

Masonry And Religion

Taken from a pamphlet entitled
"What Is Freemasonry"
Published by the Masonic Service
Association of the United States

RELIGION has been defined as "a certain kind of systematic effort to secure the conservation and enhancement of values." Although this definition is not at all incompatible with the aims and purposes of the Order, as outlined earlier, Masonry does not profess to be a religion, even though it is religious in character. Neither does it pretend to take the place of religion, nor serve as a substitute for the religious beliefs of its members.

Freemasonry opens its doors to all men, regardless of religious conviction, the essential requirements in this regard being an avowed belief in God and in immortality. Since the doctrines of most religions include these tenets, the virtual impossibility of conflict in this respect is obvious. It is therefore understandable why so many religious faiths, including the clergymen who represent them, are found among the members of the Fraternity.

The relationship between Freemasonry and religion was summarized well by Ralph J. Pollard, Past Grand Master (Maine), in an address given before the Third Annual Northeast Conference on Masonic Librarians and Education, Boston, June 13-14, 1958:

"Every Mason should understand that Freemasonry, as practiced in the British Empire and the United

States, is entirely non-sectarian; that all theological discussion is prohibited in its lodges; and that its membership includes men belonging to many different religious denominations. He must clearly understand that *Freemasonry is not a church*, nor a substitute for the Church, and that it makes no claim to save souls, to reform sinners, or to discharge any of the proper functions of a Church. Yet every Mason should also be helped to realize that Freemasonry is essentially religious; that it requires of all of its members a positive, wholehearted and unequivocal belief in Almighty God, the Author, Creator and Ruler of the Universe; that it demands a rigid observance of the moral law; that it stresses the value and importance of prayer; that it teaches the immortality of the soul; and that the Holy Bible, or similar Volume of the Sacred Law, which lies open upon every Masonic altar, is revered as the Great Light in Freemasonry, and is accepted as the rule and guide of every Mason's faith."

By way of explanation, Lodges exist and function in all parts of the world. In Christian Lodges, the Holy Bible reposes on the Altar; in non-Christian areas, however, the book held sacred to the faith repre-

sentative of the membership be so placed.

Another statement, comprehensive in its scope, clarifies the position of the Craft in this way:

"Why is it that Freemasonry, which is not a religion and not a church, can bring to men the fundamental principles of religion which every man needs? What does Freemasonry offer that attracts the man who has no creed as well as the man who has one? It is because Freemasonry is religious in that it is a plan of life—a trestleboard — whereon are written the laws and edicts of the Grand Architect of the Universe in accordance with which men must live if they are to be happy. It is because in our lodges we teach the Brotherhood of Man based on the Fatherhood of God and advance no other dogma. Not only do we leave to every brother the choice of his creed but we draw no sword to compel others to adopt our belief. Nay, we go further than this, for within the tiled precincts of the lodge every Mason is taught to revere and respect and be tolerant of that which is sacred to his brother.

be he Christian, Mohammedan, or Jew. This is the strength of Masonry's appeal."

Although Masonry excludes no one because of religious belief, certain denominations, for reasons peculiar to their doctrines, will not permit their parishioners to be affiliated with the Masonic Fraternity. Unfortunately, such prohibitions have been interpreted to mean that Freemasonry does not accept the members of certain sects and denominations, a statement which conflicts with Freemasonry's insistence on the solidarity of humanity.

To summarize, the beliefs in a Supreme Being and immortality is common to most religions. Differences exist among them, however, with respect to dogma, interpretation and ritual, often creating a breach which separates them regardless of their similar goals. Masonry embraces the common factors, uniting men by not advocating one particular theological approach above the others, thus permitting the individual to choose for himself that avenue which seems best to him for his approach to God, for the building of his moral code, and for his preparation for that which is to come.

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