

# THE MASONIC ORDER AND RELIGION

SOME RECENT CRITICISMS CONSIDERED *AND ANSWERED* by

Rn. H.R. Allen, O.B.E.. M.A.

R.W. Provincial Grand Master, R.W. Brethren, V.W. Brethren, W. Brethren, and Brethren.

I am deeply conscious of the honour in being invited to give the Robinson Memorial Lecture this evening. The late Rt. Wor. Bro. Robinson was a brother for whom I had a very high regard. He was one of the Directors of Ceremonies in Provincial Grand Lodge when I was first appointed P.G.L. Chaplain, and I was greatly impressed, not only by his work in the Lodge. but also by his great ability to communicate with the brethren, and especially to newcomers to P.G.L. He ever sought to inculcate in us the same enthusiasm and striving after perfection which was so obvious in his own service. .

The subject suggested to me for this year's lecture is one that would have been dear to his heart, and I hope that I can measure up to the standard he would have expected.

Certainly it can be said that our subject is topical. Everywhere a mason, who is serious about his membership, goes these days, he is likely to encounter discussion on the criticisms of the Order which have arisen from a series of so-called exposures in the press or on TV. While we can treat these with a certain amusement, contempt, or anger, I am afraid that we must treat the official pronouncements of various Church Bodies rather more seriously.

It would seem to me that these anti-masonic outbursts arise every now and again, and then die down until some enthusiast, looking for the limelight, thinks he has unearthed some great heresy, and oblivious, indeed ignorant, of all that has gone before, bursts forth in a torrent of abuse. The fact that there have been exposures and criticisms for the past 300 years doesn't seem to deter them. The sad thing is that attention is always given to the charges against the Order, and little place given to explanations, reasons and corrections, and even less to the positive contribution of Masonry.

I am sure that many of the Churchmen who are adopting a critical attitude to the Order, and who are advising against membership, are perfectly sincere in what they believe they are saying and doing. The trouble seems to me that they are making judgements based on a particular theological opinion, and they are not prepared to accept that other people with a different outlook can also be perfectly sincere, and indeed could be just as critical of their theological opinion as they are of our beliefs. It has been said that when we formulate our beliefs about God we create divisions. Faith in God unites us, but belief about God, which is theology, divides us.

There seems to be abroad today in most of our Churches a very conservative attitude, a judgemental manner and, indeed, one might also say a hostile attitude to many aspects of Christian life. Not only is the Masonic Order attacked, but so are the Doctrines of Baptism, Marriage, the Sacraments, Church Order, the place of women in the Church, the wearing of Vestments, and dear knows what else. Groups of young ministers have arisen, and they have sought to influence laymen and poison them with their negative attitudes. The views of these self-righteous protagonists do little to extend the influence of the faith they profess to hold, and

in some ways, are some of the reasons why more men are being attracted to the Order than come under their influence.

I feel that perhaps the best way of dealing with this question of criticisms of the Order and its compatibility with Christianity might be to examine what the Churches are saying, and then try to present the position of the Order to the several points raised.

I have had access to publications from England, Scotland, New Zealand, South Africa, Finland, and the U.S.A. Most of them deal with the same issues, and most of the answers to the various criticisms are similar. I had no idea that there was such a vast literature on the Order, running into many thousands of volumes.

The principal objection of the Churches seems to be that the Masonic Order is a religion or an alternative to a religion. The charge is made that it cannot be Christian because the name of Christ is omitted, and so it is suggested that it is incompatible for Christians to belong to the Order.

Other points of concern are:-

The required belief in a Supreme Being.

The use made of the Holy Bible.

The form of prayers used.

The place of secrecy,

The vows undertaken and the manner of taking them.

The conflict between Light and Darkness.

There is also strong criticism of part of the Royal Arch Degree which I will briefly comment on later.

I think it is important to point out that the Church reports on the Order were not produced as condemnations of Freemasonry. They were about whether a genuine Christian could belong to a men's club which has certain minimal religious beliefs as a qualification for membership. The Church of Scotland Report made it clear that it was not their intention to conduct a Witch Hunt.

I can understand how someone who is ignorant of our actual beliefs and customs, our way of working, and our interpretations of our traditions can have certain misgivings about what they regard as our anti-Christian theology. However I have to say that in over 40 years membership of the Order I have never been conscious of any conflict between my deeply held Christian belief and my membership of the Order. Yes, it is true that Christ is not mentioned in our Craft Degrees, but that does not mean that He is not present at our meetings. If He dwells in the heart of a Christian, then He is present.

There are two main areas of criticism today.

1. People like Stephen Knight who wrote 'The Brotherhood', and Martin Shon's 'Inside the Brotherhood'.

Both these publications contain false accusations about people and facts that are untrue. Some of the accusations of what the Order believes and does are quite horrendous, and bear no relation to what we know of our ritual and practice.

2. The Church of England, the Church of Scotland, and the Methodist Church have produced reports in recent years that are critical of the Order.

While it is true that these reports are based on the theological attitudes of the Churches concerned, much of the criticism is based on a mis-understanding or mis-interpretation of the beliefs and practices of the Order, and seem to me to be largely due to their belief that the Order is a religion with a unique theology. The Churches seem to be trying to see the Order as apart from its members.

The Order has no theology of its own, and therefore doesn't conflict with the faith of its members. On the other hand, each mason has his own faith which is private to him, and because there are people of different faiths within the fellowship, members do not raise matters that could cause dissension. For example. If visiting a Jewish home a Christian would not start criticising his host's belief: nor would it be considered good manners in a group of people with whom fellowship was being experienced to start a discussion on some matter of politics which would obviously start a dispute. If I am invited to the Institution of a new Rector or Priest, I don't start a discussion on the content of the Westminster Confession of Faith. If I am a member of an organisation that consists of people who are not Christians, the fact that I am there does not mean that I have renounced my faith. Even Jesus was criticised for the company he kept.

### **THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND REPORT**

This Report was the result of a consideration of the compatibility or otherwise of Freemasonry with Christianity. The Working Group was formed in February 1986 and reported in May 1987. The General Synod of 1985 had expressed concern regarding the nature of Masonic Oaths, Masonic Ritual, and the apparent secrecy surrounding Masonic activities. References were also made to Freemasons forming a mildly sinister Mafia, and to Masonry being "the way people think it is the way to get on".

The Working Group recognised that five meetings and a short paper would be totally inadequate to enable a full enquiry to be undertaken. There would need to be a larger group, properly serviced and equipped.°

The enquiry of the Group covered the following subjects:-

Is Freemasonry a Christian Society? - they suggested that Freemasonry tries to undermine Christianity.

Is Freemasonry a Religion?

The content of Prayers.

The attitude to God - they accused the Order of being indifferent to the nature and doctrine of God, and maintained that Masons have a peculiar God of their own.

The position regarding Secrecy.

The nature of the Obligations taken.

Masonic Charity.

The Hope of Salvation.

The Report states that careful consideration must also be given to two other criticisms of the Craft:

l. If Freemasonry knows of a way of establishing a right relationship with God, then it has a moral obligation to share this knowledge with others.

z. If Freemasonry can reveal in the Royal Arch the true name of God it should not conceal this name from others.

It should be noted that during the Church of England examination reference was frequently made to the work of the Rev. Walton Hannah who had written an article "Should a Christian be a Freemason?" in January 1951 which had led to a debate in the Church Assembly.

Mr. Hanna's article was most critical and referred to Freemasonry as formally heretical. He charged the Order of possessing "secret arts and hidden mysteries" which the initiate was solemnly obligated to "hele. conceal and never wilfully reveal" under penalty as given in the 1st Degree. He further accused the Order of dualism of Light and Darkness. of Syncretism i.e. being unconcerned about the vital

distinctions between different faiths and being as if we are all the same. He also criticised the apocryphal texts and legends and the search for the Missing Word which he described as the sacred and mysterious name of the True and Living God. Most High. All these Masonic teachings he described as breathing the spirit of Gnosticism. He further accused the Order of reverting for spiritual light to shadowy types and secret mysteries of bygone centuries, and accused the Christian Freemason of going behind Christ's back and dishonouring the Incarnation. He asks if a Christian is justified in laying aside, outside the Club; the fullness of the Christian faith, to worship a common-denominator non-Christian God. It is mischievous to state that Christian Masons worship any God other than the one revealed to them through Christ or that they have reverted to pagan forms of worship in the quest for spiritual light. He goes on to suggest that in Masonry there is teaching on faith and morals and the nature of God which is secret. I am not aware of the Masonic Order claiming any special religious knowledge, secret or otherwise

The suggestion is made that Freemasonry has some affinity with the mystery religions. Just as there are some especially in its sacramental side is derived from the mystery religions. so there are scholars who do the same for the Craft.

There are three different kinds of Masonry, and the gulf between them is greater than that which used to divide the Samaritans from the Jews.

1. Continental Freemasons organised under Grand Orients, and they are political, atheistical, and bitterly anti-clerical. They are found particularly in Latin countries.
2. Theosophical Masons. and they acquired importance largely through the work of Mrs. Beasant. They cover such bodies as Star of the East, the Rosicrucians, and admit women into the membership. They attempt a synthesis of religions.
3. Regular Freemasons such as ourselves - Organized under Grand Lodges which are independent of one another, but nevertheless are bound to the Grand Lodge of England, or Scotland, or Ireland, in much the same way as the Dominions are linked to Britain. Regular masons are found all over the world, they don't have any political contact, and firmly hold to the belief that in God is the great foundation of the Masonic system. They refuse all contact with Continental and Theosophical Masons. so much so. that any brother having contact with either group will be struck off Grand Lodge Register.

### **THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (PRESBYTERIAN) REPORT**

The Church of Scotland report was the result of over two years work during which they consulted with and met with officers of the Grand Lodge of Scotland. The remit given to the Committee was "to examine the theological issues involved in Church members being also Freemasons: to consider the compatibility or otherwise of Freemasonry with Christianity, and in particular to determine whether the rituals and teaching of Freemasonry are consistent with the Church of Scotland's belief in the Gospel of the Sovereign Grace and Love of God, wherein through Jesus Christ His Only Son Our Lord, incarnate, Crucified. and Risen. he freely offers to all men upon repentance and faith the forgiveness of Sin. the renewal of the Holy Spirit and Eternal Life (A typical General Assembly theological statement.) In presenting the Report in the form of a Pastoral letter to members of the Church of Scotland within Freemasonry, the Committee state that it was not their concern to investigate all aspects of Freemasonry in Scotland or to pass judgement on the moral character of its members. They state that they had, however, very real theological difficulties.

The points which concerned them were almost the same as those raised by the Church of England Report

Is Freemasonry a religion?

The suppression of the name of Jesus in prayers.

The use of the Bible.

The reference to "the Supreme Being"

The place of secrecy.

The charge of Gnosticism i.e. having a secret knowledge of ultimate truth denied to others.

The Committee also considered the "Christian Orders of Freemasonry" but I don't think it would be appropriate in this gathering of Craft masons to discuss matters which would involve knowledge not yet available to many of you.

There is, in both the Church of England and Church of Scotland reports reference to a word used in Royal Arch Masonry. The reports state that this word is used for a name for God, and in using it they say that Freemasons are guilty of blasphemy. I understand that the Supreme Council in England, who have vigorously denied the charge, and taking, or perhaps Mm already taken steps to make plain in the ritual that no such false naming of the Deity can be read into its wording. The confusion in the minds of some people about this word is due to the idea that we are involved in pagan worship, whereas neither Craft nor Royal Arch Masons call upon Scripture. It is sad, that in spite of assurances from Grand Lodge, the Working Party of the Church of England chose to accept their own interpretation.

## **THE METHODIST CHURCH REPORT**

The 1985 Conference of the Methodist Church considered a report which expressed concern about:-

The Masonic secrecy being "destructive of fellowship"

The worship of the "Supreme Being".

The offer of Salvation through secret knowledge.

Certain rituals which offer alternatives to important elements of Christian faith.

The Conference claimed that the Christian who became a Mason may compromise his beliefs. It should be noted, however, that the following year in 1986, Conference made clear that their report did not intend to imply that membership of Freemasonry is incompatible with membership of the Methodist Church.

To read some of the so-called exposures or criticisms of the Order is a strange experience. While I understand some of the criticisms of the Order expressed by Churchmen who are misjudging the Order and believe it to have a particular theology, I feel that books like Knight's "Brotherhood" and Shon's "Inside the Brotherhood" are almost incomprehensible. Certainly the things they report, the interpretations they put on our rituals, and the accounts they give of Masonic involvement in society and intrigues is something quite foreign to anything I have experienced in over 40 years membership. I have certainly never experienced any of the so-called "instruction" they quote, and at times I wonder if there is any relationship at all between Masonry as we know it in the Irish Constitution, and the sort of organisation they write about. If I were to believe the sort of charges they make, or the interpretations they give, I would certainly have to admit that Freemasonry was incompatible with Christianity. I believe it is because these people involved in the various Church reports have been influenced by wild accusations, and by what I regard as completely false information, that the Churches have spoken

as they have. I hope that my orthodoxy as a Presbyterian minister who has signed the Westminster Confession of Faith is such that I would never accept anything that I believed would weaken my faith. To me it is sad that some of my colleagues doubt my commitment to the faith just because they know that I am a Mason, and their views of the Order are so coloured by the various misrepresentations that have been made.

Before attempting to deal with the various points raised in the Church reports it might be helpful if I were to give a very brief account of the early history of the Order and its relationship to Christianity.

One of the most serious accusations against the Order is that it is incompatible with Christianity, and that the name of Christ has been deliberately deleted from its ritual.

One of the earliest Manuscripts, the Inigo Jones, is dated 1607 and refers to the Holy Trinity. In 1687 there is reference to the William Watson MS to Holy Church. but true to Reformation practice all mention of saints has been dropped. In 1696, in the Edinburgh Register House MS there is reference to candidates taking up the BIBLE (rather than the BOOK), and in 1710 we get reference to St. John in the Dumfries No. 4 MS. We read too that Medieval Masons took their oath on the Four Gospels. In 172/1 in "The Great Mystery of Freemasonry Discovered" we find part of the Catechism used refers to the three Lights as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In 1725 the Graham MS refers to the Trinity and the Saviour.

There is in existence a copy of Smiths Pocket Companion published in Dublin in 1735 with prayers referring to the Trinity. There also exist orations and lectures including reference to Christ.

It was in the 1730's that we find the beginning of what has been called the "De-Christianizing" element. There arose a feeling that the Order should be open to members of the Jewish faith, and this led to a new group being formed who renounced their allegiance to the Grand Master and became known as "The Moderns". The regular Masons adopted some new measures and became known as "Traditioners" or "Antient" lodges, who while retaining the Christian element, in 1756 included in their ritual a Jewish prayer for the making of a Brother.

It is interesting to note that post 1717 in anti-Roman Catholic England Freemasonry was one of the few institutions which welcomed Roman Catholics into its ranks. and in 1729 the Roman Catholic Duke of Norfolk was Grand Master. In 1738. and 1751 two Roman Catholic Papal Bulls were issued expressly trying to prevent any Roman Catholic becoming or continuing as a Freemason. However, these did not apply to Ireland until 1798, and Roman Catholics found in Lodges here "the only peaceful asylum to assemble among themselves and have a more humane contact with tolerant Protestants".

The Grand Lodge of Anticints was formed in 1751, adhering to the older forms of working with a Christian content. 1760 onwards saw a whole new set of ritual material in the form of so-called exposures. It is noted that one of these concerns the working of Irish Masons, and the use of Christian prayers in the Opening and in the First Degree.

In 1772 William Preston issued his "Illustrations of Freemasonry" which marked the real beginning of the De-Christianizing of the Order. Three years later Wm. Hutchinson published his "Spirit of Freemasonry" which stressed that "members of our Society at this day acknowledge themselves to be Christians".

Between 1780 and 1785 we first learn about the Royal Arch Ritual referring to "the intense Christianity" in its ritual.

Right up to the first decade of the 19th Century the Christian aspect of English Freemasonry - and that in all parts of the Kingdom - was being maintained. In 1803 there appeared in Dublin a book by Christopher Kelly, printed under the sanction of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, and its content are very much directed towards a Christian interpretation.

In 1813 the two rival Grand Lodges, the Antients (who emphasised a link with Christianity) and the Moderns united. The practice of omitting specific references to Christ and the Christian faith was accepted in the hope of enabling men of different faiths to take part in Lodge rituals without ending or compromising their own beliefs.

The De-Christianizing of the forms of working was largely brought about by the Duke of Sussex when he was Grand Master, and by 1819 was completed.

The simple truth is that Freemasonry was once very much tied to the Christian Faith, and a strong attempt was made to keep it so and so the language used in its ceremonies and teaching was well understood by Christians. When in the 18th Century it was decided to admit Jews, and later Moslems, the use of purely Christian terms was omitted, although there are still traces to be found in our ritual and practice e.g. the place given to St John, and the fact that it is the Holy Bible O.T. and N.T. that is on our Altars. It was not a matter of becoming anti-Christian, or even non-Christian, but rather of adapting certain parts of the ritual to make it applicable to wider membership. If we believe in the Christian doctrine of man we believe that God created all men, and rejoices when they have fellowship together.

It is strange to read that the Church of Scotland Report states that if we only presented homiletic material on moral questions in a colourful and dramatic way they would scarcely complain. The objection is that we use prayers. I wonder if our critics would prefer that we didn't require a belief in God, and that we didn't offer prayers. Would they be happier if we accepted atheists, agnostics, and libertines into our Order?

Let us now consider the charges made against Freemasonry, and offer what we believe to be honest and straightforward answers based on our actual knowledge and experience of the Order.

The critics assume that Freemasonry is a religion, and therefore must be in some way a rival or substitute for Christianity. But Freemasonry is not a religion or substitute for religion. It is defined, as we know, as a "system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols". It demands of its members a belief in the Supreme Being, but it provides no system of faith of its own. Freemasonry does not, and could not, cater adequately for the spiritual needs of men's souls. Freemasonry is for men who already have their personal and individual allegiance to religion, be it the Christian faith, or one of the other great religions of the world. It has no systematic theology. It does not go from faith to speculation, which is theology, but from faith to demonstration, which is life. Nor does Freemasonry have a set ministry, Orders of Service, or Sacraments, nor does it in any sense claim to be an alternative route to spiritual salvation. A man becoming a mason is expected to come with the Faith he already has, and will continue to have, both inside and outside the orbit of his masonry.

The names used for the Supreme Being allow men of different faiths to join in prayer to God as each sees Him, without the terms causing any dissension among them. There is no separate Masonic God: a Mason's God is the God of the religion he professes. When the Supreme Being is described in Masonry as the Great Architect, any mason will think, as he prays in his Lodge, just as he thinks when

he prays at home or in Church. Similarly our Jewish brethren will think of Him as the God he knows - Adonai, or as we learn the sacred name symbolised by the sacred Tetragramaton. So the Moslem or those of other religions will have their own understanding of the Supreme Being. It is no part of Freemasonry to attempt to join religions together. There is no composite Masonic God. We each enter the Lodge room with the God we know and worship - we do not leave God outside.

Criticism has been made of the Supreme Being being referred to as the Great Architect of the Universe but it should be noted that John Calvin used this title in his commentary on the 19th Psalm. Surely it is strange that the national publication of the Presbyterian Church in Canada should find fault with words that have been part of Calvinism for four centuries.

There is an interesting example in the Lodge of Research Transactions for 1988 of people of different faiths praying together. Loyal subjects of the Crown, no matter what their religion, can join in singing God Save The Queen, which is a prayer. Also, in 1911 King George V offered a prayer when addressing 100,000 of his subjects at the Durbar in Delhi:- "May the Divine favour of Providence watch over my people, and asst me in my utmost Endeavour to promote their happiness and prosperity". I don't think his prayer was only for those Christians present.

The critics hold that because we have Chaplains, say prayers, and use the Bible, that we are a religion. But surely that does not make our Order a religion any more than daily prayers in the House of Commons makes it a religion. Or prayer at Council meetings, or in schools, or even at political meetings makes them religion.

The Church of Scotland interprets having a theology as "having a knowledge of God". Each individual Freemason has his own theology - his knowledge of God. But the Order as such does not define the Supreme Being. The fact that one mason believes that God is the father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. and another believes in God in a different way does not invalidate the belief of either.

The Church today is bedevilled by opposing theologies on all sorts of issues, and Christians have been separated and set against each other just because of different dogmas.

The fact that men of different religions can accept each others does not mean that they accept each other's faith. By taking an Obligation at an Altar with my hands on the Holy Bible. and perhaps a Moslem beside me taking the same Obligation with his hands on the Koran, and we both express our belief in the Supreme Being does not mean that we are saying that our views of God are identical or that one religion is equal to another.

George Hunt in his book on Secret Societies says that when a minister becomes a mason he is saying that one religion is as good as another. What nonsense! Such misrepresentation of our position can only arise because these people insist that Masonry is a religion. I can state categorically that if that were so I couldn't be standing here this evening. I couldn't agree that one religion is as good as another and I would not expect any decent follower of any religion to downgrade his faith for the purpose of becoming a Freemason.

At no time is the Christian becoming a Freemason. asked to renounce or weaken his faith. In fact we believe that being a good Mason will help to strengthen the Christian and help to make him a better Christian. I cannot understand how my taking part in non-religious activities with people of another faith can possibly be interpreted as being blasphemous.

When in the Lodge a Christian prays to Almighty God as the Supreme Being

of the Universe. he is addressing the God he knows and worships. So do the Jew and Moslem. but this docs not mean acknowledging other understandings of the Supreme Being. There is one Supreme Being, but different people see Him in different ways. The fact that another Brother uses the same words in addressing the God he worships, surely just means that we can be agreed that there is a Supreme Being in whom we all believe, although our particular faith teaches us to approach Him differently.

Because we see the value of having fellowship together, and showing love and concern for our brother, we do not discuss those differences at our meetings. There are other times and places for such discussions. I do not expect the Jew to weaken his faith in order to help me build a caring structure, and he does not aspect me suddenly to embrace his particular faith and practices. For the Christian. the Jew. and the Moslem. there is nothing in Masonry that says that he cannot have his own belief, and his own interpretation of that belief. In fact he is assured in the Obligation that there is nothing at variance with his religious belief.

The Grand Master of Connecticut said in 1953:- "Masonry is the common ground where men of every race and nation, of every shade of religious belief, and every political opinion can meet and be united in one Brotherhood, under one God, and yet retain their individual religious and political beliefs. Let each Mason hold to his faith firmly, and at the same time allow the same precious right to every other Mason".

## **THE PLACE OF THE HOLY BIBLE**

The Bible is open upon the Altar whenever the Lodge meets. Reverence for God is ever present in our ceremonies. The Great Light of Freemasonry is the Volume of the Sacred Law, an indispensable part of the Furniture of every Masonic Lodge.

No Lodge may open without the Holy Bible open on its Altar. The open Bible signifies that by the Light of its teachings we must regulate our conduct, for it is the rule and guide of our faith. Candidates tale their Obligation on the Bible, and Masons are taught to regard the Volume of the Sacred Law with reverence and to acknowledge it as the inspired revelation of the Mind and Will of God. They are urged to read it and regulate their lives by its teachings.

If a Candidate is of another Faith, and regards another Book as his sacred volume. then it is placed alongside the Bible, but never displaces it from its central position in the Lodge room. No one is required to touch, or make a promise on, or have anything to do with a Volume of the Sacred Law which he himself does not respect.

A Christian goes into Masonry as a Christian, a Jew as a Jew, a Moslem as a Moslem. If a Mason believes that God has revealed Himself uniquely in the Bible there is nothing in Freemasonry which says that that is not the case.

## **OBLIGATIONS**

The Obligations taken by Freemasons have been grossly exaggerated. They are undertakings to help keep secret a Freemason's means of recognition and to follow the principles of Freemasonry.

The so-called physical penalties are purely symbolic. and indeed have been removed from the Obligations in the Grand Lodge of England. They remain in our ritual in Ireland, but it should be remembered that the wording carefully states "bearing in mind the ancient penalties" but "Binding oneself under the real penalty" which could be expected by anyone breaking a solemn promise. The Obligation is not saying that the physical penalties will be applied. He is only "bearing in mind" ancient customs.

Candidates do not "swear by God". They solemnly undertake to be worthy of confidence, and not improperly to divulge secrets. They are given an assurance that there is nothing in the Obligation "at variance with their religious belief, political opinion. or duty to their Sovereign or ruler".

If, after taking the Obligation. they should find that not to be the case. then obviously the Candidate is released from his Obligation `ipso facto'.

Strictly speaking the Obligation is not a vow at all: it is nonsense to say that it violates Christian principles.

## **SECRECY**

There is much concern expressed about the element of secrecy in the Order. The secrets of Freemasonry are concerned with its traditional modes of recognition. It is not a Secret Society. All members are free to acknowledge their membership and I think it would be a very good practice if more members were prepared to do this. The constitution and rules of the Order are available to anyone. There is no secret about any of our aims and principles. However, having said that. like any other Society we regard some of our affairs as private. We have seen in recent years a greater openness on the part of the Order - the Grand Master's Festival. the support of non-masonic charities. the opening to the public of Grand lodge rooms and museum in Molesworth Street, the issue of the video, and the various leaflets now available for enquirers. The place of secrecy has been greatly exaggerated, and much of what has been traditionally regarded as Masonic secrets has been made public in various exposures. .

The Church of Scotland seems to misinterpret the place of secrecy, and suggests that we are hiding some secret wisdom concerning eternal salvation. and states that if we are doing that we are guilty of the sin of gnosticism. What possible objection there can be to an organisation having so-called secret methods of recognition I cannot understand. Most Board Rooms and Political Parties have secrets relevant to their business and politics. The objection of the Churches to a candidate pledging himself to silence concerning these secrets before they are committed to him seems strange. Surely even in ordinary everyday life the custom is "I'll tell you if you promise not to tell anyone". The promise comes first.

## **LIGHT AND SALVATION**

There has been confusion over our use of the staves of Light and Darkness. The use of the blindfold and the coming to Light has been misinterpreted. It is suggested that we teach that all Christians are in a state of darkness until they receive the blessing of "Masonic Light". How ridiculous. Every candidate is asked "In all cases of difficulty and danger. in whom do you put your trust?" The candidate must answer "In God". If he cannot. or will not. he is rejected. Is it not obvious that a man who can give the required answer to that question has already attained a very considerable spiritual light? The Light of Masonry is not in conflict with the light of religion.

Even more serious is one of the Church of England's main criticisms that Masons may hope to gain salvation through Masonry without Jesus Christ. Worldwide there are many who hope for salvation without Christ. This is what the Christian Church regards as the sin of Pelagianism - so called after a 5th Century monk. and stands for the doctrine of salvation by merit. the power of the will of man without special Grace from God to attain righteousness. Our Jewish brethren are examples of those who thus seek salvation. However, Masonry does not guarantee salvation. and is

not intended as a substitute for religion. Freemasonry does not claim to be THE WAY or even A WAY of salvation, although membership MAY help a man to find his foothold upon the faith that leads to salvation. A Mason who is a Christian does not deny the Pauline statement "By Grace you are saved through Faith". We should also remember that Scripture also says that "faith without works is dead". So we arrive at the Masonic trilogy "Brotherly love, Relief, and Truth", which requires both a strong faith in God and a humble spirit in accepting His Grace in all endeavour.

The Grand Lodge of England has stated:-

"We confess that we can do no manner of good or acceptable service. but through Him from whom all good counsels and just works do proceed. and without Whose Divine and special favour we must ever have remained unprofitable servants in His sight".

There is no claim in Masonry to lead to salvation by works, by secret knowledge. or by any other means. The secrets of Masonry, I repeat, are concerned with the mode of recognition and not with salvation.

## CONCLUSION

It is interesting to find at the end of the Church of Scotland Report the statement that Freemasonry may be a challenge to the Church. The Report says that Freemasonry attracts the loyalty of many men by seeking to fulfil a number of basic needs, and asks if they are being met in the Church. For instance:

1. The need for companionship and a sense of belonging. Is the Church faithfully living as the communion of men and women of every race and age gathered in Christ?
2. The value and respect of office and role. Does the Church adequately recognise the personal ministry given by Christ to each baptised. so that the Body is built up, each member depending on the other?
3. The importance of ritual and symbolism. Is sufficient care given to the rearsal of God's mighty acts of Salvation in Jesus Christ through the tradition and liturgy of the Church?

The Report suggests that there is something amiss if men find these needs met in the Lodge. and perceive them to be lacking in the Church.

If the Church can see their failings and the challenge of the Order. would it not behave us to see our need to practise and observe the rites and ceremonies of our Faith as diligently as we follow our Masonry?

If we set that example of fidelity both to Religion and Freemasonry which is our right and duty, we may confound the critics of our Freemasonry and achieve at least some correction of the misguided opinions and attitudes of those who have been influencing the Church against us.

R.W. Master and Brethren, I am sorry to have taken so long, but there is such a wealth of material that it really was a matter of knowing what to leave out! I hope I have helped to clear the air on some matters. and to assure some Brethren that there is no incompatibility between Freemasonry and their Faith.