

## FREEMASONRY AND RELIGION

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What is the relation, if any, between Freemasonry and religion? If Freemasonry is religion, then is there not a danger that some brethren will assume that Freemasonry is sufficient for all their spiritual needs? Has Freemasonry any religion in it? If I am a Mason, do I need the Church and religion? Such questions frequently come from the critics of Freemasonry, but we occasionally hear them from our members themselves.

### A Bit of History:

Let us look for a few moments at the history of Freemasonry. The oldest extant document of the Craft - The Regius poem - dated about 1390 is definitely trinitarian Christian. This document was probably written by a priest for its opens with an invocations to the Trinity and the Virgin Mary, and contains instructions as to the celebration of the Mass. The early Craft Masons were loyal sons of the Church all through the cathedral building period. When the Reformation came, Freemasonry, still operative, was allied with the new struggle for the freedom of the people, liberty of the conscience, and independence of manhood. About the time when the English Prayer Book was first published (1549), when the English people threw off their allegiance to the Latin Church, the old Charges took a somewhat different attitude, although they remained distinctly Christian for the next 150 years. When the Grand Lodge of England was organized in 1717 and the present ceremonies established, the revisers, Rev. Dr. James Anderson and Rev. Dr. Theophilus Desaguliers recommended a new basis for all ceremonies, one that would include all who believed in a Supreme Being, Author and Architect of the Universe and the Father of all Mankind. Dr. James Anderson and his associates put forth this summary of the Ancient Charges concerning God and Religion:

"A Mason is obligated 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. But though in ancient times Masons were charged in every country to be of the religion of that country or nation, whatever it was, yet 'tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to

themselves that is, to be good men and true, or men of honour and honesty, by whatever denominations or persuasions they may be distinguished; whereby Masonry becomes the centre of union and the means of conciliating true friendship among persons that must have remained at a perpetual distance."

With very little change this declaration is the same as that today prefixed to the Constitutions of Freemasonry as issued by the Grand Lodge of England.

This was a somewhat different attitude towards the Church and Religion. Instead of being allied to a particular Church, it became henceforth free from any system of theology. Masonry proposed to unite man upon the common eternal Religion "in which all men agree" and asked men to keep "their peculiar opinions to themselves" and not make them tests of Masonic Fellowship. When the two Grand Lodges in England were united in 1813, the universal religious character of the Craft was affirmed and the last definite trace of denominational theology vanished. This attitude, however, has not been accepted by everyone since then. Hutchinson in his "Spirit of Masonry" made a strong plea for a definitely Christian Masonry, likewise Reg. George Oliver. In 1885, H.G. Whymper wrote an able book "The Religion of Freemasonry" but to no avail. The matter is now finally settled and Freemasonry will never again be the servant or handmaid of any particular dogma or creed.

Today in the Masonic World:

There are today at least three different attitudes maintained or criticisms made, in respect of the relationship of the Craft to Religion.

(1) The first is found in English speaking countries. We have grown into it as we progressed in Freemasonry and so we know it best. To enter the Craft a man must confess, not merely profess, his faith in God, in the principles and practice of morality, and in the immortality of the soul. He is not required to define in what terms he thinks of God, nor the exact nature of the future life whether a physical resurrection or triumph of spiritual personality.

"The Constitution of the Grand Lodge of New York begins with this statement:

There is one God, the Father of all men, The Holy Bible is the Great Light in Masonry, the rule and guide for faith and practice; Man is immortal; Character determines destiny; Love of men is next to love of God, Man's first duty; Prayer, Communion of man with God, is helpful. Masonry teaches man to practice charity and benevolence, to protect chastity, to respect the ties of blood and friendship, to adopt the principles and revere the ordinances of Religion, to assist the feeble, guide the blind, rise up the down-trodden, shelter the orphan, guard the altar, support the Government, inculcate morality, promote learning, love man, fear God, implore his Mercy, and hope for happiness."

That sums it all up in clear, concise language, noble in its simplicity and comprehensiveness.

(2) In the German and the three Scandinavian Grand Lodges, the entrant into Freemasonry must be a Trinitarian Christian. Universalists, Jews, Mohammedans, and others are invariably refused admission. This attitude recalls the days of operative Freemasonry when the Craft was thoroughly Christian.

(3) In Latin countries, such as France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, South and Central America, and Mexico, Freemasonry is frankly agnostic in its attitude towards the fundamental faiths of Religion. Neither the French nor Belgian Grand Orients require faith in God as a condition of fellowship. They do not require any such believe, but they do not forbid such faith; they simply do not ask what a man believes. With the French and Belgian Orients we in English speaking countries have no fraternal relations. They have no Bible or other Volume of the Sacred Law upon their altars, and we do not recognize them as Masons.

Two Conceptions of Freemasonry:

Referring again to Freemasonry in the English speaking world, we find there are two schools of thought: first, those who hold Freemasonry to be a purely social and philanthropic fraternity with nothing to do with Religion except to acknowledge its existence, accept its basic ideas, and respect its

ordinances. Its purpose is to make men friendly, "to make men wiser, and consequently happier." These men object to emphasis upon the religious aspect of Freemasonry and the high spiritual means of its symbols. They are content with it as a social order devoted to fellowship and benevolence.

Second, the other extreme, composed of friends and foes of Freemasonry who regard it as an organized system of spiritual thought and practice and entitled to be called a religion, with a definite creed and distinctive rites expressing its faith and spirit. That is the unfriendly attitude of the Roman Catholic Church and a section of the Anglican Church. They allege that Freemasonry is a rival of religion of a naturalistic kind. Where lies the truth?

Four Cornerstones:

There are four cornerstones for the edifice of Freemasonry. The removal of any one of these stones would prove disastrous to the Temple of Masonry and bring about the collapse of the structure. Let us consider briefly these four important stones:

(1) From time immemorial man has instinctively turned to a Higher Power. In the sacred writings of all faiths we find recorded men's belief in God, Deity, Jehovah, the Almighty, The omnipotent One.

Moses, the great law giver, wrote "In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth." St. John, the Evangelist, likewise said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Here we have indisputable evidence of Man's belief in God, the Creator of the Universe. The wise man instinctively knows that without God was not anything made that was made; that it is the fool only, who says in his heart, "There is no God." Is it any wonder then that the first prerequisite of a Mason is a believe in God? "In whom do you put your trust?" There is no place among the votaries of Freemasonry for the non-believer, or the atheist, or the agnostic.

Everything in Masonry has reference to God, implies God, speaks of God, and leads to God. Not a degree, not a symbol, not an obligation, not a lecture, not a charge but finds its meaning and derives its beauty from God, the Great Architect and Master Builder of the Universe, God the Father of Humanity, its solidarity and salvation, God the Maker of heaven and earth

and all that in them is, before Whom silence is eloquence and wonder is worship. Every lodge is erected to God and dedicated to the Holy Saints John and labours in God's Name seeking to make His will the design upon its Trestle Board. No initiate enters a lodge without first kneeling and confessing his faith and trust in God, whose love is the foundation of fraternity. The greatest symbol of Masonry, the triangle, is the oldest emblem of God in the history and the faith of man. Under His arching sky, upon His friendly earth where man goes forth to his labour, Masonry toils for the Glory of God.

Freemasonry insists that its votaries profess a belief in God but that, whatever their particular opinions may be concerning Him, they are of no immediate concern of the institution. Freemasonry likewise insists that every Mason should never mention the Name of God except in that reverential manner which is due from a creature to his Creator, to implore His aid in all his laudable undertakings, and to esteem Him as the chief good. Remove this cornerstone - Belief in God - and there can be no Masonry.

(2) The second cornerstone of Freemasonry is the presence within our lodge room of the Volume of the Sacred Law. Man by instinct is an animal which loves fellowship. They associate themselves around some great concept or principle or code of principles. This is essential or, as we say, the cornerstone. Take any society such as the Red Cross, we are members of it because it stands for something definite in its purpose. Similarly, a stamp collectors' club or a trade union or music-lovers' circle. We are held together as a nation by a constitution and a civil code of laws and by principles of justice. A Church likewise is a group of people which believes or professes to follow the doctrines to be found in a sacred Book of the Law. Remove that book from its altars and pulpits and the Church will cease to exist. It is as vital to the existence of the Church as the life blood which flows through the arteries and veins is to man; without it death ensues.

Our second cornerstone, therefore, is the presence in our Lodge rooms of the Book of the Law. No jurisdiction can be recognized as regular without this requirement, whether the Book of the Law be the Holy Bible of the Christian, the Pentateuch of the Old Testament of the Hebrew, the Koran of the Mohammedan or Islam, the Zend Avesta of the Persian, the Tripitaka of the Buddhist, the Rig Veda and other Vedas of the Brahmin, the Tao Te King of

the Taoist, the Bhagavad-Giota of the Hindu, or the Book of Mormon of the Latter Day Saints.

The volume of the Sacred Law is part of the furniture of every Lodge, indispensably present in the Lodge while the Craft is at work. In other words, in this country, the Holy Bible - God's Law - is a vital part of the Masonic institution.

The Bible opens when the lodge opens, and closes when it closes. No Lodge, can transact its business, much less initiate candidates, unless the Bible lies open upon the altar. There in the centre of the Lodge, supporting the Square and Compasses, it speaks to us of our duty to God, as the Square and Compasses speak to us of our duties to our neighbour and ourselves. Around these three duties we build our lives and our work.

Moreover, how many Masons do you think would have every heard of the Temple of Solomon, the preparations of his father David, the cooperation of Hiram, King of Tyre, the supervision of H.A.B. and of Adoniram, of the two brazen pillars, of the dedication of the temple, of its destruction, of the captivity of the Israelites in Babylon, of the second Temple of Zerubbabel, and many other Biblical events, had they not learned of them in their Masonic ceremonies.

What more beautiful passages of Scripture can be found than those enshrined in our Masonic ceremonies? Passages such as that melodious poem in Ecclesiastes "Remember now they Creator", or those majestic words from Genesis "In the beginning God created .... and God said, 'Let there be light and there was light'" or that beautiful prayer beginning "O Lord, Thou knowest our downsitting and our uprising and understandeth our thoughts afar off" composed as it is of many beautiful passages strung together as a necklace of pearls. The Bible is the rule and guide of every Mason's faith. It is a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path. Freemasonry builds upon the precepts found within the Volume of Sacred Law. "Within its covers are found those principles of morality which lay the foundation upon which to build a righteous life."

The Bible has not always had the place in the Church it now has. In the Middle ages it was a book unknown to the masses. Copies of it were chained to the reading desks of churches in England. It was written in the Latin tongue and its contents were unknown to all but the clergy.

Coverdale, Tyndale, Wycliff and others translated it into the language of the people and thus the Bible became known to the people, supreme in the Church and supreme in the Lodge, serving as a rule and guide to the Craft, giving colour to its lodge, and consecration to its labours. Today that Book holds the place of honour in every lodge, that is upon the Altar. There and always, it is sovereign, supreme, a source of unfailing light. Remove this cornerstone - The Volume of the Sacred Law - and there can be no Freemasonry.

(3) The third cornerstone of the Masonic Temple is Prayer. Man has always been a worshipper, seeking communion with a Higher Power. We call that prayer. Whether in the quiet of his home, or while worshipping in church, or while walking along the street, or while riding home along the highway, or while seated at his office desk, he has the privilege and right of attuning his soul with his God through the medium of prayer.

Prayer enters into Freemasonry from beginning to end. When a man enters a lodge for the first time to receive the Entered Apprentice degree, he is caused to kneel for the benefit of prayer. Every lodge is opened with prayer and closed in like manner. Few can ever forget the solemnity of prayer in the drama of the Third Degree. On all public occasions prayer forms part of the ceremony, whether it is the installation of officers, a St. John's Day Service, the laying of a cornerstone, a Grand Lodge Service, or the last rites when a brother is laid to rest. On all these occasions, and many others, Freemasonry shows its belief in prayer. In fact, it admonishes its votaries that they should never enter upon any great or important undertaking without first invoking the blessing of Almighty God. This practice, this belief in prayer, is not, of course, confined to Freemasonry; scores of institutions recognize the need for prayer. No true Mason should be ashamed to pray. We read of the world's great leaders in the dark hours of conflict, seeking the solitudes to kneel in prayer; Nelson, Foch, Joffre, Montgomery, Washington, Lincoln, and many others. Man does not live by bread alone. Remove this cornerstone of Prayer and there can be no Masonry.

(4) The fourth cornerstone of Freemasonry is a belief in immortality. The all-perplexing question of all time ever has been: "What becomes of man when he no longer walks among the living?" Job, the patriarch, asked the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" He answered it himself, "I know that my Redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the latter day upon

the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Thousands of years later St. Paul carried the thought further when he in his own assurance of immortality wrote, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens". Freemasonry throughout its ceremonies emphasizes and reiterates its belief in immortality.

The Mason expresses that faith in his symbolic use of the ever flourishing acacia, in the raising of the dead H.A.B., in the symbolism we attach to the white lambskin as the reward of the faithful Craftsman who will some day be welcomed by the Judge supreme by those words, "Well done, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," and by that beautiful passage from Ecclesiastes which calls upon us to remember our Creator in the days of our youth "Before the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns unto God who gave it."

Remove this cornerstone - A Belief in Immortality - and there can be no Freemasonry.

Upon those same four cornerstones also depends the continued existence of the Church of God. In no sense is Freemasonry a religion, nor does it attempt to usurp the prerogatives of the Church; but it does try to make its votaries better men by its teachings and precepts.