

FREEMASONRY AND RELIGION ARE COMPATIBLE

FOREWORD

Freemasonry is not, in and of itself, a Christian organization. Rather, it is one that numbers among its members many who are Christian. One of our great strengths is the ability to accept those of differing faiths into our fellowship. However, Freemasonry has come under attack from some segments of Christianity, particularly those considered to be "fundamentalists". It is to those members of the Masonic Fraternity who are Christian that this Short Talk is primarily addressed. Many Masons have had to agonize over choosing between their Christian faith and their Masonic membership, believing the two to be in conflict. It is hoped that this Short Talk will be a source of comfort and understanding to those who are in such turmoil as well as informative and a guide to those who have questions about the role of the Mason with respect to his religious beliefs. This Short Talk is directly addressing the Christian, but the truth it contains applies to all who believe and serve one God! --Editor

Forrest D. Haggard was ordained by the Kansas Church of Christ and is Founding Pastor of the Overland Park Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) where he has served since 1953. He has been in the ministry for 44 years and a Master Mason for 43 years. He has served the Church by being President of the World Convention of Churches of Christ (1975-1980) and Freemasonry by being (Grand Master of Kansas 1974-75. He is both York Rite (Red Cross) and Scottish Rite (33rd).

The recent revival, by fundamental Christianity, of anti-Masonry has created a small storm within both religious and fraternal circles. Over the past two years, I have listened to, watched on T.V. or read every program, article and item concerning the modern day anti-Masonic movement that has been called to my

attention. It has been good for me. I have re-examined my own membership in all of my "other than the Church" commitments. I have reached a considered decision that Freemasonry is not now and never has been detrimental to my Christian faith and doctrine. In fact my fraternal relationships have strengthened and assisted me in my ministry as well as in my personal faith and life.

I have found three predominant reasons for the existence of the critics:

One. Personal and personality conflicts are present. Freemasonry is a human organization with no claim to Divine origin. In any human organization you have human fragilities. Where you have a structure you have "assumed power or prestige" and with that you have conflicts. Some critics have had a "bad experience" in their Masonic connections. (Just like local congregations have people who came from some other church where things were "bad".)

Two: Political, social or religious dictatorships or hierarchical structures cannot, in fact do not dare, tolerate differences of opinion. They cannot afford any dissension or freedom of thought. Under their rule, Freemasonry and all like groups, must be attacked or destroyed. Such systems may claim to be open minded but they depend on their constituents or followers to have minds closed to all but their own particular "way" or doctrine. Freemasonry promotes freedom of thought and discussion.

Three. Money: I always listen and watch for the "bottom line" whenever I am watching the "Christian" T.V. station or listening to a "religious" broadcast. The bottom line is an appeal for membership in their group and for support funds. In spite of all of the revelations of graft, greed, corruption and immorality on the part of the hawkers of fundamental Christianity, their kind continues. They are an embarrassment to the Church. I have to assume that Satan rubs his hands in glee as their message of hate, exclusiveness and divisiveness goes out to the public.

I call your attention to some other factors:

The same voice that speaks out against Freemasonry often also speaks out against any other type, kind, style, or form of religious faith other than their very own. The same families that have left my congregation because I am a Freemason came to our Church because where they were was not of the "true" faith. And they have already left where they went from my congregation because that place was not the "true faith" either.

Remember that Freemasonry is not a single minded organization. It is a multitude of structures, groups, and units that are tied together by a common historical tradition. We have no "one voice", nor one leader, nor one ritual. Our critics pick and choose their quotes or dramatizations from any era, source or supply that meets their particular needs.

I have never argued with single minded fundamentalists. They are always, ALWAYS, in their own mind, absolutely right. They must destroy all other systems to prove their own right to exist. They can always justify their stance on the basis of their own interpretation of their Source (such as the Word). And they need money to exist. If they cannot survive on their own, then they must invade or utilize some already proven source (such as the type and quality of people who make up most fraternal groups and most especially Freemasonry).

I represent a whole host of competent hardworking ministers who labor in a parish and who really carry the load of pastoral care and concern. Many of us belong to fraternal, civic or community groups. We do so with personal joy at the sense of unity, openness and sense of morality that these groups promote. These groups are not organized religion. They not only do not compete with the Christian faith, but in reality are supportive of it. It is disturbing that the opponents of Freemasonry

are, in effect, attacking that which is supportive of Christian faith. The "Christian" anti-masonic leaders are not only inaccurate in their attack on Freemasonry but they are, in my opinion, making a far more serious attack on the basic Christian faith under whose banner they claim to operate.

How do I respond to these attacks? What do I say? I do not respond directly to the attacker. The attacker is shrewd. He attacks the weak spot of his enemy. In our case that weakest spot is not, as the attacker would have you believe and thus defend, in our rituals, customs and traditions. It is in the members themselves who have had only a ritualistic education about Freemasonry.

Where Freemasonry has instructed its candidates in its history, purpose and intent and where a local lodge is going about its business with pride and dignity, there is very little that anti-Masonic groups can do to destroy the Craft.

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FREEMASONRY AND RELIGION

Statement of the Board of General Purposes United Grand Lodge of England June 12, 1985

In the light of recent comments on Freemasonry and religion and inquiries to be held by various churches into the compatibility of Freemasonry and Christianity, the Board has decided to issue the following statement in amplification of that originally approved by Grand Lodge in September 1962 and confirmed by Grand Lodge in December 1981.

BASIC STATEMENT--Freemasonry is not a religion, nor is it a substitute for religion. It demands of its members belief in a Supreme Being, but provides no system of faith of its own. Its rituals include prayers, but these relate only to the matter instantly in hand and do not amount to the practice of religion.

Freemasonry is open to men of any faith, but religion may not be discussed at its meetings. **THE SUPREME BEING**--The names used for the Supreme Being enable men of different faiths to join in prayer (to God as they see Him) without the terms of the prayer causing dissension among them.

There is no Masonic God: a Freemason remains committed to the God of the religion he professes.

Freemasons meet in common respect for the Supreme Being, but He remains Supreme in their individual religions, and it is no part of Freemasonry to attempt to join religions together. There is therefore no composite Masonic God.

VOLUME OF THE SACRED LAW--An open Volume of the Sacred Law is an essential part of every Masonic meeting. The Volume of the Sacred Law to a Christian is the Bible; to Freemasons of other faiths it is the book held holy by them. **THE OATHS OF FREEMASONRY**--The obligations taken by Freemasons are sworn on or involve the Volume of the Sacred Law. They are undertakings to keep secret a Freemason's means of recognition and to follow the principles of Freemasonry. The physical penalties are simply symbolic. The commitment to follow the principles of Freemasonry is deep, and entirely appropriate to this form of obligation. **FREEMASONRY COMPARED WITH RELIGION**--Freemasonry lacks the basic elements of religion: (a) It has no dogma or theology (and by forbidding religious discussion at its meetings will not allow a Masonic dogma to develop). (b) It offers no sacraments. (c) It does not claim to lead to salvation, by

works, secret knowledge or any other means (the secrets of Freemasonry are concerned with modes of recognition, not with salvation). FREEMASONRY SUPPORTS RELIGION-Freemasonry is far from indifferent to religion. Without interfering in religious practice, it expects each member to follow his own faith, and to place his duty to God (by whatever name He is known) above all other duties. Its moral teachings are acceptable to all religions.

Why is a Master addressed as "Worshipful"? Few Masonic matters are less understood by the non-Masonic public than this. The word "worchyppe" or "worchyp" is Old English, and means "greatly respected." In the Wycliffe Bible "Honor thy father and thy mother" appears as "Worchyp thy fadir and thy modir." English and Canadian mayors are still addressed, "Your Worship." In some of the Old Constitutions of Masonry is the phrase, "Every Mason shall prefer his elder and put him to worship." "Worshipful," therefore, in modern Masonry continues an ancient word meaning "greatly respected." A Grand Master is "Most Worshipful," that is, "Most greatly respected" (except in Pennsylvania, where the Grand Master is "Right Worshipful," as are Pennsylvania's and Texas' Past Grand Masters).