

## **FREEMASONRY AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH\***

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The picture appearing on the front cover of this issue of our *Cabletow* is evidence that what once seemed to be barriers that would keep the Roman Catholic Church at a perpetual distance from Freemasonry have in a few short years become, in the new light of Ecumenical Dialogue, bridges of approach to a complete reevaluation and thorough understanding of the Relationship of Freemasonry and the Church. Neither Freemasonry nor the Church has essentially changed. What has changed are the people in Freemasonry and the Church. In turn this change has resulted in a change in Church leadership and in Masonic leadership. We now find Masonic leaders who openly welcome Roman Catholics into Freemasonry and Catholic Church leaders who, finding nothing objectionable to Freemasonry in their respective areas, have opened their Churches to Freemasons.

Someday a history of the relationship of Freemasonry and the Roman Catholic Church may be compiled. It will be a most interesting work to read. In it will be all of the issues that drove the wedge between the Church and Freemasonry and the resolution of those issues which restored mutual understanding. At this very moment each of us is making that history. Each day in our daily relationship with members of the Church, we Masons are resolving those issues and restoring mutual understanding.

Occasionally our relationships may be such that instead of resolving an issue, by lack of understanding ourselves, we may act in a manner

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which we feel is truly Masonic but which is actually perpetuating an issue or heightening a barrier. Although well intended, these acts of Masons only tend to prolong the time that will have to pass before a perfect accord can be reached. How can we know what to say or what to do? The best answer is to practice the Golden Rule: *Masons should act and speak to Catholics as we want Catholics to act and speak to Masons.*

But there is a great deal more each of us can do to help quicken the time for a perfect accord. This will, of course require some time, some effort, and much study. Most of all it will require an understanding within each of us as to what the ultimate goal of Freemasonry is, in its effort to reach an understanding with the Church. Briefly but precisely put, Freemasonry being a Brotherhood of Men under the Fatherhood of God must make every effort to remove any obstacle preventing men who believe in God and the immortality of the soul from entering our Fraternity with a clear conscience.

Entering Masonry must be of each man's own free will and accord. No man will be invited or induced to join our Order. However, once a man has chosen to apply for the degrees of Freemasonry, we must make sure there is nothing in our ritual that will react adversely to his conscience, such as a conflict with the teachings of his religion. If such a conflict does exist, he can not take our Masonic obligations "without equivocation, mental reservation, or secret evasion of mind." To practice the truth it professes, Freemasonry must take the first act of a Mason—the taking of his obligation — an act that can be done with a clear conscience.

During the past few years a tremendous effort both in the Church and Freemasonry has been accelerating all over the world toward reaching a perfect accord. *One of the most difficult problems to overcome is to get acceptance of the new idea by old members of both the Church and Freemasonry.* Many have said that it can't be done! They say that there will always be Catholics who will hate Masons and Masons who will hate Catholics.

Neither the Church nor Freemasonry is founded on hate. Both stand solidly on a foundation of brotherly love. Therefore, if some retain hatred in their hearts, they are neither good Catholics nor good Masons.

These are the men we must reach. These are the men God wants both the Church and Freemasonry to show the way to truth through brotherly love and understanding. These are the men who need a helping hand.

Not much can be done if such men will not meet each other face to face, and without fear, but with humility before God, in Ecumenical Dialogue to discuss those matters which, because of lack of understanding, remain barriers to final accord.

In every Lodge throughout this Masonic Jurisdiction, there should be Ecumenical Dialogue with members of the Catholic Church and Ecumenical Fraternization with the Knights of Columbus and other organizations of the Church. If we don't see the other man's problem, how can we ever appreciate his point of view? Perhaps a few hours of dialogue will reveal the fact there are no real issues, just suspicions predicated on misunderstanding. What one does not know, one cannot understand.

How does misunderstanding arise? In Freemasonry, where every Mason interprets for himself what Freemasonry means to him, there are as many chances for misunderstanding as there are Masons. Every Mason can express what Freemasonry means to him in his own choice of words. But the meaning of the words to the Mason speaking them may not be the same as the meaning implanted in the mind of the person hearing. Such misunderstanding is what has caused many issue to arise between the Church and Freemasonry. Masons speaking for themselves as individuals have been misunderstood by Catholics who thought they were speaking for Freemasonry as a Fraternity.

One great misunderstanding by Catholics has been that Freemasonry is a religion. How this misconception started, we do not know. Perhaps in the distant past some Mason may have said that Freemasonry was like a religion to him. Since Freemasons must believe in God and immortality of the soul and the Craft is admittedly a highly religious society where the Holy Bible is required to be open in every Lodge, it is not difficult to visualize the evolution of an idea among the profane that Freemasonry is some kind of religion. The Catholic Church has misjudged Freemasonry to be a sort of naturalistic religion. By definition, naturalism is the denial of the miraculous and supernatural in religion

and the rejection of revelation as a means of attaining truth. The legend of Hiram Abiff is miraculous. Freemasonry consistently admits truth by revelation. Therefore, Freemasonry is not naturalistic.

The Constitution of our Grand Lodge specifically states there will be no baptismal ceremony in this Jurisdiction. Therefore, since Masons believe in immortality of the soul, who will prepare the soul for immortality? Freemasonry leaves the ceremony of baptism up to the religion of the Mason.

The same is true for marriage. Although a Masonic funeral service is provided in our Jurisdiction, it is merely a memorial service at which each Brother in a Lodge may have a last chance to pay respect to a departed Brother. Freemasonry leaves to religion the final act of committing the departed Brother's soul to God. Freemasonry neither provides for forgiveness of sins, nor communion for a Mason to prepare his soul for eternity. It is obvious then, when seriously considered, Freemasonry cannot be a religion as it is not a system, or belief that provides complete salvation to man. Freemasonry leaves the essential functions of religion up to the religion of each Mason.

When you meet a Catholic, greet him as a Brother, because he is a brother. Whether he is a Mason or not does not matter. Do not dwell on past differences. Make plans for the future. If he has questions to ask about Freemasonry, don't hesitate to answer him exactly the same way you would any other person who might be interested in joining your Lodge. If you are not sure of the answer to his question, tell him you will get him the answer. If he hurls a challenge at you, always remember that your image as a Mason and the image of Freemasonry rests in your hands. How you act and what you say will determine the image you project.

To better understand the aims and purposes of Freemasonry as expressed in some of the other Jurisdiction, the following is quoted from the Constitution of the Grand Lodge of Scotland:

"In August 1938, the Grand Lodges of England, Ireland and Scotland each agreed upon and issued a statement identical in terms except that the name of the issuing Grand Lodge appeared throughout. This

statement, which was entitled 'Aims and Relationships of the Craft' was in the following terms:—

1. From time to time the Grand Lodge of Scotland has deemed it desirable to set forth in precise form the aims of Freemasonry as consistently practiced under its jurisdiction since it came into being as an organized body in 1736, and also to define the principles governing its relations with those other Grand Lodges with which it is in fraternal accord.

2. In view of representations which have been received, and of statements recently issued which have distorted or obscured the true objects of Freemasonry, it is once again considered necessary to emphasize certain fundamental principles of the Order.

3. The first condition of admission into, and membership of, the Order is a belief in the Supreme Being. This is essential and admits of no compromise.

4. The Bible, referred to by Freemasons as the Volume of the Sacred Law, is always open in the Lodges. Every candidate is required to take his obligation on that Book, or on the Volume which is held by his particular Creed to impart sanctity to an oath or promise taken upon it.

5. Everyone who enters Freemasonry is, at the outset, strictly forbidden to countenance any act which may have a tendency to subvert the peace and good order of society, he must pay due obedience to the law of any State in which he resides or which may afford him protection, and he must never be remiss in the allegiance due to the Sovereign of his native land.

6. While Scottish Freemasonry thus inculcates in each of its members the duties of loyalty and citizenship, it reserves to the individual the right to hold his own opinion with regard to public affairs. But neither in any Lodge nor at any time in his capacity as a Freemason is he permitted to discuss or to advance his views on theological or political questions.

7. The Grand Lodge has always consistently refused to express any opinion on questions of foreign or domestic state policy either at home or abroad, and it will not allow its name to be associated with any action, however humanitarian it may appear to be, which infringes its unalterable

policy of standing aloof from every question affecting the relations between one Government and another, or between political parties, or questions as to rival theories of government.

8. The Grand Lodge is aware that there do exist bodies styling themselves Freemasons, which do not adhere to these principles, and while that attitude exists the Grand Lodge of Scotland refuses absolutely to have any relations with such bodies or to regard them as Freemasons.

9. The Grand Lodge of Scotland is a sovereign and independent body practising Freemasonry only within the three Degrees and only within the limits defined in its Constitution. It does not recognize or admit the existence of any superior Masonic authority however styled.

10. On more than one occasion the Grand Lodge has refused, and it will continue to refuse, to participate in conferences with so-called International Associations claiming to represent Freemasonry, which admit to membership bodies failing to conform strictly to the principles upon which the Grand Lodge does not admit any such claim, nor can its views be represented by any such Association.

11. There is no secret with regard to any of the basic principles of Freemasonry some of which have been stated above. The Grand Lodge will always consider the recognition of those Grand Lodges which profess and practice, and can show that they have consistently professed and practiced, those established and unaltered principles, but in no circumstances will it enter into discussion with a view to any new or varied interpretation of them. They must be accepted and practiced whole-heartedly and in their entirety by those who desire to be recognized as Freemasons by the Grand Lodge of Scotland."

Within the Philippines, the Supreme Council of the 33rd and Last Degree of Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite announced its DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES in the Proceedings for 1951 as follows:

"In view of the many allegations that Freemasonry concerns itself in controversies, both of a religious and a political nature, this Supreme Council hereby declares to the world the following statement of principles:

This Supreme Council affirms its unswerving loyalty to the fundamental purpose and principles of Freemasonry.

It understands that purpose to be the improvement and strengthening of the character of the individual man, and through the individual, of the community.

It believes that this purpose is to be attained by laying a broad basis of principle upon which men of every race, country, sect and opinion may unite, rather than by setting up a restricted platform upon which only those of certain races, creeds and opinions can assemble.

Believing that good and wise men can be trusted to act well and wisely, it considers it the duty of the Fraternity to impress upon its members the principles of personal righteousness and personal responsibility, to enlighten them as to those things which make for human welfare, and to inspire them with that feeling of charity, or well-wishing toward all mankind which will move them to translate principle and conviction into action.

To that end, it reaches and stands for the worship of God, for truth and justice, liberty and enlightenment, fraternity and philanthropy.

It believes in principles rather than programs. Principles unite men; programs divide them. Men may agree on principles without agreeing upon their particular application to some specific problem.

Nothing can be more important than the preservation of the essential and permanent sympathy and unity of purpose of those who are unable to agree as to the wisest action under special and temporary conditions.

It is the essence of Freemasonry that this unity be preserved.

Believing this, this Supreme Council affirms its continued adherence to that ancient and approved rule of Freemasonry which forbids the discussion within closed doors of creeds, politics, or other topics apt to excite personal animosities.

It further affirms its conviction that it is not only contrary to the fundamental principles of Freemasonry, but exceedingly dangerous to its unity, strength, usefulness and welfare for Masonic Bodies in their official

capacity to take formal action or attempt to exercise pressure or influence for or against any particular legislative project or proposal, or in any way to attempt to procure the election or appointment of governmental officials, whether executive, legislative or judicial, or to influence them, whether or not members of the Fraternity, in the performance of their official duties. The true Freemason should act in judgment and the dictates of his conscience."

The Catholic Church has alleged that Freemasonry is anti-catholic and subversive in character. Whatever may be said of Freemasonry elsewhere, the Free and Accepted Masons of the Philippines have never been subversive of the Philippine government. The promise of every Master of a Lodge to support government is contained in Charges II, III, and IV of the Installation Service. As Filipinos all know, many of the Masonic brethren have been famous patriots. As for Freemasonry being anti-catholic, to our knowledge there is nothing essentially anti-catholic in our constitutions. In the past there may have been differences and even quarrels between the Catholic Church and the Free and Accepted Masons of the Philippines. But the past is past. Today we are fully committed to a cooperation with the Catholic Church. Such antagonism in the past must have been more due to subjective reasons, to the resentment mainly which Masons felt at being excommunicated by the Catholic Church.

We have time and again insisted that the Free and Accepted Masons of the Philippines do not hold communion with some Masonic groups and are not in amity with some of the Grand Orient Lodges. Our Grand Lodge was founded on Dec. 19, 1912, by the three American Lodges holding charters from the Grand Lodge of California, and therefore could not have had relationship with anti-catholic Masonic Lodges existing during the Spanish times.

The Free and Accepted Masons of the Philippines believe in God and the immortality of the soul. It admits people of any faith who believe in God and the soul's immortality. It has no intention, however, of separating them from the religion of their respective consciences. On the contrary, it promises to encourage each to follow the religion of his choice. Freemasonry does not pretend to be a religion.



The Free and Accepted Masons of the Philippines does not oppose the dogmas and official doctrines of the Church, nor religious instruction in Philippine schools as provided by law, which is according to the wishes of the parent, nor the directive of Philippine Catholic Bishops in their territory. In fact, it is more than willing to cooperate with the Roman Catholic Church.

Some of the profane have objected to the Masonic oaths saying they seem immoral, both by reason of the terrible punishments the candidate invokes on himself as well as the object whose nature the candidate does not know about upon taking the oath. Our answer to questions of this sort is that the ancient oaths are symbolic in character, and are not enforced by the terrible punishments mentioned. Neither would the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the Philippines command things that are immoral, subversive or against the official teachings of the Roman Catholic or any other Church. In some Masonic Jurisdictions an alternative penalty is prescribed as follows: "or the equally effective punishment of being branded as a willfully perjured individual, void of all moral worth, and unfit to be received in this or any other Lodge, or society of men who prize honour and virtue above the merely external advantages of rank and fortune."

Freemasonry is a world-wide voluntary association of closely united men who, employing symbolic forms borrowed principally from the mason's trade and from architecture, work for the welfare of mankind, striving morally to ennoble themselves and others. It is a unique institution in that it does not invite anyone to join it; it accepts only men of good character and reputation in the community in which they live, and who believe in the existence of God, in a life after death and in the Brotherhood of Man irrespective of race, language, nationality, color, or creed.

While our Grand Lodge has never made any formal proclamation of the aims, principles, and purposes of Freemasonry, the following summary may be taken as a guide to aid our Masonic Brethren who may be called upon from time to time to answer questions which may be asked of them by persons outside the Fraternity.

1. The Jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of the Philippines wherein it is the Supreme Masonic power and Authority is defined by the territorial boundaries of the Philippines, and in addition thereto extends to its Lodges in Guam, Saipan, Kwajalein, Okinawa, Japan, South Korea, South Vietnam, and wheresoever other Lodges may be constituted under its authority.

2. The Grand Lodge of the Philippines as the Supreme Masonic power and authority is sovereign in its jurisdiction and is not beholden to, subject to review by, or dependent on any other Grand Lodge, Jurisdiction, Masonic Authority or Masonic entity. Its pronouncements are absolute within its Jurisdiction.

3. The Grand Lodge of the Philippines administers directly the Subordinate Lodges within its Jurisdiction generally known as Symbolic Lodges, its administrative concern being the first degrees of Masonry viz; the first degree or Entered Apprentice; the second degree; or Fellowcraft and the third degree, or Master Mason.

4. The Grand Lodge of the Philippines manifests Freemasonry is not a religion, has no pretense of being a religion, has no aspiration toward being a religion; has no sacraments or pretenses thereto; and has no rituals that could be construed, however remotely, as being part of any religion. It does not provide for the salvation of men.

5. The Grand Lodge of the Philippines declares Freemasonry does not, can not, and will not favor, in any manner in which the words can be construed, a member or members belonging to any specific religion, political party or group. Neither does it, can it, nor will it disfavor, in any manner in which the words can be construed, any member or members belonging to any specific religion, political party or group. In the implementation of its traditional teaching of harmony among men, it does not permit the discussion, debate, argument or reference to, or about religion, or politics at any Lodge meeting. However, it does not interfere with the Human Rights of Men, and Masons are completely free to enter into any such discussions as any private citizen may, outside the Lodge.

6. The Grand Lodge of the Philippines asserts Freemasonry consistently urges its members to greater devotion to the religion of their choice,

and never has or will try to influence any member in his choice of the manner or place of his devotions, being fully content that its members improve their moral character through their own religious preferences.

7. In the Grand Lodge of the Philippines no atheist can become a Mason, since belief in one Supreme Being is the first prerequisite and belief in the immortality of the soul is the second but equally essential prerequisite to acceptance into the Fraternity. Yet Freemasonry does not provide a baptismal ceremony, but leaves such to be provided by the religion of the individual Mason.

8. In the Grand Lodge of the Philippines no woman can become a Mason, nor a youth in his nonage; or a man in his dotage.

9. In the Grand Lodge of the Philippines Freemasonry, although not a religion, is practiced as a highly religious Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God.

10. The Grand Lodge of the Philippines is for unsectarian religious education in our Public Schools, as provided by law believing that any religious instruction in Public Schools must be open to all religions on an equal basis with no religion having any advantage over any other and in accordance with the wishes of the parents of the children concerned.

11. In the Grand Lodge of the Philippines the Masonic Funeral Service is a ritual of Freemasonry, giving surviving Brethren a means of paying public homage to their departed, is not designed to supersede any Church Service, nor superimpose itself as such. It is performed at the request of the dying Brother with the consent of his family, or at the request of the family alone, if the departed had been unable to express such a wish before death.

12. In the Grand Lodge of the Philippines no ritual appertaining to any degree in Masonry, Symbolic or otherwise, has any intended reference or allusion, derogatory or otherwise to any specific religion, political party, or group. Freemasonry in this Jurisdiction is always willing to reexamine its rituals in the light of the many changing attitudes in this modern world and make changes therein for a better understanding of the fundamental concepts of Freemasonry. However, no changes can be made in the Ancient Landmarks or the tenets of Freemasonry.

These are best known to us as the ancient charges and regulations which are the following duties of the Masters of a Lodge that on no account are ever to be neglected or departed from :

I. You agree to be a good man and true, and strictly to obey the moral law.

II. You agree to be a peaceable citizen, and cheerfully to conform to the laws of the country in which you reside.

III. You promise not to be concerned in plots and conspiracies against government, but patiently to submit to the decision of the Supreme Legislature.

IV. You agree to pay a proper respect to the civil magistrate, to work diligently, live creditably, and act honorably by all men.

V. You agree to hold in veneration the original rulers and patrons of the Order of Masonry, and their regular successors, supreme and subordinate, according to their stations; and to submit to the awards and resolutions of your Brethren, when convened, in every case consistent with the Constitution of the Order.

VI. You agree to avoid private piques and quarrels, and to guard against intemperance and excess.

VII. You agree to be cautious in carriage and behaviour courteous to your Brethren, and faithful to your Lodge.

VIII. You promise to respect genuine Brethren, and to discountenance impostors and all dissenters from the original plan of Masonry.

IX. You agree to promote the general good of society, to cultivate the social virtues, and to propagate the knowledge of the Art.

X. You promise to pay homage to the Grand Master for the time being, and to his officers when duly installed; and strictly to conform to every edict of the Grand Lodge or General Assembly of Masons, that is not subversive of the principles and groundwork of Masonry.

XI. You admit that it is not in the power of any man or body of men to make innovations in the body of Masonry.

XII. You promise a regular attendance in the committees and communications of the Grand Lodge, on receiving proper notice, and to pay attention at all the duties of Masonry on convenient occasions.

XIII. You admit that no new Lodge should be formed without permission of the Grand Lodge; and that no countenance should be given to any irregular Lodge, or to any person clandestinely initiated therein — being contrary to the ancient charges of the Order.

XIV. You admit that no person can be regularly made a Mason in, or admitted a member of any regular Lodge, without previous notice and due inquiry into his character.

XV. You agree that no visitors shall be received into your Lodge without the examination, and producing proper vouchers of their having been initiated in a regular Lodge."

Personally, I am looking forward to the day in the not too far distant future when Masons and Catholics can reach a perfect accord. Catholic Bishops in some dioceses have already welcomed Masons into their churches and offered no objections to members of their churches entering Freemasonry. In this Christmas season I ask all Masons and Catholics to join in prayers that once again, and soon, there will be Peace On Earth among Men of Good Will.