

Freemasonry and the Church

Cabell F. Cobbs

Virginia Research Lodge

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Perhaps no modern occurrence has excited more interest and reaction in our Craft than the adoption by the Southern Baptist Conference at its 1992 meeting of a motion to order a study by its Home Mission Board of the compatibility of Freemasonry with Christianity.¹ More recent press dispatches indicate the Board found many alleged Masonic teachings to be "incompatible with Christianity", but left it to individual Baptists to decide for themselves whether membership "imperils their souls".² There is nothing new in such a finding.

Consider the following statement:

Having thought it needful to warn you of the mischiefs and evils practiced in the sight of GOD by those called Freed Masons, I say take care lest their Ceremonies and secret Swearings take hold of you; and be wary that none cause you to err from Godliness. For this devilish Sect of Men are Meeters in secret which swear against all without their Following. They are the Anti Christ which was to come leading men from Fear of GOD. For how should Men meet in secret Places and with secret Signs taking Care that none observe them to do the Work of GOD; are not these the ways of Evil-doers?

¹ As reported by the Associated Press, the motion for the study was made by Dr. James L. Holly, M. D., author of *The Southern Baptist Convention and Freemasonry*, a two-volume polemic condemning the Fraternity. See *Roanoke Times and World News*, Issue of June 11, 1992.

² *Roanoke Times and World News*, Issue of March 20, 1993.

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Knowing how that GOD observeth privilly them that set in Darkness they shall be smitten and the Secrets of their Hearts layed bare. Mingle not among this corrupt People lest you must be found so at the World's Conflagration.³

Unlike the current Southern Baptist Conference activities, this publication is a bit older. It was printed in 1698 as a "Warning to this Christian Generation".⁴ But the thought processes are obviously similar. Between the early pamphlet and the modern attack by Dr. Holly, there have been a great number of religious pronouncements concerning the nature of Freemasonry. Most familiar, perhaps, are the papal bulls issued by the Roman Catholic Church, beginning in the Eighteenth Century and continuing in effect, in one form or another, until the present day. Their net effect is to deny communicants of that body the right to become members of the Craft. Originally, the penalty was excommunication *eo instante* (or worse, in the hands of the Inquisition), but now the matter of discipline seems left to the local Diocese, which often simply ignores the issue.⁵

Other bodies have included the Church of England, the British Methodist Church, and a number of smaller, more fundamental sects. In 1988-1989, these were joined by the Church of Scotland, mother of the Presbyterian bodies in this country.

As did the Southern Baptists, the Scottish Church ordered a study of the compatibility of Freemasonry and Christianity. It was originated at a time when the Deputy Grand Master Mason of Scotland was a senior clergyman of this denomination. It was chaired by a minister who had been rejected for membership in the Craft twenty years before. Not unsurprisingly, the Report of the Panel on Doctrine to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland was unfavorable, repeating the time-worn assertions that the Fraternity was

³ Pamphlet, "Set forth as a Warning to this Christian Generation" by M. Winter, and printed by R. Sare at Gray's Inn Gate in Holbourn. 1698, reprinted in Knoop, Jones and Hamer, *Early Masonic Pamphlets*, Q.C. Correspondence Circle Ltd., London (1978).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Hartlove, "The Bulls of Rome," *Transactions*, Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777, Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons, 1992, pp. 1-10.

a secret, self-seeking organization, un-Christian in its ceremonies, and operating to the detriment of society in general.⁶

The involvement of fundamentalist evangelical groups in attacks on Freemasonry in America may be traced to the so-called Morgan incident in 1826. William Morgan allegedly was kidnapped and murdered by a group of Masons in Batavia, New York, in retaliation for publication of an exposure of Masonic rituals.⁷

A month after Morgan's disappearance, Reverend David Bernard, a member of the Lodge at Pavilion, New York, began a series of attacks on Freemasonry from the pulpit, which constituted the opening guns in a campaign of Masonic vilification that was to last for more than ten years. Bernard, pastor of the Baptist Church at Warsaw, New York, became a leader in the movement to destroy Masonry. At a Baptist convention held at Le Roy, New York, it was resolved to excommunicate all church members who were members of the Craft and did not agree to renounce the Order. Bernard thereafter authored an anti-Masonic book, *Light on Masonry*, in which many allegations were leveled at the Craft, which can still be found among those of its modern detractors.

The movement was subsequently taken over by politicians, and led to the creation of the Anti-Masonic Party, which enjoyed some small success at the state and local level, but faded rapidly from existence after it failed to carry any state other than Vermont in the Presidential elections of 1836.⁸

⁶ See the condensed discussion of this matter, taken from the 1989-90 *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Scotland*, reported in the *Masonic Messenger*, Volume 76, No. 3, July 1992, an official publication of the Grand Lodge of Georgia, at pp. 35-36.

⁷ See, generally, Coil, Henry Wilson, *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia* pp. 423, et seq., Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, Richmond (1961); Morgan, Captain William, *Freemasonry Exposed*, Ezra A. Cook, Publisher, Inc., Chicago. Six Freemasons were ultimately convicted of kidnapping Morgan, but his disappearance was never satisfactorily resolved.

⁸ Coil, op. cit., *Anti-Masonry*, p 57 ff.

Since the anti-Masonic fervor of the early Nineteenth Century, there have been sporadic attacks upon the Craft by almost every church in America. Again, however, the fundamentalist and evangelical sects have led the way. Prominent among these has been the Assemblies of God, an evangelical body growing out of splinter fundamentalist groups in Arkansas and Missouri. Throughout the years, it seems almost a tenet of its faith that Freemasonry, or the "Lodge", as its publications denominate the Craft, is an instrument of Satan. Its booklets attacking the Fraternity, dating back to the Church's inception in 1914, may be found in almost every Christian bookstore.

These works, by selective quotations and erroneous derivations from various Masonic works and Rituals, accuse the Craft of being a Satanic cult, of worshipping Satan and pagan gods, of consorting with non-believers, and of teaching salvation outside Christianity by good works alone. Many are repetitive of the allegations in Bernard's *Light on Masonry* and share that minister's misconceptions.

In recent years, the dynamics of television have made this sect more important and enabled it to launch its misleading and biased assault on the Craft to a far greater audience. Thus, many of us have been treated to the spectacle of watching Pastor John Ankerberg hold his supposed seminars on various religious networks, in which a highly edited dialogue is carried on with a supposed professor from Wheaton College, attributing various satanic activities to the Craft. Ankerberg's work is based on highly edited readings of Albert Pike's formidable volume, *Morals and Dogma*.⁹

Of course, no mention is made of the fact that Pike's book involves a collection of philosophical comments from all over the world and in no way expresses any official or generally accepted interpretation of our work. Nor is any attempt made to distinguish between Scottish Rite Masonry with its European background and almost unilateral

⁹ *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, etc.*, Charleston A.: M.: 5632 (Reprint L. H. Jenkins, Inc., Richmond, 1952)

anticlerical development by Pike in America, as opposed to our Ancient Craft Masonry with its roots in England and Christianity.¹⁰

In addition, Ankerberg makes reference to the Royal Arch Ritual and declares that we worship in its Chapters the pagan god Baal and the Egyptian god Om. He refers to a portion of the Royal Arch ceremonies in which reference is made to the substitute name of God in the Hebrew, Syrian and Egyptian languages, i.e., the word for "Lord".¹¹

Interestingly, this Assembly of God minister makes no mention of the repeated references in Masonic ritual to the "merits of the lion of the Tribe of Judah," or the rejected stone becoming the headstone of the corner. Omitting these Christian concepts, he concentrates on the argument that we Freemasons worship a god of the Lodge called the "Grand Architect of the Universe", a purely pagan deity erected by Masons alone. The most cursory research would have informed him and his fellows that this phrase originated in the Middle Ages with the Mother Church and was intended to give to God credit for the wonderful cathedrals and other buildings, whose designs could only have emanated from His Divine Plans.¹²

Dr. James L. Holly, leader of the current move to have the Southern Baptist Convention condemn Freemasonry, reiterates most of the charges which Dr. Ankerburg has parroted from the texts which preceded him.¹³ He condemns Freemasonry as an occult religion,

¹⁰ See Roberts, Allen E., "The New World Order? Commentary — NOT a Review," *The Philalethes* magazine, Vol. XLV, June 1992, p. 79.

¹¹ The same sort of misinformation is found in Stephen Knight, *The Brotherhood*, Grafton Books, Collins Publishing Group, London (1985). Interestingly, Knight himself used a pseudonym, his real identity being that of Swami Puja Debal, a follower of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, who certainly was not a Christian believer. Ironically, the fundamentalists rely on such a non-Christian author to condemn Freemasonry as "un-Christian"!

¹² See Coldstream, Nicola, *Masons and Sculptors (Medieval Craftsmen Series)*, British Museum Press, London (1991).

¹³ Holly, James L., M. D., *The Southern Baptist Convention and Freemasonry, Volume II*, Including the Complete Text of Volume I, *Mission and Ministry to Men, Inc.*, Faith Printing Company, Taylor.

characterized by its secrecy, its ownership of Lucifer as God, anti-sectarianism, salvation outside Christ, universalism, and advocacy of toleration.¹⁴

We members of the Craft are fully aware that we belong to a religious institution. Belief in a Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul is required of every petitioner, and he is encouraged to continue be an active participant in his particular religion after he is made a Mason.¹⁵ But the Craft does not profess to offer revelation, it has no sacred literature, postulates no dogmas, performs no sacraments, possesses no clergy or seminaries, has no Holy calendar, and, unlike religions, is selective in its membership.¹⁶

Our meetings are opened and closed with prayers. So are sessions of the United States Congress and other political bodies, as well as most American clubs and organizations. Yet, these have never been accused of being part of a religious system. Beyond the falsity of this basic premise, however, almost every one of Dr. Holly's assertions are false. Accusing the Lodge of worshipping Satan, he quotes from A. C. De la Rive's report of Albert Pike's alleged "Instructions to the 23 Supreme Councils of the World" that "Lucifer is God". De la Rive himself admitted that his quotation was false and designed to further anti-Masonry when made in 1889. Even Holly admits this as a possibility, but nonetheless relies on it tenaciously to establish his point.

As it is not a religion but a fraternal body that welcomes men of all faiths, leaving each to establish his own relationship with God, Freemasonry is not anti-sectarian. It simply adopts a neutral attitude towards all religious partisanship, forbidding discussions of such in Lodge, as it does politics. The Craft regards these differences as divisive and seeks to avoid controversy among its membership for that very reason.

¹⁴ Holly, op. cit., Volume I, passim.

¹⁵ See Guthman, Rabbi Sidney S., 32 KCCH, "Freemasonry a Religion? How Wrong Can You Be?", *Scottish Rite Journal*, Volume CI, No. 2, February 1993. This issue of the Journal contains several articles in reply to Dr. Holly's assertions, as an attempt to set the record straight for the S. B. C. and to inform the Craft regarding the controversy. The Ancient and Accepted Rite is due the thanks of the Craft for the tremendous effort it has expended to answer our critics.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Dr. Holly, however, tends to define "anti-sectarianism" differently. He phrases it in terms of active rejection of Christian faith and, as such, he is in error. Freemasonry neither accepts nor rejects any creed beyond that stated – belief in a Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul.¹⁷ To a fundamentalist, of course, there is only one way and failure to pursue it alone is satanical.

Holly, in common with many of his fellows, likewise makes quite explicit his distaste of Masonic toleration for all creeds. Toleration, he declares:

". . .springs, as demonstrated in the initial study in this series, from the pits of hell and from the father of lies, Lucifer."¹⁸

I suppose Dr. Holly would equally condemn the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights for its staunch protection of freedom to believe as one chooses. I believe that the position of the Craft needs no defense against such ranting.

One could continue in the dissection of Holly's attacks, but they offer nothing new, being based, as noted, on highly selective and distorted quotations from Pike and other philosophers who have never spoken for the Craft, but have unwisely attempted to trace its origins to the early mysteries of the Egyptian and other priesthood. This nineteenth century attempt by one of the Rites to strengthen its appeal to its European and later, American, membership, has little basis in fact; but has offered much grist to the critic's mills. Nevertheless, even these have offered bricks without straw to fanatics like Holly.

¹⁷ "Freemasonry and Religion," Statement of the Board of General Purposes, United Grand Lodge of England, June 12, 1985. "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." Id.

¹⁸ Holly, *op. cit.*, p. 35. It is ironic to see such a Baptist condemnation of toleration in light of the Church's long held tradition that "religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God." Thomas Jefferson, letter to a Committee of the Danbury Baptist Association, January 1, 1802, Jefferson, *Public and Private Papers*, Vintage Books, New York (1990). p.184

It would be more than passing strange to find that the great ecclesiastical structures of the Middle Ages, from Rheims to York Minster, were erected by workmen who worshipped Satan rather than our Lord. The contrary, of course, is true. Our oldest Masonic charge, the Regius Manuscript, dating from 1390, is filled with Christian adjurations, typical of which is the following:

Now Jesus, with thy holy name,
Shield me from sin and shame;
Grant to me both Absolution and Holy Eucharist,
Before I go hence,
And true contrition for my sins
So that I never, Lord, die therein;¹⁹

When Freemasonry was reorganized under the Premier Grand Lodge of England in 1717, the one Holy Church had yielded to the Reformation which, in turn, had brought to England, first, its own state Church, and the Puritan Revolution of the Seventeenth Century in and out of that church. The pendulum swung back from the extremism of the Puritan movement and its short-lived Commonwealth to the Restoration of the Monarchy. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Freemasonry adopting the rationalism of the Eighteenth Century and, after much struggle, leaving the matter of religion to one's own conscience.

From its very beginning, the Grand Lodge of Virginia adopted precisely that view:

Whosoever, from love of knowledge, interest, or curiosity, desires to be a Mason, is to know that, as his foundation and great cornerstone, he is to believe firmly in the Eternal God and to pay that worship which is due to him as the great Architect and Governor of the Universe . . .

¹⁹ Hunter, Frederick M., *The Regius Manuscript, etc.*, Oregon Research Lodge No. 198, A. F. & A. M., Portland (1952).

. . . For although in ancient times, the christian Masons were charged to comply with the christian usages of the countries where they sojourned or worked, (being found in all nations, and of divers religions and persuasions) yet it is now thought most expedient, that the brethren in general, should only be charged to adhere to the essentials of religion, in which all men agree; leaving each brother to his own private judgment, as to particular modes and forms. Whence it follows, that all Masons are to be good men and true – men of honor and honesty, by whatever religious names or persuasions distinguished; always following that golden precept of 'doing unto all men as (upon a change of conditions) they would that all men should do unto them'.²⁰

In these times, one would have thought that the grant by a Society such as the Freemasons of its membership without regard to sectarian considerations or particular religious opinions would be as a matter of course. As noted, we are not a religion, though the Craft has strong religious overtones, and much of our Ritual retains a Christian flavor. Thus, the references to "the merits of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah," the teachings of the Mark Master and Royal Arch degrees, and almost every facet of our initiatory ceremonies are not only Biblical but have genuinely Christian tendencies. It is not at all surprising to find the Introductory Preface to our first Virginia Constitutions referring to the basis of Masonic principles as the wisdom of "His GLORIOUS SON", or that they are daily cultivated by every Craftsman, "through the grace and goodness of his DIVINE SPIRIT, THRICE BLESSED THREE, in one eternal GODHEAD!"²¹

While, over the years, our Constitutions and Ritual has to some extent been "de-Christianized", this has been more due to the spirit of religious toleration which should animate all of us than an effort to denigrate our own Christian beliefs or to form a

²⁰ Read, John K., *The New Ahiman Rezon, Containing the Laws and Constitutions of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, etc.*, printed by John Dixon, Richmond (1791), adopted by the Grand Lodge of Virginia, May 1, 1792. I express my appreciation to Staunton Lodge No 13, Staunton, Virginia, and its Secretary, Right Worshipful Robert W. Dull, for the opportunity to examine this rare volume and excerpt its contents.

²¹ Read, *Ahiman Rezon, etc.*, op. cit.

separate sect, based on salvation by works. Thus, if anyone has a real complaint, it might be one of our Jewish, Moslem, or other brethren, who share only our fundamental belief in God and in those rules of conduct which should be common to all men. It has not, for I believe they, as do we, understand the real meaning of Freemasonry and its toleration for all who assume its obligations, regardless of creed.

As for the Hollys, Ankerbergs, and the rest of that ilk, one can hardly better the explanation of General Sir Gregor MacGregor of MacGregor, Grand Master Mason of Scotland, in his report on the views expressed by the Church of Scotland:

It does not matter where it takes place. Fundamentalists are equally unpleasant wherever they occur. They all display a high level of intolerance and bigotry; there can be no discussion in their eyes and there is no room for anybody's point of view but their own. They are in step and everybody else is out of step. We must not be surprised therefore that there are those who try to denigrate Freemasonry.

We must adhere to our ancient Landmarks. Let us stand up and be counted, for we have nothing to fear. We can go forward into the future confident in our belief in God and in the knowledge that we are carrying out His will when we do all in our power to promote the well-being of mankind. May Brotherly love prevail and every moral and social virtue cement us.²²

What should we do then, brethren, about these continued attacks? Some have proposed a heavy counter attack, believing that adoption of an unfavorable report by the Southern Baptist Convention could result in our loss of as much as twenty per cent of our membership.²³ On the other hand, a survey of the public recently conducted under the

²² Masonic Messenger, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

²³ Wilkerson, James B., "Extremism vs. Freedom, A Masonic Call to Action," Scottish Rite Journal, Vol. CI, No.2, February 1993, p. 9 ff.

auspices of the Scottish Rite and Masonic Service Association indicated that less than two per cent of eligible males had religious reservations about the Craft.

We have weathered these storms for centuries. For over two hundred years, the Roman Catholic Church has fought the Craft with its awesome powers of life and death in many countries. Yet, even in those nations, the Craft lived on. Fanatics now appear to rule the Southern Baptist Convention, but there is substantial dissent on the part of many churches. The traditional Baptist freedom of belief will ultimately prevail, and the fundamentalists will fall of their own ignorance.

Let us inform our brethren and arm them to answer these critics, but let us not kick against the pricks of their ignorant needles. Remember it was the Zealots who sought the freedom of Barabbas and condemned our Lord. Let these modern Inquisitioners fight among themselves and, in the words of the poet, "be four and twenty sects, jarring and confusing."

As for us, let us be Craftsmen, live according to our obligations, and, in the words of our great Master: ". . . love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind . . . [and] . . . love thy neighbor as thyself."²⁴

If we live and conduct ourselves as Masons, the bigots and zealots will never prevail against us, for we build a Temple of Living Stones. But one sometimes wonders whatever happened to Christian love.

²⁴ (24) Gospel According to St. Matthew, Chapter 22, v. 37, 39 The Holy Bible, King James Version, Gideon International (1983).