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The Church and the Lodge Problem

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CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

The Church and the Lodge Problem
THEO. NICKEL

Resetting Our Sights in Christian Education
RANDOLPH CRUMP MILLER

Homiletics

Brief Studies

Book Review

Vol. XXXVI

March 1965

No. 3

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The Church and the Lodge Problem

THEO. NICKEL

In this age of ecumenicity and worldwide religious brotherhood, we may seem to be out of step in raising once again the question of whether a Christian may hold membership in what is sometimes called a lodge, or more technically, a fraternal organization. But we write this hoping only to serve the interests of God-pleasing ecumenical relations and Christian brotherhood. In this article we propose to cite instances from the teachings and ritual of the Masonic Order (Freemasonry) to show that commitment to this lodge and membership in the Christian church are not compatible. Many of the fundamental claims and demands of Freemasonry cannot be honored by one who would live according to the claim which Jesus Christ has upon him.

Not all lodges and fraternal organizations are identical.¹ But many of them, in their obligations and rituals, make themselves guilty of compromising and vitiating that which is most sacred in the religion of our Lord, the holy Gospel, the

¹ Some Christian denominations, including The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, maintain committees which seek to keep abreast of the current situation in fraternal orders. It is always advisable for the pastor to secure the latest and most reliable information when dealing with any phase of the lodge problem.

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teaching that we are saved by grace, through faith, apart from our works. And it is this factor which compels us to label many modern lodges as non-Christian. In the forefront of these is Freemasonry.

I. THE OATHS AND THE PROBLEM OF RELIABLE INFORMATION

It is not difficult to study Freemasonry objectively, despite the sworn secrecy of the order.² Let us look for a moment at some of the oaths by which the Masonic member is obligated to complete secrecy under threat of the severest penalties. We shall examine those of the first three degrees in some detail.

The obligation of the entered apprentice or first degree reads as follows:

"I, a Candidate of my own free will and accord, in the presence of Almighty God and this worshipful Lodge, erected to Him and dedicated to the holy Saints John, do hereby and hereon³ most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear that I will always hail, ever conceal, and never reveal any of the secret arts, parts, or points of the hallowed mysteries of ancient Freemasonry, which have been heretofore, may at this time, or shall at any future period be communicated to me as such, to any

² It should be carefully noted, however, that the primary objection of the Christian church to Freemasonry does not lie in the latter's insistence upon secrecy. The pastor who makes this the fundamental issue will rarely be able to convince a Mason that he has materially denied his Lord by joining the order.

³ His right hand is on the Bible, his left under the Bible, Square and Compasses.

person or persons whomsoever, except it be to a true and lawful brother of this degree, or within a regularly constituted Lodge of Masons, and neither unto him nor them until by strict trial, due examination, or legal information I shall have found him or them as lawfully entitled to the same as I am myself.

"(2) I furthermore promise and swear that I will not write, print, paint, stamp, stain, cut, carve, mark, nor engrave them; nor cause the same to be done upon anything movable or immovable, capable of preserving the least impression of a word, syllable, letter or character, whereby the same may become legible or intelligible to any person under the canopy of heaven.

"All this I most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear, with a firm and steadfast resolution to keep and perform the same, without any equivocation, mental reservation, or secret evasion of mind whatever; binding myself under a no less penalty than that of having my throat cut across, my tongue torn out by its roots and buried in the rough sands of the sea at low water mark where the tide ebbs and flows twice in twenty-four hours, should I ever knowingly violate this my solemn obligation as an Entered Apprentice. So help me God and keep me steadfast in the due performance of the same."⁴

The oath of the Fellowcraft, or of the Second Degree of Freemasonry, repeats

⁴ *King Solomon and His Followers* (Illinois), rev. ed. (New York: Allen Publishing Company, 1954), pp. 21—23. It is commonly assumed that William Morgan (1775—1826) was the first American Freemason who divulged in print the ritualism of the Blue Lodge (first three degrees). Since Morgan's day, the rituals of the first three Masonic degrees are available in authentic cipher code books. One publisher of such cipher code books is the Allen Publishing Co.

the first paragraph of this oath almost verbatim. After several additional vows, it concludes with the following oath of secrecy:

"All this I most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear, with a firm and steadfast resolution to keep and perform the same without any equivocation, mental reservation, or secret evasion of mind whatever, binding myself under a no less penalty than that of having my left breast torn open, my heart plucked out and given as a prey to the beasts of the field and the fowl of the air, should I ever knowingly violate this my solemn obligation of a Fellow Craft Mason. So help me God and keep me steadfast in the due . . . performance of the same."⁵

The obligation of the Master Mason's, or Third, Degree is introduced as follows. The Worshipful Master, after rapping three times with the gavel and causing the Lodge brethren to rise, says to the candidate: "Brother . . . In your advancement thus far you have repeatedly assured us it [the taking of the two previous oaths] was of your own free will and accord. If you are still of the same mind, you will advance to the Altar, kneel on your naked knees, your hands resting on the Holy Bible, Square and Compasses, in which due form you will say, 'I, repeat your name, and say after me:

'I _____, a Brother of my own free will and accord, in the presence of Almighty God and this worshipful Lodge erected to Him and dedicated to the holy Saints John, do hereby and hereon⁶ most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear that I will always hail,

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 69 f.

⁶ His hands on the Bible, Square and Compasses.

and ever conceal and never reveal any of the secret arts, parts or points of the Master Mason's Degree to any person or persons whomsoever, except it be to a true and lawful brother of this Degree, or within a regularly constituted Lodge of Master Masons, and neither unto him nor them until by strict trial, due examination or legal examination I shall have found him or them as lawfully entitled to the same as I am myself.'

[After two further oaths, which we omit here in the interest of brevity, the candidate continues]

'(4) Furthermore, that I will keep the secrets of a worthy brother Master Mason as inviolable as my own, when communicated to, and received by me as such, murder and treason excepted. . . .

'(7) Furthermore, that I will not sit in a Lodge of Clandestine Masons, nor converse upon the secrets of Freemasonry with a Clandestine Mason, nor with one who is under the sentence of expulsion, to my knowledge, while under such sentence. . . .

'(11) Furthermore, that I will not give the Grand Hailing Sign of Distress of a Master Mason⁷ unless in real distress, or in cases of the most imminent danger; in a regularly constituted Lodge of Master Masons; or in a secret place of Masonic instructions; and should I see the sign given, or hear the words accompanying

⁷ NOTE: This sign is made by raising both hands high and straight over the head, the palms facing forward. Then the hands are dropped so as first to be level with the ears, then level with the shoulders, then dropped to the sides. The words accompanying this sign are, "O Lord my God — Is there no help — for the widow's son," spoken at the different levels of the raised hands respectively.

it, I will repair to the relief of the person so giving it, if there is a greater probability of saving his life than losing my own.

'(12) Furthermore, that I will not give the Grand Masonic Word⁸ in any other manner, or form, than that in which I shall hereafter receive it, and then only in low breath.'⁹

'All this I most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear, with a firm and steadfast resolution to keep and perform the same, without any equivocation, mental reservation or secret evasion of mind whatever; binding myself under a no less penalty than that of having my body severed in twain, my bowels taken from thence and burned to ashes, and the ashes scattered to the four winds of heaven, that no trace or remembrance may be had of so vile and perjured a wretch as I, should I ever knowingly violate this my solemn obligation of a Master Mason. So help me God and keep me steadfast in the due performance of the same.'¹⁰

The entire content of the obligation of the *First Degree* is a commitment to secrecy, the penalty for violation being that "of having my throat cut across, my tongue torn out by its roots and buried in the rough sands of the sea. . . ." In the *Fellowcraft Degree* the pledge of secrecy is repeated in the opening paragraph of the oath, the penalty for failure to comply being no less than "that of having my left

⁸ NOTE: This word varies. It is sometimes MAH-HAH-BONE, or MAK-AH-BAYNE, or MAK-BIN-EH. All three forms are used.

⁹ The form is on "the five points of fellowship. . . . foot to foot, knee to knee, breast to breast, hand to back, and cheek to cheek, or mouth to ear," usually to left ear. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 107 f.

breast torn open, my heart plucked out and given as a prey to the beasts of the field and the fowl of the air." In the *Master Mason's Degree* this pledge of secrecy is found in paragraphs 1, 7, 11, and 12, and failure to keep it brings the penalty "of having my body severed in twain, my bowels taken from thence and burned to ashes, and the ashes scattered to the four winds of heaven etc. . . ."

People who have taken such vows, even though they should later cease to approve of them, will frequently hesitate to break them, lest in so doing they invite upon themselves the wrath of the brethren of the Craft. A pastor will often find it difficult objectively to discuss the Lodge and its teachings with a member of his flock who may have strayed into the order. The Masonic member is likely to be hampered in this discussion by the fear of his brethren in the Craft or by the remembrance of the penalties of his obligation which, as he was so often told, was taken "of his own free will and accord."

Booksellers often will refrain from stocking books and pamphlets that expose the secrets of the Order, since thereby they invite upon themselves the wrath of the Lodge. Walton Hannah, a Church of England priest, who has since joined the Roman Catholic Church, found this true in England. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, for instance, of which the then Archbishop of Canterbury (himself a Freemason) was president, issued a directive to its bookshops that *Darkness Visible*,¹¹ a popular exposé of Masonry, must not be stocked.

¹¹ Walton Hannah, *Darkness Visible* (London: Augustine Press, 1952). See also his *Christian by Degrees* (London: Augustine Press, 1954), especially p. 45, n. 1, and p. 46, n. 3.

Even the published interpretations and evaluations of Freemasonry by its own chief exponents and defenders must be used with caution, since they are not accepted by the Craft as authoritative for, and as binding upon, the individual member. To quote from Mackey or Pike or other Masonic authorities is likely to draw the reply, "But these men present merely their own interpretation of the Craft. They have a right to do that. But I also have the right to have my own interpretation." Now it is the boast of Freemasonry that any interpretation is permissible, including the Christian. It is a fact, however, as Walton Hannah points out, that "no book has ever been written, or in my opinion could be written, that explains the ritual in terms compatible with the full Christian faith."¹² And it is a fact that Masonic members rarely try to present an exclusively Christian interpretation.

How shall we, then, effectively and successfully examine this order? For our evaluation we shall restrict ourselves to the use of the rituals, since through them the principles of Freemasonry are inculcated and by them the candidates are initiated. Here we stand in the presence of the things that are being said and done in the lodge room. Here we have the ideas that are expressed and set before the initiate as he joins the order and participates in its ceremonies. And these things are a must. They may not be altered. The ritual itself requires this. It states, "Our ancient landmarks you are carefully to preserve and not suffer them, on any pretense, to be infringed, or countenance

¹² *Christian by Degrees*, p. 13.

a deviation from our established customs."¹³ The ritual also states:

"In your present character it is expected that at all our assemblies you will observe the solemnities, that you will preserve the ancient usages and customs of the Fraternity sacred and inviolate, and thus, by your example, induce others to hold them in due veneration."¹⁴

It is in the ritual itself, therefore, and in what it expresses and says to the candidate while he is being initiated into the order that we find Freemasonry guilty of doctrine and practice that violates the Gospel.

Now someone may ask, "But are the rituals actually available so that they can be truly known and that justice may be done them in our evaluation of them?" The answer is that by means of exposés and printed code books and from the corroborating testimony of seceders, which all can be tried and tested through the published writings of freemasonry itself, reliable rituals are available for study.¹⁵

While it is true that the ceremonies of the Masonic Order practiced in England vary to some extent from those practiced in Ireland, France, and America; and while those of various states also differ to some degree from one another, they are nevertheless fundamentally the same. For our study and evaluation we shall restrict ourselves to the ceremonies as they are currently practiced in the state of Illinois and

¹³ *King Solomon and His Followers*, pp. 22, 70, 110.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁵ Basic Masonic rituals, including coded rituals for each state, can be obtained from the National Christian Association, 850 W. Madison St., Chicago, Ill. Although this organization is dedicated to an anti-Masonic program, its Masonic material is accurate and reliable.

as they are given in the cipher code book entitled *King Solomon and His Followers*. This edition has been compared with several others from other publishing houses and from other states, and all have been found to be in substantial agreement.

However, we have always felt that really to understand Freemasonry, one ought to see the ritual dramatized, since the teachings of the Craft are inculcated by the enactment of a drama in which the initiate himself plays a role. Accordingly, we will also attempt to depict some of the dramatic symbolism of the craft in the remainder of this article.

It would not be decisive for the nature of Freemasonry to quote from the statements and resolutions of those church bodies which have officially pronounced against the Masonic Order. But we would mention in passing that to our knowledge all the major Lutheran bodies have passed critical resolutions of one form or another against the theological principles for which this order stands. The wording or the purpose of one or another resolution may not be wholly satisfactory, but most groups are in agreement that loyalty to the Masonic Order and uncompromising subscription to the Lutheran Confessions are inconsistent. We maintain this position in the pronouncements of our own body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.¹⁶

¹⁶ See, for example, *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Article I. For the official position of all the major Lutheran bodies in this country see *The Lutheran Churches View Fraternal Organizations* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963). We would direct the reader's attention to a pamphlet by a Roman Catholic priest, which succinctly states his denomination's reasons for objecting to Freemasonry. Joseph I. Malloy, *May Catholics Be Masons?* (New York: The Paulist Press, n. d.). The position of other church bodies is reported in Hannah, *Darkness Visible*, pp. 67—78.

II. FREEMASONRY AND THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF GRACE

A. In this thesis we propose to show that the official teachings and ritual of Freemasonry so thoroughly confuse the Biblical doctrine of grace with its own doctrine of merit that, in the words of St. Paul, "grace is no longer grace" (Rom. 11:6). This is one of the central teachings of the Bible; it is one of the central themes of the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church. But it is just this doctrine which Masonry vitiates and destroys by what it says in its rituals. This is evident most clearly from what its ritual states concerning the Lambskin Apron.

In the *First or Entered Apprentice Degree* this apron is presented to the candidate in a very impressive ceremony. It is called "the badge of a Mason" and is declared to be "more honorable than the Star and Garter, or any other order that can be conferred upon you at this time, or at any future period, by king, prince, potentate, or any other person, except he be a Mason."¹⁷ A review of the initiation is given subsequent to the bestowal of the Lambskin Apron, when the candidate is told the following: "You were presented with the Lambskin, or white Leather apron, because the lamb has in all ages been deemed an emblem of innocence. He, therefore, who wears the lambskin or white leather apron as the badge of a Mason, is thereby continually reminded of that purity of conduct and life which is so essentially necessary to his gaining admission into the celestial lodge where the supreme Architect of the Universe presides."¹⁸

¹⁷ *King Solomon and His Followers*, p. 25.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Here you have a statement which teaches that a necessary requisite for gaining admission into heaven is a man's "purity of conduct and life." Scripture is emphatic and clear that the life and death and rising to life again of our Lord Jesus have achieved our salvation and assured our admission into God's presence; that nothing of our own can or need be added; that we are saved entirely by grace, through faith. Salvation is "not your own doing," says the apostle; "it is the gift of God, not because of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph. 2:8 f.)

Good works are the manifestation of faith, the inseparable companion of that faith which is centered in Jesus Christ and which is the sole path to Paradise. Justification by grace alone, through faith alone! these are the shibboleths of the Bible and of the Reformation. To be in error here is to come under the fearful curse of the apostle who said, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8 f.). Any person who adds "the purity of conduct and life" to his faith in Christ as an essential means of admittance into eternal life is thereby automatically cut off from Jesus Christ and His salvation, as St. Paul says, "You are severed from Christ you who would be justified by the Law" (i. e., who look upon your deeds as having redemptive or admittance value with God), "you have fallen away from grace." (Gal. 5:4)

But there are other statements in the ritual which also are tantamount to a rejection of Jesus Christ. In the *First or Entered Apprentice Degree*, for instance, the Secretary is ordered by the Worshipful

Master, to "take with you the Stewards, retire and propound the usual interrogatories." The Secretary thereupon receives the replies to the six questions usually asked the candidate for initiation. Then he instructs the candidate as follows: "Even the ceremonies of gaining admission within these walls are emblematical of events which all mankind must sooner or later experience. They are emblematical, at least in some small degree, of your great and last change, of your exit from this world to the world to come.

"You are undoubtedly aware that whatever a man may acquire on earth, whether wealth, honor, titles, or even his own merits, can never serve him as a passport to the Grand Lodge above, but previous to his gaining admission there, he must find himself poor, penniless, blind and naked, dependent on the will and pleasure of the Supreme Grand Master. He must be divested of the rags of his own righteousness and clothed in a garment from on high.

"And in order to impress this more deeply on your mind it will be necessary that you be divested of a portion of your outward apparel and clothed in a garment furnished you by the Worshipful Master of this Lodge, a garment similar to that worn by all candidates who have gone this way before you."¹⁹

Upon declaring himself willing to submit, the candidate, whether pagan or Christian, is given a garment furnished by the lodge. He is thus prepared for a ceremony of initiation which is emblematic of man's entrance into heaven. This very act, therefore, constitutes in itself a rejection of Jesus Christ as the only

means of entering everlasting life, and as the only expiation for our sins (John 10:9; 2 Cor. 5:21), especially since the garment employed for the rite is said to be emblematic of "the garment from on high," and is presented not only to those who believe in Jesus Christ, but also to those who deny Him, whose only requisite for receiving it and for being accepted into the lodge is that they "believe in the existence of God" and "promise to conform to the usages and customs of the Fraternity."²⁰

To give this garment, therefore, and to accept it (as the ritual states), together with "all candidates who have gone before," including rejectors of Jesus Christ, is in itself a denial of Him. It is like saying, "Even those who reject Jesus can obtain the garment of righteousness which fits them for everlasting life." But to say this is to deny Jesus, who said, "No one cometh unto the Father but by Me." (John 14:6)²¹

In the closing lecture of the *Entered Apprentice Degree* something is said concerning *the Common Gavel*, which also contains false instructions about the way of life. There the following is propounded: ". . . we as Free and Accepted Masons are taught to make use of it [i. e., the common gavel] for the more noble and glorious

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 11 f.

²¹ Attention should also be called to the lecture on the perfect Ashlar (i. e., a hewn or squared stone which has been polished). The rough Ashlar reminds the Mason of his "rude and imperfect state by nature." The perfect Ashlar symbolizes "that state of perfection at which we hope to arrive by a virtuous education, our own endeavors, and the blessing of God." See Hannah, *Darkness Visible*, p. 38. Cp. Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Ps. 51:5; John 3:6 f.; Rom. 7:18; Eph. 2:1-3; Heb. 10:14; etc.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 12 f.

purpose of divesting our hearts and consciences of the vices and superfluities of life, thereby fitting our minds, as living stones, for that spiritual building, that House not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens."²²

Certainly it is a good thing to teach that we should divest our consciences of our vices and superfluities, but to add that thereby we are "fitting our minds, as living stones, for that spiritual building . . . eternal in the Heavens" is again teaching salvation by one's doing, a doctrine which comes under the curse of Holy Scripture (Gal. 1:8,9) and which, if believed, will rob us of salvation (Gal. 2:16), for "by works of the Law shall no one be justified." (Rom. 3:20)

In evident opposition to these Scriptural teachings the Master Mason is taught in a lecture on the "Sword and the All-seeing Eye," that "The Sword pointing to the Naked Heart demonstrates that justice will sooner or later overtake us; and although our thoughts, words, and actions may be hidden from the eyes of man, yet that All-Seeing Eye . . . pervades the inmost recesses of the heart and will reward us according to our merits."²³

Finally in *the charge of the Master Mason's Degree* we have another statement for instruction, which climaxes everything that precedes it. There it is stated: "And now, my brethren, let us see to it, and so regulate our lives by the plumbline of justice, ever squaring our actions by the square of virtue, that when the Grand Warden of Heaven shall call for us we may be found all ready."²⁴

The exhortation continues: "Let us imitate in all his varied perfection him, who, when assailed by the hands of murderous craftsmen, maintained his integrity even in death, and sealed his principles with his vital blood." The reference is to Hiram Abif, who allegedly assisted King Solomon in the building of the temple, and was slain during its construction. "Let us emulate his amiable and virtuous character, his unfeigned piety to God, and his inflexible fidelity to his trust. . . . Then when our dissolution draws nigh, and the cold winds of death come sighing around us . . . with joy shall we obey the summons of the Grand Warden of Heaven and go from our labors on earth to eternal refreshment in the paradise of God, where by the benefit of the pass of a pure and blameless life, and an unshaken confidence in the merits of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, shall we gain ready admission into the celestial Lodge where the Supreme Architect of the Universe presides. There, placed at His right Hand, He will be pleased to pronounce us just and upright Masons."²⁵

Comment is hardly necessary. To teach that we shall "gain ready admission into the celestial lodge" or heaven "by the benefit of the pass of a pure and blameless life and an unshaken confidence in the merits of the Lion of the tribe of Judah" is not Christian.

Even if the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah" were meant to allude to Christ, the statement would still be false. For if there is one doctrine which St. Paul hammers home again and again, it is this: that our works do not contribute an iota to our salvation;²⁶ that it is Jesus Christ *alone* who

²² Ibid., p. 54.

²³ Ibid., p. 145. See Gal. 3:10-13; Titus 3:4-7; Matt. 19:27-20:16.

²⁴ *King Solomon and His Followers*, p. 150.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 151.

²⁶ Rom. 3:19, 22, 27; 5:6-8; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Gal. 2:16; 5:2-6; Eph. 2:1-10; Phil. 3:8, 9; Titus 3:4-7.

redeemed and saves us, and that He does this entirely *apart from our works*.²⁷ Saint Paul condemns with an anathema anyone, even an angel, should he presume to alter his Gospel in the least. He warns that to trust in a single work of our own for admittance into everlasting life is to be cut off from Jesus Christ and thus to lose our salvation entirely. "You are severed from Christ [literally "completely cut off" from Christ], you who would be justified by the Law; you have fallen away from grace" (Gal. 5:4). Hence our so-called blameless life dare never be placed alongside faith as our pass to heaven. To accept this statement of the ritual, or to pass it on to others, therefore, is to stumble, or to cause others to stumble, at the same stone at which Israel stumbled already in the days of Paul. For the apostle says, "that Israel, who pursued the righteousness which is based on Law, did not succeed in fulfilling that Law. Why? Because they did not pursue it through faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone." (Rom. 9:31 f.)

Good works are necessary to faith. Good works are the fruits of faith,²⁸ but they are never an additional price of admission into God's presence. They can add nothing to the price that Christ has already paid for our admission into everlasting life. With St. Paul we say, therefore, as every genuine Christian must say: "[We who] know that a man is not justified by works of the Law, but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by

²⁷ Rom. 3:21-26; 5:8, 9, 18, 19; 1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 3:13, 14; Eph. 2:13-18.

²⁸ Gal. 5:6; Eph. 2:10; Rom. 3:31; 6:1-18; James 2:14-18.

works of the Law, because by works of the Law shall no one be justified." (Gal. 2:16)

B. With its modified code of ethics as expressed in its Obligation, Freemasonry also undermines the Christian code of ethics, with its demand for radical obedience.

We should again remind the reader that the essence of Masonry lies in the various oaths of obligation which the candidate must accept as he advances from degree to degree. For example, the following dialog takes place in connection with the ritual of the Third or Master Mason's Degree.

"Worshipful Master: Brother Senior Warden, are you a Master Mason?

Senior Warden: I am.

Worshipful Master: What makes you a Master Mason?

Senior Warden: My Obligation."²⁹

Now let us study these oaths of obligation as they are found in the rituals of the first three degrees of Masonry. First let us consider the very nature of these oaths of obligation. By reason of the attached penalty they are in each case so constructed as to compel one to keep them for fear of the invoked consequences. But such oaths are categorically forbidden in the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus Christ Himself, since a Christian's yea is to be a yea without the addition of an oath. (Matt. 5:33-37; James 5:12)

Moreover, in the Fellowship and Master Mason's Degree the promise is made under oath, "that I will conform to all the laws, rules and regulations of the Fellowcraft

²⁹ *King Solomon and His Followers*, p. 97. See also pp. 99, 163, 166, where directions are given for opening and closing the lodge for business. These directions include the repetition of all the signs which symbolize the oaths and penalties of the first three degrees.

Degree, as far as they shall come to my knowledge," and "that I will conform to and abide by all the laws, rules and regulations of the Master Mason's Degree, and of the Lodge of which I shall hereafter become a member; and that I shall ever maintain and support the Constitution, laws and edicts of the Grand Lodge under which the same shall be holden, so far as they shall come to my knowledge." This, in effect, involves promising under oath complete submission to rules and laws and regulations before knowing what they may turn out to be. (Matt. 14:6-9)

No. 4 of the Master Mason's oath, "that I will keep the secrets of a worthy brother Master Mason as inviolable as my own, when communicated to, and received by me as such, murder and treason excepted" may involve the Christian in an intolerable moral dilemma.

No. 5, "that I will aid and assist all worthy destitute brother Masons, their widows and orphans, I knowing them to be such, as far as their necessities require and my ability will permit, without material injury to myself or family," may be permissible, as long as it is not permitted to limit the radical demands of our Lord. (Matt. 5:43-48; 7:12)

No. 7, "that I will not sit in a lodge of Clandestine Masons, nor converse upon the secrets of Freemasonry, with a Clandestine Mason, nor with one who is under sentence of expulsion, to my knowledge, while under such sentence," may create an obstacle between the Mason and the spiritual care of his non-Masonic pastor, who is required by God to be his spiritual shepherd (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17; 2 Tim. 4:1-5), and whom the Mason is required not to despise but to hear. (Luke 10:16)

No. 9, "that I will not cheat, wrong, nor defraud a Master Mason's Lodge, nor a brother of this Degree, nor supplant him in any of his laudable undertakings, but will give him due and timely notice that he may be warned of approaching danger, if in my power," must not be permitted to narrow Christian responsibilities in the light of the Seventh Commandment and the Golden Rule. (Matt. 7:12)

Several words of caution are in order here. One must be careful when arguing from the modified morality of the oath, since in the Charge of the First Degree the Entered Apprentice is enjoined to do his duty to his neighbor and his country in an exemplary fashion, even to the extent of the Golden Rule.³⁰ However, this charge was spoken before he took his oath of obligation in the Third Degree, and the Charge does not make him a Mason, nor bring with it a penalty, but the oath does. Nor is the Charge given in the form of an oath, but the code of morality demanded of him when under oath is a modified code of behavior which no genuine Christian can condone.

C. And finally, we call attention to the *Masonic use of the Sacred Scriptures*, or the Volume of the Sacred Law, the V. S. L., as they refer to the Bible. This use is indicated in a statement made in the Dec. 19, 1953, issue of the *Freemason's Chronicle*, which we quote verbatim: "Freemasonry being embracing all religions, the V. S. L. [Volume of the Sacred Law] is for each candidate the Book of his Faith by which is pledged his promise, as proves the well-known fact that in the Far East, not one but several such volumes may be found in use in the same Lodge, and even the

³⁰ King Solomon and His Followers, p. 44.

same day's ceremonies, each in turn as the one binding on he who pledges himself upon it. Being thus undenominational in character, as it has been since the Union of 1813, there can be no right cause for a Master to read any passage of the Book of one particular faith to a gathering comprising adherents to others, and it could be regarded as a breach of the understanding."³¹

Now listen to what the ritual says to the Entered Apprentice in a Charge addressed to him in the First Degree, "As a Mason, you are to regard the Volume of the Sacred Law as the great Light in your profession; to consider it as the unerring standard of truth and justice, and to regulate your actions by the Divine precepts it contains. In it you will learn the important duties you owe to God, your neighbor, and yourself, etc." How, we ask, can a Christian agree to have the ritual say this to the Mohammedan with reference to the Koran, or to other non-Christian religions with reference to their sacred writings without doing violence to Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit of God?

III. THE GOSPEL CONFRONTS THE LODGE MEMBER

In the second part of this article, we directed our attention to the fundamental point that participation in the rites, the symbolism, and the teachings of the Masonic Order involves one in the proclamation of "another gospel," which in effect destroys the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith. In Part III we shall point briefly to some of the practical courses of action which flow from this basic conviction.

³¹ *Christian by Degrees*, p. 43, n. 1.

The confrontation with Freemasonry will be effective in the measure that the Christian church sees this key issue and unites in its witness against this proclamation of "another gospel." This principle must be applied at several levels. The individual denomination, and that would also apply to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, must strive for greater unity in its own attitude toward membership in objectionable lodges. The Lutheran bodies throughout the world ought to find this a common issue in which they can unite. The Gospel itself is at stake, and no Lutheran church group can remain placid or unconcerned about any threat to the Gospel. Discussions with lodge leaders at the national level surely should include representatives of all Lutheran groups.

But this concern for the Gospel is not a uniquely Lutheran feature. It must characterize each denomination which calls itself Christian. Representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches—yes, every denomination which is determined to preach Paul's Gospel has a stake in this concern. For those Christians who are not convinced that this is a question which affects them, we suggest that they look at Masonic hymnals, the Masonic Monitors, and the Masonic prayers and observe for themselves how carefully every mention of Jesus Christ has been avoided in the regular work of the order.³²

We feel that local groups of Lutheran pastors or church federations must make their voice heard on this matter. So often national leaders of Freemasonry tell us

³² The so-called Christian degrees do not really represent an exception to this rule, for in them Christ is referred to only as a perfect moral exemplar.

that their members are completely unaware of any difference between the teachings of their church and of a given lodge which they have joined. United witness and action at the local level would, in many cases, convince national leaders to give immediate attention to changes in ritual and to eliminate those features which violate the Gospel and Christian ethics. So long as this local pressure is not felt, the national leadership is not likely to make changes simply to satisfy a committee of one church body. Representatives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod continue to meet with national Masonic leaders, although progress of a substantial nature has not yet been registered. But the channels of communication themselves are important.

Freemasonry has once again launched an intensive program of education among its members. The current religious trends in the United States with their emphasis on "religion in general" and the "great creedless society" make the teachings and ritual of Masonry an attractive answer to the "religious search" of many.

As in many other areas of the church's life, so also in this area a prophetic voice is needed, crying out in the American wilderness, "Repent ye, and believe in the Gospel." Laxity on the part of the churches only complicates the problem. It encourages lodge leaders in their efforts to gain Christians for membership, and it confuses many Christians who are on the fence.

Now we should like to suggest a few principles for dealing with the individual who is a member both of a non-Christian lodge and a Christian congregation. Obviously, the first principle is to lead this

person to a clear understanding of the meaning of the Gospel. Every experienced pastor knows how difficult it is for his people, and for himself, for that matter, to retain a profound insight into the meaning of God's free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. He knows also how he must continually repeat this glorious truth from the pulpit and in every other speaking and counseling situation. Experience demonstrates clearly that only where the Gospel is made the central issue is there much hope for a God-pleasing resolution of the lodge question.

The evangelically oriented pastor knows the meaning of the word "patience" in dealing with these individuals. He gives freely, willingly, and regularly of his time and his talents. He is sensitive to the fact that in matters of this sort, offense can be given as well as taken, and so he is frequently on his knees, asking God for wisdom and tact.

The wise pastor will avoid arguments and appeals which do not flow from the Gospel. Thus he will not argue that the person must discontinue his membership because a clause in the congregation's constitution forbids it. He will not use the example of former lodge members, especially those whose "business became even better after they left the lodge." He does not use moral coercion with statements such as, "What would your sainted father or mother say?" Rather his entire approach is in terms of the mercies of God (Rom. 12:1), the love of the Father (Luke 15), and our response to them.

The pastor knows that the Holy Ghost can use him to bring clarity to a confused Christian only when he properly applies the Law and freely offers God's forgiveness

in the proclamation of the Gospel. In this connection the pastor manifests his love for the brother especially with regard to Holy Communion. He does not legalistically and automatically bar him from the Lord's Table. The pastor will make every effort to understand the wandering brother's total background, especially his religious background, as he seeks to reduce the lodge problem to a question of the true Gospel, and that alone. He will center his entire approach there.

The evangelical pastor will stress the glories of membership in the body of Christ, which belong to all those who confess that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which a person can be saved than the name of Jesus Christ. But he will show also that the glories of this membership in the body of Christ impose upon God's people the responsibility of confessing Christ's name everywhere and of proclaiming His Gospel and not "another." And he will demonstrate to his Christian brother that participation in the ritual of the Lambskin apron, of the "garment from on high," and of other Masonic symbolic exercises will involve him in the proclamation of "another gospel" apart from that of Jesus Christ and will bring down upon him the "anathema" of God's inspired apostle (Gal. 1:8,9), and may even endanger his own personal salvation.

In short, the Christian pastor will work with the Gospel; he will make every en-

deavor to surround the lodge member with the full awareness of the height and the depth of the love of Christ. If he deems it necessary, he will begin again to teach the individual, and perhaps the entire congregation, the rudiments of the Christian religion. (Heb. 6:1 f.)

In this connection it should be said that experience shows that it usually does not work to take a lodge member into the fellowship of the congregation with the hope of then leading him to renounce his membership in the lodge. In truth such a maneuver, however well intentioned, generally leads to resentment and bitterness.

And now, having emphasized the privilege and heavy responsibility which rests on the shoulders of the Christian pastor in this matter, we must conclude on the unhappy note that eventually the pastor must confront the individual with the question: "How long will you go limping with two different opinions?" Eventually the person must be asked either to give a clear and consistent witness to his appreciation of the precious Gospel by separating himself from an offending lodge, or he must come under the discipline of the congregation. Experience has shown clearly that it will not work simply to permit a case to drag on endlessly; this only comforts and consoles a man who should perhaps be awakened and terrified. This is the inescapable and final responsibility of the pastor who would be faithful to his task.

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