

Answering Our Religious Critics

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This presentation needs to be understood in the light of who I am and am not. I am NOT a researcher, nor a professor, nor an author, nor a "full time Mason" not even a Masonic speaker although I have had limited activity in each of these areas. I am a full-time parish pastor, priest, minister, clergyman. I just completed my 47th year serving as a senior minister of local congregations.

I am a Freemason and in my 47th year as a Master Mason. Within 90 days of being raised a Master Mason I received my first anonymous anti-Masonic materials. I find little difference in the content of such materials of 50 years ago and today. I do find a vast difference in the methodology, the intensity and the social climate by which and in which the anti-Masonic groups operate.

I have, since February of 1978, given strong warnings to the community of Freemasonry about what was happening and what would result. For that original prediction I was made a Blue Friar and a Fellow of The Philalethes Society. I cherish those distinctions but I can quite honestly say that I would have preferred a listening ear and a receptive mind. This paper will deal with two factors: definition and accountability.

The problem of criticism by religious fundamentalists now has the attention of everyone and I find a plethora of "answers" being given by leaders of the Craft. In Wonderland, Alice stood at the crossroads with the Cheshire cat looking on. "Well, where are you going?" the cat inquired. "I don't know." she replied. "Well then," said the cat, "If you don't know where you are going, one road is as good as another."

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Let's start down the ROAD.

WHO? We do have enemies. Who are they? In our past they have been represented by the Morgan Anti-Masonic Period, the Roman Catholic Inquisition, the destruction by Nazi Germany under Hitler and by traditional Christian groups namely Roman Catholicism and Missouri Synod Lutherans with a sprinkling of religious bodies who were Pentecostal, fundamental, very self-contained and closed in membership. Today anti-Masonic sentiment has expanded to include formal criticism by The Church of England and its affiliates in places like Australia and New Zealand, the Southern Baptist Convention and mass media evangelist ministers such as John Ankerberg, politically motivated media preacher and writer Pat Robertson, and Ron Carlson.

The shrinking, both in numbers and influence, of mainline Protestantism, has strong impact upon Freemasonry. The majority of our membership comes from mainline Protestantism. That shrinking influence has led millions of mainline Protestants to turn their attention and a good part of their loyalty to Media Religion. This is one factor that has deeply affected Freemasonry. I find it increasingly difficult to get pastors of county seat congregations to give me an affirmative statement about being a Freemason. They feel they cannot afford to alienate the laity who provide financial support.

Our enemies are motivated by political and personal as well as religious reasons. Activists groups (minority concerns, women's rights, conflict of interest, undue influence, etc.) are raising questions about Freemasonry. Our history in the U.S.A. of excluding women and minorities offends many people. My observation and experience says that we may have become immune to our own teachings.

In my opinion our enemies (as opposed to our critics) have some common traits.

They find it easy to lie. Perhaps that comes from what seems to be their working philosophy that the end justifies the means. One illustration is the continued petition of

the proven falsehood that Albert Pike was an advocate of "Luciferian doctrine." The truth about that falsehood has been made known time and time again but it is still being used. In his book *The Southern Baptist Convention and Freemasonry*, James L. Holly, MD. (Part VI: The god of the Lodge: Lucifer: R. is titled Albert Pike: Lucifer is God.) gives full force to this false quote (pg. 18-19) and then adds this disclaimer "In the late Nineteenth Century many anti-Masonic books were written, purporting to be written by masons. Some have argued that this is one such book. There is no conclusive evidence either way. However, the contention that Lucifer is the god of the Lodges does not rise or fall on this quote from a book about masons." The end justifies the means!!

Our enemies usually promote a rigid life style in which there is no room for any difference of opinion nor freedom of personal thought. In my 47 years of ministry in a local parish, that includes 35 years of chaplain with and to law enforcement, I have found a very strong connection between preaching a rigid sexual moral code and personal immorality on the part of the preacher. Those who throw rocks at all around them usually do so in an attempt to make certain that their own lack of personal "holiness" is not uncovered.

Any recent readings of newspapers or listening to TV will affirm the above observation. The rigid celibacy imposed, by Romans, on their priesthood has, according to the media, cost them over 400 million dollars to settle sexual abuse cases involving priests. The false and radical nature of the accusations made by our enemies is reason enough for us to bring them into a setting where they may be held legally accountable for their statements.

Our enemies are shrewd. For example they continually state that they are not "against the mason" but only against Freemasonry. There is no difference! Freemasonry cannot be separated from the man who is the Mason. They state that the average Mason "really doesn't know nor understand" how terrible Freemasonry is and they are doing him a favor by showing him the truth. Is the average Mason an ignorant idiot? I no longer give long involved detailed documented answers to my critics. I simply state that I am intelligent, well educated, and a well-informed Freemason. I tell them that they are wrong. Their

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information is wrong. They must choose whom they believe: The enemies of Freemasonry or me. I ask them: "Just who is it that makes these accusations against ME? Do you know them, really know them? Where do they live? How much money do they make? What real good do they do in the world? What is their personal life style? And just who are these "high degree Masons" that they are always quoting?"

WHY? There are, what seems to me, obvious answers:

FINANCIAL: What sells is what is important and all of these groups of whom I am aware are in the business of selling tapes, books, and raising money for their own concerns and personal use.

EXCELLENT TARGET: Most causes need an enemy if they are to keep in business. Freemasonry is a good target. We are vulnerable. We are unstructured. We have a history of not responding to criticism. We have no single head nor group to respond nor bring a law suit (one item that I strongly hope can happen is that some Masonic group will finance a law suit against one of our more vulnerable and outspoken enemies). Freemasonry has made much of its declining membership and we have become "fair game" in what is rightfully seen as a diminishing capacity to respond.

Our philosophical teachings include one called "FREEDOM OF CHOICE": Political, social or religious dictatorships and hierarchical and radical fundamental structures cannot tolerate freedom of choice. They cannot afford nor dare they tolerate differences of opinion or thought. Freemasonry encourages a man to think for himself and even opens doors to understandings (especially religious) that are seen as dangerous to any system that demands absolute obedience to their way.

COMPETITION: In the religious market place we are seen as competition. The Rev C.C. Smith, PM Canterbury Kilwinning Lodge No. 23 Christchurch N.Z., stated: "The fact some

lodge members tend to make their lodge a substitute for their church is probably one of the more relevant objections to the Craft."

Is Freemasonry a "religion"?

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines religion as: 1. a. (1): The service and worship of God or the supernatural (2) The commitment or devotion to religious faith or devotion b. The state of a religious 2. A personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices 3. Archaic: scrupulous conformity 4. A cause, principles or system of beliefs held with ardor or faith. In my opinion, by dictionary definition, we are a religion.

The first paragraph of the intended article on religion to appear in the revised *Coils Encyclopedia* is written by Allen Roberts. I agree with it but I set out, in the following paragraphs, to define that "religion" that we claim not to be! And, at the same time, explain that Freemasonry is so linked with generic religion that, in my opinion, a court of law would hold as to be a legal religion. The article in *Coils* will now read as follows:

Freemasonry is not a religion. No stretching of one's imagination can find the necessary elements to characterize anything in ancient craft Masonry as a religion. As a total structure it has no dogma, and no theology; it saves no souls and it competes with no organized religion. It accepts good men from every clime regardless of their religious beliefs.

Freemasonry is composed of a multitude of strands of varying groups, structures, organizations, and philosophies. This fabric is interwoven with the threads of religion. The history, ethic, morality, idealism, and theology of the religions of the world intertwine with the structures of Freemasonry. Yet Freemasonry is not, by any sectarian or organized definition, a "religion."

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Freemason is not listed as one of the many hundreds (even thousands) of recognized religious bodies, groups, systems, or structures. Freemasonry came into being out of the craft and science of the builders as well as from the deep divinely given instincts of man to rise above the material and to deal with the mystical and spiritual portion of existence.

History shows that sectarian or organized religion has many times failed to meet the spiritual needs of the human race. The reformation, renewal movement, piety groups, monastic orders, and many more spiritual endeavors were all prompted by such failures. In the same way man has utilized parts or portions of Freemasonry to fill the gap. But even when portions of Freemasonry have assumed some of the duties, trappings, goals, and structures of organized religion, it is still is not a religion.

We recognize that Freemasonry and religion are permanently linked by the factors of their heritage, goals, and the nature of man. Organized religion has always had a strong ally in the lifestyle, stewardship, and commitment of Freemasons. It must also be recognized that Freemasonry has always been attacked by bigots and tyrants who see the fraternity as a competitive religion and a contender for the time, energy, and money of their adherents.

My entrance into Freemasonry was a religious experience. I am aware that our buildings bear "religious titles" like cathedrals, temples, and mosques. We use volumes of Sacred Law, we have rituals, prayers and chaplains. Ever since the "Morgan Incident" we have tried to show that we are "religious" in nature. We have succeeded. I listened to some non-masons describe us. Dr. Lynn Dumenil, historian, professor and author of *Freemasonry and American Culture: 1880-1930* (1984) said to a Symposium on Theater of the Fraternity (Minneapolis, MN August 1992, sponsored by the University of Minnesota): "Freemasonry allows a religious experience to a non-religious man." In that sentence Dr. Dumenil lifts up one of our "problems" in that she uses the term "religious"

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in two settings in each of which it has a different definition. In that same symposium Dr. Kent Neely, critic and theater historian, stated that he saw Freemasonry as a "spiritual response to existential anxieties."

It is time for us to more clearly define our role in the philosophical, intellectual, moral and religious nurturing of men. Gabe Daimath, T.U., news anchor from Rochester N.Y. and a non-Mason, stated to a group of Freemasons at a banquet of the Finger Lakes Chapter of the Philalethes Society International Meeting in Rochester, NY. on September 12, 1992: "I am angry that Freemasons do not get credit enough. You need to be more vocal. You need to share your experience of being happy, of self-respect, of doing good. You are a part of the solution for the problems of today."

It might be well for us to set about having ourselves classified as a "religion" that would solve our tax status and, what is more important, give recognition to who we really are and what we really do in terms of morality, charity and ethical teachings.

WHAT: What will happen? What should we do?

We will change or we will disappear. We can change and we are changing. The social climate is in flux and Freemasonry does have excellent answers to some of the world's most difficult questions. We may die down, in fact, I think we will continue to decline even if we use some strong assertive steps.

Ignorance is a given. I am appalled at my own, and Masonry starts us on a journey where the presumption of one's own ignorance is a first step. Artemus Ward, the 19th century philosopher, said: "Ignorance ain't so much the things you don't know as it is the things you do know that ain't so." In this world of darkness and ignorance Freemasonry promotes light and truth in which it leaches, as Pascal says: "Everything is a thought of God."

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We depend on what we feel to be timeless truths to hold us steady in the storm and to resurrect us should we be wounded unto death.

The Old Testament phrases it (Ecc 3:1 I): "He has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." Or in another translation, "He has given us a desire to know the future but never gives us the satisfaction of fully understanding what He does."

We believe that God has not placed a sign along our pathway saying: "NO THINKING ALLOWED BEYOND THIS POINT." Freedom to think and to speculate is our highest risk and our greatest dignity. No, I repeat NO externality can abridge your freedom to think and feel, no government, no teacher, no creed, no tyrant, no orthodoxy. NOTHING CAN unless you allow it. Only by our cowardice can this freedom be removed. Is the flip side of this freedom the true definition of Satan or evil? I think that Freemasonry so teaches.

As a Freemason you are taught that you are FREE TO THINK FOR YOUR SELF!! FREEMASONRY IS A HERESY using the true meaning of the word. Heresy, in the Greek, means "to take" to choose a path not generally chosen by others. If our enemies call us heretics then I would take it as a compliment. We have chosen not to walk the path of the ordinary or commonplace.

Freemasonry is not an organized nor structured "religion" by today's commonly accepted definition. A fact for which I thank God. It is a way of life. It is a set of teachings. It is a fellowship of men. It is a human institution reaching up for God with no pretense at being Divinely inspired in its beginnings nor with an intent to be an intermediary between God and man. It instills in its members an honest desire to have God guide and direct them.

I am proud to be a Freemason. I will never deny it nor give up my membership within it. I wish the same for you.