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An Open Letter to the Publisher of *Masonic Inspiration*

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: The person addressed in the following letter is Charles Van Cott. He is publisher of *Masonic Inspiration*, "a monthly bulletin to increase Lodge attendance and win the hearts and minds of members to Masonry." According to biographical information provided in his stationery, he is "a 32° Mason, a Shriner and Tall Cedar . . . a writer for twenty years on large city newspapers and magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post*. . . . Singlehandedly he succeeded in erecting a statue of gold honoring Brother Thomas Paine."

The "Open Letter" referred to in the following pages appeared in *Masonic Inspiration*, July 1955. Its full title is "An Open Letter to Lutherans Spreading Anti-Masonic Propaganda." In an earlier issue of *Masonic Inspiration* (April 1955) Mr. Van Cott published an article captioned "Martin Luther—Our Illustrious Brother Mason." The "Open Letter" is an elaboration of the earlier article; but it attempts also to refute arguments raised by Lutherans against Masonry. In a letter to the undersigned dated May 1, 1955, Mr. Van Cott writes: "Frank discussion is a good thing in a Democracy. I feel that if you would publicize the article [he had sent galley proofs of the "Open Letter"] and answer it anyway you see fit, it might help both sides of the case." We believed a good way to reply to Mr. Van Cott's article would be to do so in the form of a letter.

DEAR MR. VAN COTT:

This is a reply to your articles which appeared in *Masonic Inspiration* (April and July 1955), the one headed "Martin Luther—Our Illustrious Brother Mason" and the other "An Open Letter to Lutherans Spreading Anti-Masonic Propaganda." In the latter you attempt to provide evidence that though Luther may not have been a Mason himself, the friends who kidnapped and brought him safely to the Wartburg were members of the guild of *Steinmetzen* and therefore, so you conclude, Masons. In the same article you also attempt to refute objections raised by some Lutherans against religious and unchristian aspects and teachings of Freemasonry.

I hesitated for a long time to reply to your articles since you fail to adduce clear and incontrovertible historical evidence that Luther was a Mason and that Masons conceived and carried out the plot to seize Luther and take him to the Wartburg. Why reply to

such historically unproved assertions? Furthermore, your refutation of arguments raised by Lutherans against Masonry is not a refutation, but merely a reiteration of basic Masonic principles with which we are familiar. But I decided to reply for these reasons: (1) You write in your letter of May 7, 1955: "I feel that if you would publicize the article and answer it anyway you see fit, it might help both sides of the case." This is fair enough. No Mason with whom I have carried on correspondence ever made so gracious an offer. (2) You say in your "Open Letter": "I am forced by my conscience to answer these unfair attacks." I respect your conscience. I gather that what you say in the "Open Letter" is the result of careful thought and reflection. Therefore you deserve a reply. (3) You write in the same letter quoted above that your "Open Letter" "will go to some 600 Lodges" and that you planned to "publicize it widely." Apparently you did just that, for repercussions of this as well as of the earlier article reached our office, and so it seems members of your brotherhood are looking for a reply from this end.

May I begin by expressing my reactions to your argumentation that Luther was a Mason and that if he himself was not a Mason, the friends involved in the kidnapping plot were members of the craft. You say in your first article: "Martin Luther, the peasant who defied the Pope, became a Mason, according to his own story, fifteen days after his earth-shaking burning of the Pope's bull in 1520. Just a few months after joining the Craft armed Brethren rescued him from a plot to capture the 'Soul of the Reformation.'" Your "Open Letter," however, leaves the impression that you felt you had overstated the case. You write:

On pages 172 to 176 of this book [you are referring to Augustine Row, K. T., *Masonic Biographies and Dictionary*. Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1868] appears *what purports to be a statement made by Luther to his son. . . . In the absence of more direct evidence upon the subject, I herewith submit my opinion as to the degree of credence which I think may be attached to the story. . . . It would be vain, therefore, to seek for a Lodge record bearing the name of Martin Luther. . . . I think it highly probable that both Luther and Melanchthon were members of the Brotherhood of Steinmetzen.* [Italics mine.]

Your evidence that Melanchthon may have been a member of the *Steinmetzen* is so far-fetched that there is no purpose in entering in on it. In addition, you yourself admit: "This charter *is said to have emanated* from a convocation . . ."; you also say: "*I believe that it is not denied* that such a convocation was held at Cologne at the time named." (Italics mine.) Nevertheless, in spite of the absence of clear historical evidence that Luther and, for that matter, also Melanchthon were Masons, even though you so modify the sweeping initial statement in your first article that it virtually becomes a retraction, you are determined to demonstrate that Luther owed his life to the brave efforts of Masonic Brethren. You write:

Martin Luther *was* a Mason, loved his membership and praised the values he received from it; or, Martin Luther *was not* a Mason but was protected, sheltered and inspired by the Masons of his day. In either case, Mason in fact or enabled to defy the pope and promote the Reformation through the courage of his Masonic friends, Martin Luther would have quickly died a martyr, his bold body consumed by burning fagots, and Protestantism would have suffocated in its cradle had not the brave Masons of that era stood behind the rebel monk. . . . If Martin Luther was a Mason — fine! If he wasn't — at least he owed his life and success to the protection, sympathy and understanding of the brave Masons of his time. [Italics in text.]

Having posed for Lutherans this dilemma, you conclude: "Either way, it makes the anti-Masonic attacks of certain Lutheran synods a new record in ingratitude."

Now, Mr. Van Cott, your argumentation would be most embarrassing for "certain Lutheran synods" if you had provided irrefutable historical evidence for your assertions. But you provide no such evidence. Furthermore, it is exceedingly doubtful whether there is such evidence. You cannot demonstrate conclusively that there is a historical connection between the *Steinmetzen* and Masons as you employ the term "Masons." Enough information on Luther is now available to enable anyone interested in the facts surrounding Luther's life to examine the record and find out for himself. It is evident from your argumentation that you have two basic concerns: (1) You would like to claim for Masons the honor of having rescued the "Soul of the Reformation" and thus add

more luster to the achievements of Masonry; (2) You would like to have "certain Lutheran synods" appear as ungrateful wretches who, though calling themselves Luther's disciples, are, in reality, untrue to the teachings of the illustrious founder of Lutheranism.

But your futile effort to demonstrate that early sixteenth-century Masons rescued Luther and enabled him to carry out the work of the Reformation, damaging as it is, not to Luther and his followers but to your fraternity, is a matter of secondary importance. I find a more disturbing element in your "Open Letter" — disturbing to "certain Lutheran synods" (you have in mind Lutheran synods affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America). My concern is that you, Mr. Van Cott, are the author of that article. I realize that in that article you are expressing only your own views, for your introductory paragraph informs the reader: "Many sections of the United States are being flooded with Lutheran-inspired leaflets, magazine articles, and other forms of propaganda — all against Masonry. I have read and studied these attacks. It is the policy of Official Masonry to ignore these onslaughts and let the recording of history prove who is right. But speaking for myself, uninstructed and uncensored by any Grand Lodge, I am forced by my conscience to answer these attacks." Nevertheless, your word carries weight in view of your high rank in Masonry and in view also of your journalistic prestige. What is even more disturbing to me personally is that "you read and studied these attacks," and that they evoked in you no other reaction than a restatement of glittering generalities in defense of Masonry. I am coming to conclude that Masonry does not wish or finds it impossible to gainsay the objections raised by Lutherans to the religious beliefs of the craft.

Before examining the five paragraphs of your rejoinder, allow me to share with you my concern regarding the nature and purpose of your organization. It is known as the "Ancient Fraternity Free and Accepted Masons." People therefore believe your organization to be a fraternity, a brotherhood. You repeatedly stress this feature of Masonry. You write: "Masonry is not a religion, unless striving for the Brotherhood of Man . . . is religion"; "Masonry is a Brotherhood of all creeds"; "Masonry welcomes to its Brotherhood Jews," etc.; "Masonry . . . practices the Brotherhood of Man"; "Men of

all creeds, professions, races and stations can meet in the one place in the world where Brotherhood with a capital B is a reality—the Masonic Lodge."

Frankly, I have never heard or read of anyone who disclaimed that Masonry is a brotherhood in the sense in which you define it, though I challenge your statement that the Masonic Lodge is "the one place in the world where Brotherhood with a capital B is a reality." My question to you is: Precisely how does Masonry give evidence that it is a brotherhood? You say: "Masonry . . . practices the Brotherhood of Man." What do you mean? Masonry is not a fraternal benefit society in the sense that it has a life insurance program like that of scores of other fraternal organizations. We know, of course, that Masonry maintains homes for the aged. The Shriners, whose membership is made up of 32° Masons and Knights Templar in good standing, do a great deal for suffering humanity, especially for crippled children. But the Shriners are not a Masonic body. *Statistics Fraternal Societies 1955* lists on pages 52, 53 some thirty widely known fraternal societies which do not provide insurance but pay benefits to their members. I note that the Ancient Fraternity Free and Accepted Masons is conspicuously absent from that list. I should therefore like to know precisely *how* Masonry practices brotherhood, especially "Brotherhood with a capital B." I have almost come to the conclusion that your fraternity practices also "brotherhood" in secret.

But granting that Masonry is a brotherhood, that the Masonic Lodge is "the one place in the world where Brotherhood with a capital B is a reality," that it is a brotherhood which practices brotherly love in an exalted degree, that performs works of charity, mercy, and benevolence far in excess of any other organization, secular or religious—granting all this, the question comes to me: What *else* is Masonry? What is it in addition to being a brotherhood? What are its other aims and objectives?

Some Masonic writers stress the allegory and symbolism of Masonic ritualistic ceremonies; others its religious features; still others its ethical emphasis; and yet others its patriotic ideals. Sometimes one gets the impression that Masonry regards itself as the founder and guardian of the basic principles of our government, though I still do not know whether *all*, or 51, or only 31 of

the 55 signers of the Declaration of Independence were Masons. Nor have I been able to discover to my satisfaction how many presidents of the United States were Masons. Your authorities differ in their opinions. Be that as it may. Every American is glad to know that also Masons played a part in the founding of our Republic, and every American is glad to know, too, that Masons are deeply and consistently concerned about preserving our American heritage. But sometimes one also gets the impression that the true goal of Masonry is to enlighten the American people regarding pretensions and encroachments—real or unreal—of the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore my question to you is: What *else* is Masonry besides being a brotherhood, and what are its other aims and objectives?

May I illustrate why I ask these questions. We have tried for years to grasp and understand the nature and objectives of Masonry apart from it being a brotherhood. We have spent many hours reading Mackey, Pike, Gould, Fort Newton, and other Masonic interpreters of Masonry. We have examined many rituals. We are regular subscribers to, and readers of, the *New Age* magazine. And yet, when we find it necessary to quote from a Masonic authority, we sometimes receive the curt reply: "Masonry recognizes no authorities!" Is this true?

This puts us into an embarrassing quandary. We are told: "Masonry recognizes no authorities!" But about the same time we discover that *New Age* refers to Albert Pike as "our great leader and teacher" (July 1955, p.400) and that "the spirit of Albert Pike still guides Freemasonry to a better understanding" (August 1955, p.471). Soon after we stumble on a statement like this: "He who truly understands Freemasonry knows that *it is a moral philosophy*. . . . No one who reads the Ancient Charges can fail to see that *Freemasonry is a strictly moral institution*." In the same article from which the quote is taken we also discover that Albert Mackey and Albert Pike are called on as witnesses (*New Age*, June 1955, p.340). In the *Texas Grand Lodge* magazine (April 1953, p.151) we read: "*Masonry is a system of ethics based on the principles of true religion*." Now we conclude: Masonry is, in addition to being a brotherhood, a moral institution, a system of ethics.

But we are soon disillusioned. We happen to page around in Mackey's *Masonic Ritualist* and note the statement: "As Masons, we are taught never to commence any great or important undertaking without first invoking the blessing and protection of Deity, and this because *Masonry is a religious institution*, and we thereby show our dependence on and our trust in God" (p. 44). Sometime later we examine a Masonic Bible (Temple-Illustrated edition published by the A. J. Holman Co., Philadelphia) and discover in the introduction (p. 27) the statement: "The Bible is now so closely identified with the Lodge that, for Christian countries, it is one of the very few undisputed Landmarks of Freemasonry. Another is belief in God. These two essentials, belief in a Supreme Being and reverence for His Word, *establish beyond question the character of the Fraternity as a religious institution.*" (All italics in this and preceding paragraph are my own.)

You will, I trust, by now understand, Mr. Van Cott, that for some Lutherans Masonry is a most confusing thing, as confusing as Alice's Wonderland and Mr. Tomkins' world of modern physics. And so I repeat the question: What is Masonry besides being a brotherhood? Is it, or is it not, *a moral institution and system of ethics?* Is it, or is it not, *a religious institution?* And what about Masonic ritualism and symbolism? Are they merely trimmings and trappings intended, as some Masons tell us, to enhance the beauty of the Masonic Lodge and its practices? Or are they to be taken seriously, that is, are they intended to make meaningful those realities which members of the Lodge are expected to experience for the sake of becoming better members of the craft?

Perhaps the solution is something like this: Masonry is primarily a brotherhood, but it is also intensely interested in promoting morality and certain religious beliefs; it is genuinely interested also in national and international affairs, and its ritualism and symbolism are, at the least, a constant reminder of all goals and objectives of Masonry. Yet I nevertheless ask: What is the underlying philosophy of Freemasonry? What is the more or less audible *cantus firmus* discernible in all manifestations of Masonry? If you are disposed and able to answer these questions clearly and concisely, "it might help both sides of the case."

After this digression I shall now submit my rejoinder to your interpretation of the religious implications of Masonry. I shall quote in full each of your five paragraphs and then add my comments.

1. *Worship of the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.* Belief in a Triune God is the privilege of Lutherans. Masons believe *in the light as each individual sees it.* Masonry is not a religion, unless striving for the Brotherhood of Man, universal love, and the end of hatreds is religion. [Italics in text.]

"Belief in the Triune God is the privilege of all Lutherans." This is an unintended understatement. Belief in the Triune God is the privilege and one of the cardinal teachings of the entire Christian Church. All Christians believe that the Triune God alone is God and that all other "Gods," however they are named and defined, are fabrications of the human mind and therefore idols.

"Masons believe in the light as each individual sees it." What you apparently mean to say in terms of the context is that Masonry does not prescribe which "God" Masons should acknowledge as "God." Masonry therefore professes to be entirely neutral with respect to the name and nature of the Divine Being. But, unfortunately, Masonry is not neutral in this matter as I shall attempt to demonstrate a bit later. Masonry has a theology regarding "God."

"Masonry is not a religion." This is your personal opinion. As I have indicated above, some Masons say that Masonry is a "religious institution." What you obviously mean to say is that Masonry is not a religion in the sense in which Buddhism, Mohammedanism, etc., are commonly regarded as religions. May I suggest that we cease quibbling as to whether Masonry is or is not *religion*, or *a religion*, or *a religious institution*. More on this in a later paragraph.

2. *Salvation other than by faith in Jesus Christ.* Masonry in its early years had many Christian influences. It is not a Christian organization. It welcomes to its Brotherhood Jews, Mormons, Unitarians, Confucians, Buddhists, Freethinkers — *all men seeking a better world* and giving other men the right to worship as they please. [Italics in text.]

"Salvation other than by faith in Jesus Christ." Yes, Lutherans, in fact, all Christians, believe that "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12) than the name Jesus. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This teaching of Holy Scripture constitutes the very essence of Christianity. Lutherans believe that the Church of Jesus Christ stands or falls depending on its relation to this teaching. Because they believe in the truth of this teaching and because they themselves have experienced the comfort of this teaching, they are most deeply concerned that this central doctrine, together with God's entire revelation in Holy Scripture, be proclaimed by the church through its pastors, missionaries, and teachers to all people, including Jews, Buddhists, Confucians, Mohammedans, and all others who do not know of it, so that these people, too, having come to faith in Jesus Christ, might have eternal life.

"It [Masonry] is not a Christian organization." You are absolutely right. Masonry does not make this claim as far as I know. But American Masonry *pretends* to be "Christian." In the Blue Lodge the Volume of the Law, that is, the Holy Scriptures (Authorized, or King James, Version) is one of the three "Great Lights." In a large-sized Masonic Bible (*The Holy Bible, Masonic Edition* [Chicago: The John A. Hertel Co., c. 1949]) we read in the introductory chapter (p. 10): "York Rite is the Christian route of Masonry following the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ who said: 'Suffer the little children to come to me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'" We also ask: How do you account for the "Christian" elements in the Royal Arch, the Order of the Red Cross, the Order of Malta, and the Order of the Temple (Knights Templar)? How do you account for the so-called "Christian" degrees in the Scottish rite (18° and 30°)? Why do Knights Templar and other Masonic bodies conduct their own Maundy Thursday service? Why do they have an Easter service to which they at times invite the public? And how do you account for the scores and scores of references and allusions to, and quotations from, the Holy Scriptures in the rituals of the three basic degrees? Check the A. J. Holman Temple-Illustrated edition

of the Masonic Bible, pp. 27—51. No, Masonry is "not a Christian organization." But it undeniably pretends to be "Christian" in character in many of its degrees. We admit that many Masons are thoroughly honest when they tell us that Masonry is "Christian." We know, too, that Masons sometimes become indignant when we tell them that, though Masonry professes to be "Christian," it completely disregards, in its basic degrees, Jesus Christ and His merits and is therefore, in reality, a counterfeit form of Christianity. We contend that Edmond Ronayne many years ago expressed the truth in his *Handbook* (pp. 28, 29) when he wrote:

All allusions made in the ritual to Solomon's Temple (Master Mason's Lodge) are only to be understood as symbolizing the erection of a spiritual temple in the heart, pure and spotless, which Freemasonry professes to build for every one of its members, Jew or Gentile, without the remotest reference to the name or atonement of Jesus Christ. In this way, and only in this, can the philosophy of Freemasonry and its true symbolism be rightly understood; and then it will be discovered that it is such a stupendous mass of infidelity and imposture that modern civilization never witnessed its equal.

"All men seeking a better world and giving other men the right to worship as they please." This sounds innocent enough. In fact, if Masonry aspires to this, it is truly pursuing a high and noble aim. But your statement must be interpreted in terms of its larger context. You say in the first of your concluding paragraphs: "Masonry is the greatest friend of all religions. Wherever it has thrived churches have been free. Where Masonry has been oppressed Dictators of church and state have reduced men to peonage, brain-washed progressive ideas, set civilization on a backward march."

These are sweeping statements and perhaps not intended to be taken too literally. In any case, Masonry is a foe of Roman Catholicism, numerically the largest representative of the Christian religion. Furthermore, I must remind you that Martin Luther, who was not a Mason, championed the Biblical principle that the kingdom of God is dependent for its growth and expansion, not on the sword but on the persuasive power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a principle which is embodied in the very structure of Lutheranism. May I also at least intimate that the horrible and

blasphemous oaths taken by those who are initiated, passed, or raised in the Blue Lodge, if they have any significance at all, compel one to conclude that they have in instances resulted in ostracism and perhaps even in cruel death for those who disassociated themselves from Masonry and who, for reasons of conscience, revealed its secrets. Masonry is a brotherhood. Granted. But it, too, is a sinful brotherhood subject to all the inclinations of the sinful human heart. Your last statement quoted above is so wide and sweeping that it would require a book to make a meaningful reply.

3. *Prayers made not in the name of Jesus Christ.* There can be only one God and Masonry asks all men to approach this one God as they see his manifestations. To pray to Jesus Christ only would be to favor one religion — the Christian church — and Masonry is not a religion, not a church, not the branch of any creed, but rather a *Brotherhood of all creeds seeking a better world.* [Italics in text.]

"To pray to Jesus Christ only would be to favor one religion." May I kindly ask you to recheck what you read in "Lutheran-inspired leaflets, magazine articles, and others forms of propaganda," regarding the place accorded Jesus Christ in Christian prayers. Christians — not Lutherans only — do pray to Jesus Christ, since they believe Him to be God's Son who with the Father and the Spirit is One God. But what particularly offends Lutherans and other Christians is that the prayers prescribed in the Blue Lodge do not invoke the Triune God and give not the slightest hint that they are offered in the name of Jesus Christ, that is, in complete dependence on His meritorious suffering and death. But, as you know, Masonry, in particular the Blue Lodge, does not allow for such prayers. And, so we are informed, individuals who have been initiated, passed, and raised in the Blue Lodge are regarded as full-fledged Masons in every sense of the term. We know indeed that Christian ministers officiating as chaplains in a lodge hall will, on occasion, address the Triune God and perhaps also conclude their prayer with the phrase "in the name of Jesus." Yet when they do so, they do so contrary to explicit directions of your brotherhood; and they do it only when they are reasonably certain that the lodge in which they offer up prayer does not include members who deny and reject Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of mankind.

"There can be only one God and Masonry asks all men to approach this one God as they see his manifestations. . . . Masonry is not a religion. . . ." I shall comment on both statements a bit later.

4. *Its burial ritual says that non-Christians will enter heaven* [italics in text]. The one great God operating the universe has a place for every one of his sons whom he created. To think that Christians only merit immortality is narrow and not in keeping with the omnipotent love of the Creator of this vast universe.

We are most grateful to you, Mr. Van Cott, for verifying, by implication, our interpretation of Masonic burial rituals. For we do say that according to these rituals every Mason who is given a Masonic burial goes to heaven. What is equally offensive to us is that according to your statement Christianity has no "corner" on heaven. At this point you are in total disagreement with the teaching of Holy Scripture. You are frank and open about it, and this we appreciate. But we must inform you that Holy Scripture makes it emphatically clear that whoever hears and knows but rejects Jesus Christ and His Gospel of salvation is eternally lost and damned, and that Gentiles, though they may not have heard the Gospel, are "without excuse" (Rom. 1:18-32) and are under the wrath and condemnation of the holy and righteous God.

"To think that Christians only merit immortality is narrow." I shall comment on this statement a bit later.

5. *Belief in the divine authenticity of the Holy Scripture* [italics in text]. This is in direct opposition to Masonry which demands a belief in God and the immortality of the soul as its sole religious test. Masonry recognizes that many men approach God in different ways and that to be dogmatic and set up one way as the only way is to make mockery of tolerance and brotherhood and set a road-block against any possible Brotherhood of Man.

What you say in answer to the belief of Lutherans "in the divine authenticity of Holy Scripture" is from my point of view an evasion of the issue. May I explain. Lutherans believe that the Triune God revealed His will and grace only to the prophets of the Old Testament and to the Apostles and Evangelists of the New Testament, who recorded it by divine guidance in the writings of the Bible. Lutherans reject the belief of many people that the true

God made known His will and grace also in the Koran and other "sacred books" of Eastern religions. Therefore they are deeply concerned when they read that Masonry reduces the Holy Scriptures, even though it regards it a "Great Light," to the level of other "divine" revelations. But that is precisely what Masonry does. Fort Newton, one of the distinguished interpreters of Masonry, speaks thus of the Holy Scriptures: "Masonry invites to its altar men of all faiths . . . knowing that while they read different volumes, they are in fact reading the same vast Book of the Faith of Man as revealed in the struggle and sorrow of the race in its quest of God. So that, great and noble as the Bible is, Masonry sees it as a symbol of that eternal Book of the Will of God." [Quoted in the A. J. Holman Company Masonic edition of the Holy Bible, c. 1940, p. 52.]

"Masonry . . . demands a belief in God and the immortality of the soul as its sole religious test." As I suggested above, let us stop quibbling as to whether Masonry is *religion*, or *a religion*, or *a religious institution*. You admit that Masonry has a "religious test." I maintain that Masonry has a system of religious beliefs, that it has a theology. This I shall now attempt to demonstrate. I shall first present the Masonic doctrine of God and then the Masonic doctrine of man.

I. THE MASONIC DOCTRINE OF GOD

"Masonry demands a belief in God." You do not stop at that point. You make it explicit that Masonry professes monotheism, the belief in *one* God. You write: "Masonry asks all men to approach this *one* God." Elsewhere you speak of the "*one* great God." By implication you therefore reject polytheism, the belief in many "Gods." One might even infer from what you say that you reject theological dualism, the belief that there are two ultimate principles: one that is good and responsible for all the good in the world, and one that is evil and responsible for all the evil in the world. But you write that there is but *one* God. My question to you is: How do you arrive at this conclusion? Would you say that it is purely a construct of your mind? You will recall that according to the popular religions of the Greeks and Romans there were many "Gods." You may remember, too, that David Hume in his *Dialogs on Natural Religion* demonstrated to the deists of

his day that it is possible on rational grounds to arrive at either monotheism or polytheism. Nevertheless I am glad to know that Masonry, for reasons which I need not develop at this point, holds to monotheism. In any case, one basic element in your doctrine of "God" is that there is but *one* "God." (All italics in this paragraph my own.)

But you also define this one "God." You ascribe to him certain attributes and actions. You say of this "God" that he is a "great God." You refer to his "omnipotent love." You speak of him as the "Creator of this vast universe" and you refer to him as "operating the universe." You also admit that men should pay their respects to this "God," for "Masonry asks all men to approach this one God as they see his manifestations." I take this to mean that men are to honor and praise this "God," perhaps even implore him for help. You are certain, finally, that this "God" "has a place for every one of his sons whom he created." What you mean, if I interpret you correctly, is that this "God" will somehow and at some time appoint to each human being a place of eternal bliss in the hereafter. All this I gather to be the substance of your theology of "God."

The most serious flaw in your theology of "God" is that you assume "the omnipotent love of the Creator" and that "the one great God . . . has a place for every one of his sons whom he created." How do you know this? What is the basis for your assumption? Would it not be equally rational to assume that this "God," besides possessing "omnipotent love," is also a "God" of wrath and vengeance who punishes his fallen creatures and condemns them to eternal doom? As I see it, you are doing exactly what Pike does. He, too, defines "God" in most attractive terms. He refers to him as the "One, Supreme, Infinite in Goodness, Wisdom, Foresight, Justice, and Benevolence, the Creator, Disposer, and Preserver of all things" (Masonic Edition of the Holy Bible published by the John A. Hertel Co., Chicago, p. 17). But according to the same Albert Pike, the "God" of Masonry is also the "Absolute and Infinite Intelligence, which is the One Supreme Deity, most feebly and misunderstandingly characterized as an 'Architect'" (p. 9 in the John A. Hertel Company Masonic Bible referred to). In other words, Pike is merely fabricating a "God" according to his

own moods and poetic and philosophic fancies. Some modern scientists and philosophers are less anthropomorphically and idealistically inclined, and so they speak of deity as "energy" with a capital E.

We Lutherans say on the basis of divine revelation in Holy Scripture that there is only *one* God and that it is possible for man to have an inkling of the reality and even of some of the attributes and actions of this God. But we also say that man in his fallen state is altogether too much inclined to fabricate for himself a "golden calf" which he worships, that is, to make for himself images and likenesses of "God" which suit his own purposes. And so we believe that the true God, that is, the Triune God, may be known only from Holy Scripture, where He revealed Himself for what He is and does. There He informs man that He is truly the Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of this vast universe. There He also declares that man is a fallen sinner and the object of His terrible wrath. There He, and that is the chief and final purpose of His revelation, tells man that in His love and grace, and because of the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ on Calvary, He reconciled the world to Himself, so that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and accepts in faith His redeeming love is saved now and forever.

II. THE MASONIC DOCTRINE OF MAN

The second part of the "religious test" imposed on Masons is, as you say, "belief in the immortality of the soul." I conclude that Masonry has also a doctrine of man. You believe that man has a soul. Again I ask: How do you know this? As you are aware, many people with a completely naturalistic and mechanistic outlook on life deny that man has a soul. They say that man has at best a bagful of psychological experiences, but no soul. You believe, too, that man's soul is immortal though you, in keeping with Masonic practice, do not define what "immortal" means to you. I need not remind you however that Masonic burial rituals are more explicit. They speak also of a resurrection of the body in terms such as these: "We commit his body to the grave. Earth to earth. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. There to remain till the trump shall sound on the resurrection morn." (George E. Simons, *Standard Masonic Monitor*, p.217.) Furthermore, though you may

have attached no special significance to the term "merit" in the statement: "To think that Christians only merit immortality," I must comment on it. I cannot but infer that Masons believe that man *merits* immortality and, for that matter, other blessings which fall to his lot in this and in yonder life. I read in the *Temple-Illustrated Masonic Bible* (p. 2) that according to Masonic belief "character determines destiny." In Simons' *Standard Masonic Monitor* (p. 225) I note the statement in the funeral ritual: "That through thy love we may be received into thine everlasting kingdom to enjoy, in union with the souls of our departed friends, *the just reward of a pious and virtuous life*" (italics mine). In the same *Monitor* I read on p. 242: "May we so faithfully discharge the great duties which we owe to God, to our neighbor, and to ourselves, that when at last it shall please the Grand Master of the Universe to summon us into His eternal presence, *the Trestle-board of our lives will pass such inspection that it will insure unspeakable and perpetual happiness at his right hand*" (italics mine).

Masonry, so I conclude, may or may not be *religion, a religion, or a religious institution*, but *it has a system of religious beliefs, it has a theology* in which are included most basic religious elements. But this theology is not the theology revealed by God in Holy Scripture. It is in many respects a caricature of Biblical theology. In other respects it is in violent opposition to Biblical teaching. For this reason some Lutherans do not approve of the religious beliefs of Masonry.

May I, in conclusion, return to Luther. If Martin Luther had known that the friends who meant to rescue him in the forest at Waltershausen and to conduct him to the Wartburg were brethren of the craft in the sense in which you explicitly and by implication summarize the religious beliefs of Masonry, he would hardly have entrusted himself to them without offering the most stubborn resistance. He would have, of this I am certain, said words to them as harsh as those which the Savior Jesus Christ, according to Matt. 16:23, directed to Peter.

One final note regarding Luther. You quote with approval Luther's heroic confession at Worms, "It is neither right nor safe to act against conscience. God help me. Amen." Luther did say this. But Luther must not be interpreted out of context. His complete

closing statement at Worms reads: "Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures or evident reason (for I believe neither in the pope nor councils alone, since it has been established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), *I am bound by the Scriptures adduced to me, and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God*, and I am neither able nor willing to recant, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. God help me. Amen." (Italics mine.)

"My conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God." Against such a conscience, Luther says, it is neither safe nor right to act. Lutherans who voiced their objections to the religious beliefs of Freemasonry are people whose "conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God." This is the ultimate reason that they dared to protest against the religious beliefs of Freemasonry. From your point of view, Mr. Van Cott, they were spreading "anti-Masonic propaganda." From their point of view they were, and still are, concerned only about confessing what they believe to be the Word of God recorded in Holy Scripture. They cannot do otherwise.

Respectfully,

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