

THE CHURCH AND THE LODGE AS THEY MEET IN THE MAN

This Short Talk Bulletin was given as an address at the Luncheon of the Conference of Grand Secretaries of North America at Kansas City, Missouri, on February 20, 1964, by The Reverend Forrest Haggard, Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of Kansas, who has graciously permitted its reproduction in this form.

There seems to be today a considerable hue and cry about the status of Freemasonry in the eyes of organized religion. This is not a new subject. I do not consider it to be the most important area of concern for the Fraternity; and I most certainly am not an authority in this field. I am a clergyman and a Freemason, and keenly aware that the subject needs attention.

At the outset, it needs to be stated that it is difficult not to rephrase old arguments or merely repeat what has been said before - and even more difficult to launch out into new ideas and still remain in sight of ancient and basic landmarks.

Underneath my suggestions are certain basic suppositions: First, the lodge. The Fraternity is, to me, man's organized attempt in an orderly way to proceed in a direction of life that is oriented toward what he feels is Creation's design for him within this universe. It is the reach of man toward God. Masonry is, of course, a fellowship of men, a system of morals and philosophy. In some of its original concepts it was to be a center of union and the means of conciliating true friendship among persons who must have remained at a perpetual distance.

Is Freemasonry a religion? Today our literature is filled with such statements as, "It can not be too strongly asserted that Masonry is neither a religion nor a substitute for religion." (1) Or, "Masonry never intended to take the place of the Church in modern society, for it offers no plan of salvation." (2)

And yet, in the beginning, the Old Charges read, "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." This is the concept that George Washington had when, in addressing the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, he said, "I shall always strive to prove a faithful and impartial Patron of genuine, vital religion." (3)

All of this is to say that to attempt to prove that Masonry is, or is not, a religion is to miss the point. I do not claim the Lodge is a religion, and, when confronted with this challenge, use it as a springboard to make a positive statement as to the true nature of the Fraternity.

Secondly, let me give you a definition of the Church as seen in this discussion. This is difficult, as the various bodies of Christianity, for example, cannot come to a single definition among themselves. Certainly the Church is not organized religion. It seems to me that the Founder of

Christianity was martyred, for one reason, because of his resistance to organized religion. The Church, as I see it, is basically a people called out by God and blessed by His spirit. In Christian faith it is called "the body of Christ". It is the reach of God for men.

Now, the main body of the Fraternity seems to make an error in this definition. It is correct when it lists the "opponents" of the Lodge and names certain organized religious bodies, but it is not correct in stating that the Church is critical. Certain of the clergy may be critical. The error of equating the Church, especially in the free Protestant tradition, and its clergy, is not uncommon - but it is an error.

Therefore, I cannot say that I see a conflict between Freemasonry and the Church. I agree with Cerza in his conclusion which states, "The question can rightfully be asked, "Is there anything about Christianity or Freemasonry which makes them incompatible with one another? The answer is emphatically no." (4)

If a conflict exists it does not exist within the body of Masonry nor within the teachings of the Church. It exists as these come together in the Man. It can be a conflict as simple as that for time, energy, and talent of the human being, or as complex as the egocentricity of the laity or clergy who cannot tolerate any threat to their status as the "chosen of God". It is at the "man level" that conflict or co-operation exists.

The clergyman might see the Lodge as a well-oiled machine which competes for the loyalty of people, or he might see it as a handmaiden of his own purposes and ministry. The Lodge might see the Church as a divided, bickering, and somewhat hypocritical group of differing institutions, or as a people blessed by God.

And let me digress just a moment and say that a lot of this conflict or co-operation finds its origin in the initial meeting between clergy and the Fraternity. Too many clergymen have been solicited into the Fraternity and had their way paved and paid by well meaning, but misinformed, Brethren. Such an approach only deepens the misunderstandings. It is far better that you explain the goals, history, and worth of the Fraternity to the clergy when the occasion presents itself. This occasion might even be at a time of misunderstanding - as at the graveside, or following a sermon against "secret societies". Gentle words of wise counsel and information are usually respected by a pastor, especially if they come from a man whom he may well respect.

I have some suggestions that apply to this area of relationship of the Lodge and the Church within the Man. These are based on the supposition that light is the cure for darkness, and that knowledge is the remedy for ignorance.

1. A program of education is urgent and necessary. It must be leveled first at the general body of Masonry. Why? To combat the new and concentrated attack upon us by some of our ancient enemies. One of the latest books purports, as usual, to reveal the exact procedures in the degrees of the Fraternity. (5) But it differs from other attacks in that this book is not aimed at the general public, but at the average nominal "Blue Lodge" Mason. It is well written and calculated to lower his estimation of his own institution. We need new and positive literature aimed at the general body of our Fraternity. And more, such a work as might be titled, "The History of Freemasonry in America", or "Freemasonry and Christianity" needs to be placed, by proper jurisdiction, in the

public libraries of our communities and in the libraries of our Bible colleges and seminaries. This would certainly be a worth-while project for the public relations or education committee of any jurisdiction.

2. A continued look at the public ceremonies of the Craft is in order. For example, the funeral service is under observation by a good many Masonic scholars. Most articles are critical of the ceremony. Among other things, it is claimed that the funeral ceremony invades the function of the Church, repeats the service which precedes it, is inexpertly done, is theologically unsound, is a sombre and melancholy thing, and is objected to by members of the clergy.

In specific instances, no doubt, all of these may be true. I would agree it needs careful attention and re-study. But this and other difficulties will not be solved unless attention is given to a more basic problem: that of our changing culture. The problem of the funeral ceremony is only a symptom of a deeper problem that is tied in with shifting population, changing economic roles, and revolutionary advances in science and discoveries. I feel that few jurisdictions have ever really taken the time to study the pattern of things as simple as changing population from rural to urban, or to chart the growth and loss patterns of their memberships and Lodges. In other words, a part of the difficulty in the funeral ceremony lies not in a theological or spiritual conflict, but in the failure to adapt old truths to a new situation.

3. Last of all, we need to use our Brethren who are members of the clergy. I appreciated the use of Dr. Daniel A. Poling's statement:

"I arrived at the decision that Masonry is a vital and dynamic force in America, and in the world, for everything high and worthy to which my life has long been committed. And there is something more. Masonry occupies, in my opinion, a unique position of opportunity and obligation in the human order today." (6)

Recently both the state and national publications of the Christian Church, of which I am a pastor, carried a story and picture of my own and our congregation's participation with the Masonic Fraternity on the occasion of St. John the Baptist Day. Use the clergymen at every level of Masonic activity, but attempt to ascertain that he participates out of a love of the Fraternity and not out of a need of "honor".

Brethren, we live in a dark and troubled age. The forces of evil seem to be combined against the forces of good. Our frame of reference has been twisted until what was once good now seems to be bad. The word "square" and its common usage is but an example. In this kind of situation we need a good relationship between the Church and the Lodge. It is still true that our answer to opponents of the Craft is good conduct, good works, and a noble example. And since both Church and Lodge are made up of men, it is within the Man that this answer must be found.

An uncrushable triangle that will form a solid base of support for the good things of our community can be formed by the union of the Church, the Lodge and the Man. And the key to this triangle is the Man himself.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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3. `The Writings of George Washington, edited by John C. Fitzpatrick; Vol. 30, p. 339.
4. Anti-Masonry, by Alphonse Cerza, Lodge of Research, p. 362.
5. Christianity and Freemasonry, by William Whalen, 1958. Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
6. `The Philaethes, op. cit., Vol. XV, No. 1.