

# Butler Lodge Short Takes Volume VIII

Michael C. Lee

Butler Lodge No. 254

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## Is Freemasonry a religion?

One of the most common misconceptions about Freemasonry is that it's a religion. Conspiracy theorists go as far to say that Freemasons worship their own God, which is not the God of the Bible.

Freemasonry is not a religion, but it is *religious*. In order to become a Freemason, the candidate must believe in God. Atheists are not admitted into the fraternity. Freemasonry is open to members of *any* faith – although a majority of American and European Freemasons are Christians. Because it is non-denominational, there is no specific dogma, theology, or religious orthodoxy to follow. There are no sacraments, or claims that good work can lead to salvation. Each member is encouraged to follow his own faith, but is not required to be an active churchgoer. Another key difference is that Freemasonry entirely lacks a clergy, either at the local, state, or national level. There are no priests, rabbis, imams, clerics, monks, friars, or pontiffs. Each Lodge has a Chaplain, who opens and closes meetings with prayer, but this is common in many fraternal organizations, including the Elks, Odd Fellows, Rotary International, Boy Scouts of America, and the United States Congress. Freemasonry forbids discussions of religion (along with politics) in Lodge.

Because it developed in Europe during times of great religious strife and conflict, these topics are off-limits in order to promote unity and harmony in the Lodge.

Critics point out that Freemasons often refer to God as the "*Supreme Architect of the Universe*," and claim that this is not the God of the Bible. Unbeknownst to them, "*Supreme Architect of the Universe*" is a term simply used out of respect for members who might not be of the same faith, and does not denote a separate God from the Bible.

Because it is religious, new candidates *are* required to take an obligation on a Holy Bible, although a candidate's personal volume of sacred law can be substituted at his request. Freemasonry allows any holy book of the candidate's choosing. Masonic meetings are conducted with an opened book of sacred law to better influence and guide the meetings. Butler Lodge No. 254 uses a King James Bible for this purpose. In European Lodges, multiple books of sacred law can be simultaneously opened, out of respect to all religions.

Freemasonry does have two patron Saints: *Saint John the Baptist* and *Saint John the Evangelist*; well-regarded Christian figures that Freemasons respect for their character and virtues. All Masonic Lodges are dedicated to these saints, and some hold special dinners on June 24 and December 27 in honor of these two figures.

## Encyclopedia Britannica on Freemasonry

Modern Freemasonry evolved from the medieval stonemason guilds, first becoming organized in 1717 in England. The following article is from the 1768 first edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and is copied verbatim.

One of the more interesting features of this article is the use of what's called a "Descending S" or "Long S". This is an old literary trick from the days of handwritten manuscripts. It was used whenever the letter "S" appeared in the beginning or middle of a word, allowing the manuscript writer to start the next letter without having to raise his pen from the page. This is done by writing a long "S" from the bottom up, starting from the base of the previous letter. Perhaps the most famous example of this technique is in the word *Congress* at the beginning of the Bill of Rights. With the advancement of printed documents, printers carried over this tradition by using the letter "F" in place of an "S" at the beginning and middle of words (usually excluding titles.) This practice was used until about 1785. The following quote is an example of the technique.

Free and Accepted Masonry, a very ancient society or body of men, fo called, either from fome extraordinary knowledge of mafonry or building which they are fuppofed to be mafters of, or becaufe the firft founders of the fociety were perfons of that profeffion. Thefe are now very confiderable, both for number and character, being found in every country in Europe, and confifting principally of perfons of merit and confideration. As to antiquity, they lay claim to a ftanding of fome thoufand years. What the end of their intitution is, feems ftill in fome meafure a fecret; and they are faid to be admitted into the fraternity by being put in poffeffion of a great number of fecrets, called the mafon's word, which have been religioufly kept from age to age, being never divulged.

## Common phrases taken from Freemasonry

Language is in a constant state of change. New words are constantly added to the fluid English language, while older ones fall out of use. Words like "ironic," "unique," and "literally," are in a process of being changed as newer generations frequently use them incorrectly. Prior to the Norman conquest of England, English words tended to be shorter until French words were introduced into the language.

"Idioms" are phrases that do not have a literal meaning. Common examples of idioms are *bought the farm* (to die), *chip on your shoulder* (being angry), *sick as a dog* (ill), *rubbing someone the wrong way* (annoying them), or *the whole nine yards* (a phrase that derives from the length of .50 caliber ammunition belts during the Second World War).

Freemasonry has contributed several idioms in the English language: *On the level*, the name of this column, is one example. Its meaning is to be honest, straightforward, and trustworthy, rather than to sit on a giant construction level. *Fair and square* means that a deal has been completed honestly and without deception. The term *blackballed* or *blackballing* is derived from the method Freemasons use to vote on new candidates, where white balls dropped into a ballot box to indicate a positive vote, and either a black ball or cube indicates a negative vote. Although these idioms were slipped into the English language from Freemasonry, many of the implied concepts are not Masonic in origin. The square representing trustworthiness traces back to the Greeks and Romans, and the Freemason's method of balloting is not unique. However, it is the Freemasons English version of these phrases which has made it into the language. One idiom which is likely of Masonic origin is the phrase *The Third Degree*. This is a direct reference to the third and final Master Mason degree which signifies that the initiate is now a full voting member of the Lodge. The rough incantation of the phrase is based on the assault and murder of a Ninth century BC biblical figure whose story is recounted during the degree.