religions are sufficient guides for faith and life. In other words, every member can be saved his own way. As long as they believe in a Supreme Being, Jews, Muslims, Christians and so on are welcomed.

The religious nature of Freemasonry is clearly demonstrated in its lodge settings and meetings. No service organization features an altar with a Bible, Koran or some other "holy" book, but Freemasonry does. Every lodge session is opened and closed with prayer. These prayers are offered to the "beneficent Author of life" and not to the God who revealed Himself in the Scriptures. Hymns are also sung. The great hymn of praise to the Triune God, "Holy, holy, holy" - "God in three Persons, Blessed Trinity" has been changed into "Holy, holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty" followed by the next line: "Look upon this Brother, who comes with faith in Thee." "God in three Persons, Blessed

Trinity" is left out. Obviously, the God of Freemasonry is not the God of the Christian Scriptures. The Trinity is denied.

The Masons have also changed the well-known Christian doxology "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," in this way:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below.
Praise Him above for all that's good;
Praise Him for our true brotherhood.

These are just two illustrations of Christian hymns twisted to suit Freemasonry's religious sentiments. And a lodge meeting is closed with a benediction: "May the blessing of Heaven rest upon us, and all regular Masons; may brotherly love prevail, and every moral and social virtue cement us." The response is, "So mote it be. Amen."

Freemasonry's God

Freemasonry uses a distinctly deistic name for God, "The Supreme Architect of the Universe," in an attempt to share a common religious belief with people who have faith in a Supreme Being. (Deism is the view that our knowledge of God comes through reason rather than revelation. It dispenses with the need to have a personal relationship with God.) There is nothing in its view of God that will offend either Jew or Muslim, as it does not confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God. The Supreme Being confessed is not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (compare John 10:30-33). It is also noteworthy that the two-volume Masonic Encyclopedia contains articles on pagan gods, but it does not have *even one* article on Jesus Christ.

Freemasonry is a Christless and apostate religion. One does not have to be an academic theologian to determine that Freemasons and the Christians do not worship the same God. But no one can remain neutral. Men are either for or against Christ. One cannot be saved through Buddha or Muhammad or the Hindu divinity Brahman. Jesus does not allow for many ways. He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). And He demands our full allegiance.

Salvation by works

Freemasonry is a faith without grace. It offers "salvation by character" instead of justification by faith alone. The apron the Masons wear is always white. It symbolizes "innocence and purity." It is supposed to remind them of that "purity of life and rectitude of conduct which is essentially necessary to his gaining admission into the Celestial Lodge above, where the Supreme Architect of the Universe presides forever."

The symbol of Jacob's ladder is another illustration of Freemasonry's view of salvation through one's own effort. For an initiation rite a ladder must be brought to the lodge. This ladder is viewed as "a symbol of progress," representing "the means of advancing

from earth to heaven." Why need a Saviour when man is basically good and only needs to improve himself?

Ray Hillier, lodge master of the King Solomon Masonic Lodge in Thamesford, Ontario, said it all when he told a *London Free Press* reporter that the concept of Freemasonry is "to make good men better." Masons believe themselves to be united in the "heavenly work of doing good." It aims for utopia here on earth, while the prophets and our Lord Himself call sinners to repentance.

Freemasonry and the Reformed faith

The Church's attitude toward Freemasonry has been ambivalent. The Roman Catholic Church denounced it. General William Booth (1829-1912), founder of the Salvation Army, said that "no language of mine could be too strong in condemning an Officer's affiliation with any Society which shuts Him [Christ] outside its Temples." In 1933, the Greek Orthodox Church formally condemned Freemasonry as incompatible with Christianity because it "reminds us of the ancient heathen mystery-religions and cults - from which it descends and is their continuation and regeneration." The Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church in America forbids its ministers and elders to become members of a lodge. As I have shown, mainline denominations readily accept Freemasonry within their membership.

Although in the 18th century, Calvinist churches were opposed to Freemasonry in general, the Reformed Church of America (RCA) in New York and New Jersey had accepted the lodge as part of American society and compatible with Christianity. Consequently, many of its members joined. When the Dutch Secessionist immigrants united with the RCA in 1850, the question of Freemasonry did not arise. They assumed that the RCA had the same attitude toward the lodge as the orthodox Calvinists had in the Netherlands, who considered lodge membership a sin. They were aware of the controversies caused by the Freemasonry question in the State church (NHK). No doubt they had heard what happened in the Nijmegen Reformed Church. The consistory of this church did not want to accept the brothers Merkes as members because they belonged to the lodge. However, the government intervened and a neighbouring pastor welcomed the brothers into the state church and afterwards the Nijmegen consistory was forced to accept them.

The first mention of the lodge issue was in 1853, in Classis Holland, which declared that because Masonry was among the works of darkness, it was "thus unlawful for a [church] member" to belong to a Masonic lodge. The Christian Reformed (CRC) historian Henry Beets claimed that Freemasonry was one of the formal causes for a group of people to break with the RCA in 1857 and to organize a new denomination. In 1867, the CRC Synod officially banned membership in the lodge. In 1868, the General Synod of the RCA was asked to declare that membership in the church and the lodge were incompatible and to condemn Freemasonry. Synod voted to take no action. This decision led to a further exodus from the RCA. Many of the dissidents joined the CRC.

RCA consistories which did attempt to discipline Masons often found that those offending members would take their membership papers to a RCA congregation which accepted Masons. The Secessionist leader, A. C. van Raalte (1811-1876), who led his flock into the RCA, opined that Freemasonry was not a sufficient reason to excommunicate someone from the church. Membership in the lodge was a matter of discipline only if a church member's life gave cause for such action. Elton J. Bruins comments that Van Raalte had clearly Americanized his attitude toward Freemasonry. Van Raalte did not like the Freemasons and would never have joined the lodge, but after 1868 he no longer voiced the traditional Dutch opposition to Masonry. The Dutch immigrants who stayed with the RCA after the founding of the CRC had Van Raalte on their side.

Conclusion

Church membership and Freemasonry are incompatible. Freemasonry's god is not the God of the Scriptures. The Word of God says, "Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world." (1 John 4:3f.). Membership in the lodge is not the same as membership in the Church. The lodge is a middle class "brotherhood" from various religious backgrounds. True brotherhood is found only in the Church of Jesus Christ. Freemasonry says that the Masonic Stone of Foundation is a symbol of divine truth. Christians confess Christ as their true Cornerstone. He is the One who unites them. Christians are "no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and membership of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

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