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ANTI MASONRY - RELIGIOUS ANTAGONISM

W. Bro. S. A. Goldsmith, P.M. Lodge Gothic, No. 388.

For most of us, anti-Masonry and religious antagonism to Freemasonry, are something about which we may have heard and possibly read, but fortunately, few have experienced. If you are hit by it, as was a very good friend of mine recently, you are devastated. Who do you turn to? What has happened to your world?

For many years, it has been the policy of Freemasonry, not to argue with someone who is antagonistic to the Craft, but to move away from that argument. It is difficult to accept this policy however, if you are personally involved. If it should affect your wife and children as well, family frictions and the resultant difficulties from that, can arise. The family perhaps more than yourself, might feel frustrated because their church affiliates make them feel like second class citizens. There is a loss of self respect, which is very difficult to accept, as is the criticism that is levelled at you, their husband and father. When it comes to the stage that your children and your wife say - "It would not have happened if you were not a Freemason" what is the next move.

You might well ask — "What is a guy like you doing in this subject environment."

The reason is that friend asked my opinion. He is a well-read Brother, devoted to his wife and family, his religion and Freemasonry, the same situation as most of us, and he asked my opinion. When I looked into the problem, it had such similarities to other situations I know, that I felt it worth investigating, It is unpleasant to see anyone imposed upon or persecuted

for any reason, and when the reason is because he is a Freemason, that makes me try and stop the persecution.

The main antagonism of the church to Freemasonry, seems to stem from the church sometimes considering that Freemasonry is a religion, and as such, it is taking members away from the church and allowing them to become free thinkers. 'Those involved in a religion in which all men agree', is one of the fundamentals of a Masonic outlook.

The second area of specific concern for us, is the incorrect interpretation of Masonic matters by non-Masons. The Brother who brought this matter to my attention, quoted a word from Royal Arch Masonry, a word that appears in a somewhat similar form in the Rose Croix. The church put an interpretation on this word, as being a combination word of God with idols. Such a combination is untenable. While I do not have the facts on the significance of that word from involvement in either of those bodies, I have assurances from members of those orders that in no way is the name of God involved at any stage in any degree, with idols.

When people present arguments or untruths that you cannot answer because of a lack of understanding on your part, or a lack of knowledge of the subject, a doubt can arise in your mind. A Mason who is not aware of the adverse effect of this type of action by others and does not react positively to it, can subsequently be put at a disadvantage. The people criticising are usually not sufficiently knowledgeable to be 100%, and the use of half-truths to denigrate the Craft, must be answered by greater knowledge on our part.

I hope that the information contained herein will be of value to others and might assist them in their researches and reaction should, unfortunately, they ever be placed in a similar position.

The questions I was asked were: "What should I do? How can I best continue to give of myself to my religion and its involvements when leaders of my church now consider me unsuitable to lead because I am a Freemason?"

My first reaction was — there is a simple answer. This has happened before, surely, to others, in this and past generations, in this and other parts of the

world. How was the problem solved. Many answers have been given but the problem was not solved.

As a general rule, Freemasons avoid confrontation on issues antagonistic to the Craft - do nothing, or give the minimum answer possible and hope the antagonism will go away. That is easy to say, but when one is personally involved and when those affected by it are you and your immediate family, it is not easy to take.

For you and I who are not so affected, it is difficult to understand such a predicament, but for my friend to be made a second class citizen within his church, because he is a Freemason, is something I could not accept and I am sure when you think about it, you too, will feel for him.

In the First Degree, in the Charge after Initiation, we are told that while in the Lodge we should abstain from every topic of religious discussion. This is between Brother and Brother.

In the charges of a Freemason, at the front of our Book of Constitution, we are told a Mason bound, never to act against the dictates of his conscience and no matter what mode of worship of religion a man may have, he is not excluded from our order provided he believes in the Glorious Architect of Heaven and Earth.

These statements are from our side of the fence, but what of those outside the Craft? Can they understand our attitude. The majority of difficulties arise due to misunderstandings, misunderstandings of what Freemasonry is, what it stands for and what it means to so many of us. The answer, therefore, is surely one of a need for those outside the Craft to have a better understanding of what the Craft really is. Grand Lodge has made several efforts at this over the years, but even today in this period of enlightened thinking and easy availability of knowledge, problems of this nature continue to arise.

Some non Masons consider Freemasonry a religion, some a blasphemy of religion and some something in between and some consider it as a organisation of men who seem to be very pleasant, considerate and of high moral action.

Because Freemasonry, as such, is the concern of its members alone, one might well say it is not the concern of any one clergyman, lay leader or even any church, newspaper or the general public; but from their point of view they want to know more about us so that they know whether we can be trusted and accepted in the community

Rarely is Freemasonry decried in the public image, but in recent years we have seen two particular cases - one when an odd branch of Freemasonry in Italy has been accused of corruption and more recently, criticism of Scotland Yard because of the number of staff who are Freemasons. However, our concern at the moment is in relation to religious matters.

We accept that Freemasonry is religious to the extent it demands a fundamental belief in God. It is not a religion as such. However, some non-Masons find, or might find, it conflicts with their religion, or rather that it is in competition with their religion, or in competition with their interpretation of what their religions means to them, which might well be different from your interpretation, or mine. Because many of these people are unwilling or unable to see or try to understand our appreciation of both religion and Freemasonry, they won't accept it. "What I don't know, and what I can't understand, I don't and won't accept"

A possible solution might be that if the critics are worthy men, they might be guided to investigate Masonry further and maybe, they could be guided to become Masons. From that time on, their viewpoint would change, it would become more widely based and undoubtedly be favourable to the Craft.

Because Freemasonry is open to all who believe in God, Christians, Jews, Moslems and all other believers, some non Masons find it objectionable because other religions can be acceptable and at the least, tolerated. This perhaps is a situation we on our own, cannot do anything about. Those who think they are the only ones who are right, will be difficult if not impossible to get to change their opinion.

Another objection levelled is Freemasonry is not a Christian institution because it relies on the Old Testament for its foundation; but so, does Christianity. However, there are branches of Freemasonry that are peculiarly

Christian towards these branches that some non Masons have the greatest objection - Christianity outside the church.

"Freemasonry, like a beautiful stained-glass window, must be seen from within.

No man can judge it accurately standing outside."

The next question to be asked is: From where do the objectors get their information. We know there have been exposures of Freemasonry for the last 250 years, but the present situation seems to be one which has come about not from ancient exposures, but more recently from one of those wilfully perjured individuals. The Masonic knowledge he has gained in the Craft has been passed on to non Masons perhaps incompletely. The antagonism has come about, perhaps, not from his direct disclosures but rather the interpretations put on the disclosures by others.

The main difficulty my friend has struck, is that no matter what answers he has given, there is always an "oh but" type objection. It is a lack of understanding by the critic and limited knowledge of how to combat the criticism by the Mason, that has resulted in Masonry generally avoiding giving explicit answers. No one Mason can answer for all Masons, any more than any one Christian can speak for all Christians. Perhaps an over simplification of the problem is that Freemasonry could be considered by non-Masons as being in competition with the Church, not only from the point of view of the religious faith, but also the high moral code it propounds and these, coupled with the fact the church considers it is divinely inspired, whereas Lodges are man made, all together make for viewpoints that will continue to be difficult to amalgamate.

It is difficult to answer fully or argue to a favourable conclusion for Freemasonry, but some of the points can be answered and some answers, which to us might appear self evident, are unfortunately unlikely to be accepted as such, by others.

1. Criticism: We are a secret society.

Answer: No — we are a society with secrets. I will return to that subject later.

2. Criticism: The church suggests a uniqueness of Christianity, but Masonry admits all religions.

Answer: We are not a religion.

3. Criticism: We are criticised for the nature of oaths or obligations which we undertake.

Answer: Our obligations were reworded a few years ago to eliminate some of the former objections to the penalties expressed in them and Lodges should have adopted these — if they have not, it is strongly recommended they reconsider their stand as recommended by Grand Lodge. The church might object to somebody undertaking an oath, but that is something of concern for the man involved and as expressed to the candidate prior to his taking the obligation; "there is nothing incompatible with his civil, moral or religious duties"

4. Criticism: The use of Masonry for private advantage.

Answer: This should not occur. Any worthy Mason does not involve himself in this manner.

5. Criticism: The exclusion of the name of Christ in the ceremonies.

Answer:

It is a misnomer that our ceremonies are specifically religious — they are not and they are not directed to or at specific religions. Furthermore, it should be appreciated by non-Masons that religion is not discussed or considered in our ceremonies. Freemasonry is not a religion.

6. Criticism:

Association with non-Christians in what some consider a religious atmosphere.

Answer: As we live in a multi racial and multi religious society, it is necessary and indeed desirable that we should all meet with other faiths, on an equal footing wherever possible. We try to maintain a continual communication with the community at large and association with people

from other religions is part of our normal way of life. One does not associate only one's own religion, either in business or socially.

Again, Freemasonry is not a religion.

7. Criticism: We substitute a high moral code for religious faith.

Answer: It is not a substitution but rather an addition. Freemasonry is not a religion.

8. Criticism: The provision of charitable funds was for Masonic ends only.

Answer: This is not the case. Masonic funds are used in many ways - helping those less fortunate than ourselves. The Masonic charities are extended over an extremely broad range, and I think of the most recent exercise of Grand Lodge in the establishing a Chair of Geriatrics, assistance for the blind, the purchase of an engine for a lifeboat. The range of involvement for charitable purposes, is truly enormous. Perhaps we should make a point of trying to get this message out into the community at large.

9. Criticism:

That time used in Lodges could be better used in church.

Answer: A Freemason's Lodge is not a religious body. The Lodge teaches good men to be better. It does not teach religion. A classification of our time usage by importance in someone else's eyes, is tantamount to a dictatorial policy. We are a free people, and long may we remain so, able to use our spare time as we might wish.

10. Criticism: That if our activities are wholesome, they should not be kept secret.

Answer: The secrecy contained in Freemasonry is minimal. The objects and aims of Freemasonry are widely detailed in published material and the secrecy aspects are only a matter of identification of the stages of the Craft knowledge gained as one progresses in the Craft, just as you progress in studying for any subject. In extending your researches to obtain a university degree, you are regularly enlarging on your knowledge and as you gain in

knowledge, so you gain the answers or secrets that are contained in that further knowledge. If you don't have the knowledge, how can you make the decision relating to that subject. It is very difficult to elaborate and explain that in detail, to a non-Mason.

11. Criticism: The Lodges are man made, while the church is divine.

Answer: The Lodge does not profess to be divinely inspired. Again, we repeat, Freemasonry is not a religion.

12. Criticism: There is nothing in the Lodge which a church cannot provide better.

Answer: Much depends on the church and its leaders, both clerical and lay. Different churches interpret and implement matters differently. Again, how do you explain the education we receive from Freemasonry to a non Mason. The fundamentals of Freemasonry are "brotherly love, relief and truth" are as profound and deep in interpretation as one could ever wish. With those objectives, we should do our utmost to see that the information is conveyed to those outside the Craft. We need greater publicity on what we are and what we do. Good publicity is, however, hard to get. Again — masonry is not a religion.

To the present, the paper has dealt with the immediate, those specific objections or criticisms that have been levelled at my friend. Let us take a short look at the history. The Papal Bull of 1738, could be considered the start of church antagonism towards Freemasonry. The church and operative Masons originally worked very closely together and when Freemasonry came on the scene, the church showed its concern because it was losing control. It tried to stop the loss of that control.

Probably the most important cause of church antagonism, was the publication of the Book of Constitutions in 1723, by Dr James Anderson, himself a Presbyterian minister, in which he expounded the views which became the basis of the liberal attitude of the Craft toward religion. It was stated as follows:

"Though in ancient times Masons were charged in every country to be of the religion of that country or nation, whatever it was, yet it is now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves; that is, to be good men and true, or men of honour and honesty, by whatever denominations or persuasions they may be distinguished; whereby Masonry becomes the centre of union and the means of conciliating true friendship among persons who must have remained at a perpetual distance." It is understandable that this sudden approval of freedom of religious belief and merely requiring members to abide by certain fundamentals which constitute "a religion in which all men agree" was enough to alarm the hierarchy of the church and resulted in their efforts to put a stop to it. It still continues from time to time.

For hundreds of years the church claimed a monopoly of teaching and explanation of morals and ethics, and they maintained that only men specially trained by the church in the "secrets" of theology, could do that teaching. Therefore, some of these church bodies claimed that such organisations as Freemasonry, should not be tolerated and their members are not suitable persons with whom to be associated, particularly concerning religious matters. It was this situation that prompted this present paper. So, in effect, things have not changed all that greatly, and where church bodies are controlled by individuals who are not prepared to look and try to understand our attitudes, we are going to continue to have difficulties.

Looking at the church approach over the years, we see varying action and reaction. In the past, the Roman Catholic church was avidly against Freemasonry and persecutions and inquisitions in Spain, Portugal, Italy, the Philippines and other countries followed, where there was involvement with Freemasonry. Today the Roman Catholic church generally accepts the Craft. Protestant philosophy over the years, has been more tolerant. They seldom officially condemn the Craft but have left it to their individual clergymen and lay leaders to project criticisms, whether weak or strong, or to be pro Masonic, according to the individual feelings and freedoms of the area of involvement. In some Charismatic and Fundamentalist groups of Christians, the individual's attitude plays a greater part in decision making on religion and religious viewpoints and it is from these groups some recent

antagonism has arisen. Throughout the world today, we are seeing a rise of fundamentalism in many religions. We hope the attitudes towards Freemasonry will broaden, so that men continue to meet together in brotherhood. We must communicate our thoughts more efficiently to the world at large.

The antagonism of church authorities towards Freemasonry, has sometimes taken the line that the attention of their members and office bearers is distracted by their involvement with Freemasonry. Well, if it is a matter of deciding where your areas of involvement are to be, this must of course be a concern, but it is a matter for each of us to establish our own priorities.

It has been said, the Craft conceals secrets from its members and that "secret aims" of the Craft are so hidden that many of its members don't know them and are in fact in danger from them, but don't realise it. Those of us who accept Freemasonry in its simple form of "brotherly love, relief and truth", find this hard to accept, but the type of comment will continue to rear its ugly head, and it will be very hard to ever eliminate. Accusation is easy. Defence is very difficult.

W. Bro. Rev. N. B. Cryer, P. Dep. G. Chap., Asst. Prov.G.M. Surrey and Master of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge in 1981/82, delivered a paper on the subject in which he made these comments:

"As we reflect on those concerns (relating to antagonism to Freemasonry) that have reappeared so constantly through the years, the following words might be of help:

- a It seems evident that one of the essential landmarks of the Craft should constantly be the assertion that Freemasonry is not a religion.
- b It is equally evident that some of the Craft's worst embarrassments are caused by past statements, not least by clerical brethren, no doubt acting from the best of motives, which imply that the Craft has some special interest in and power over the way in which its members conceive and approach the Supreme Being.

- c. One of the major difficulties could be overcome if it were constantly realised by non-Masons that not every Mason who issues in print is speaking with the authority of the whole Craft and is not quotable to that end. Further, that some who do get quoted are some who have left the Craft for whatever reason, and disclosed sometimes in half-truths, some of the "secrets" of the Craft.
- d. The consistent de-Christianisation of the Craft degrees, with the Royal Arch, has been so effective that outsiders ought to be forgiven for thinking that this reflects the whole tenor of all Freemasonry. A sober and careful and reconsideration of the purpose, manner and effect of this so-called de-Christianisation process, especially at and after the union (of G.L. of England), is a further matter for research and representation so that Masons are at least aware of the true situation. The basis of the resurgence of the Christian degrees is a matter for new thought and print. (Perhaps our Grand Lodge will give serious thought to it.)
- e. The argument or arguments leading to more recent changes in the Roman Catholic assessment of British and associated forms of Freemasonry, ought to be more clearly understood and recorded. This may well be a tacit answer to the Christian concern with the Craft. It might also define the area within which we ought to operate, and beyond which we would be wise not to venture by rash Masonic musings if we are to keep the church's goodwill and not expect opposition. (Here again Grand Lodge should be thinking positively. We are no longer living in a period of lack of knowledge.)
- f. "If there are still other problems that might face any religious believer about the craft, we need to know what those are and seek so to speak and act so they are countered with as little antagonism and confrontation as possible". Again, a matter for Grand Lodge. It won't go away on its own. We need to face it and communicate.

All Brethren must feel some concern for this subject. Newer Brethren might be very concerned about the matter. But be assured, it has existed for a long time. There is no denying the problem is still here. It is up to us to show that

we are, every one of us, a true brother among men. This will show the fundamental good of Freemasonry.

In bringing this paper to a close , I cannot do than quote from an address in 1952 by Thomas S. Roy DD, when, as Grand Master of Massachusetts, he delivered an address to his Grand Lodge, in which he said:

"We have none of the marks of a religion. We have no creed, and no confession of faith in a doctrinal statement. We have no theology. We have no ritual of worship. We have no symbols that are religious in a sense of the symbols found in church and synagogue. Our symbols are related to the development of character and of the relationship of man to man. They are working tools to be used in the building of a life.

"Our purpose is not that of religion. We are not primarily interested in the redemption of man. We seek no converts. We solicit no new members. We raise no money for religious purposes. By any definition of religion accepted by our critics, we cannot qualify as a religion. All of which means that a man has not subscribed to a new religion, much less an anti-Christian religion, when he becomes a Mason, any more than when he joins the Democratic Party, or the Y.M.C.A. And there is nothing in Freemasonry that is opposed to the religion he brings with him into the Lodge."

Greater education of our own members in all matters relating to the Craft and its attitudes to religion is desirable. The public at large needs greater knowledge of the Craft and its involvements. Almost all of the concern from both sides of the fence is from lack of trustworthy information. We must communicate more to all people - Masons and non Masons. Articles attacking the Craft are news. Articles in defence and praise of the Craft are not.

Much of what has been presented here arose from the very personal concern of one Mason with a problem. I now know of several who have been similarly affected recently. I hope it is of some value to him and those others, for their own good and for that of the Craft.

Much of the information here is the work of Brethren much better qualified to - talk on Christian involvement than I. Some of it has come from Christian ministers of religion who are Freemasons. Sources include references from

Wor. Bro. Rev. E. H. Wyatt 1930 Auckland, W. Bro. Rev. N. B. Cryer 1982 of Surrey England, W. Bro. W. Lang 1971 of Dunedin, together with R.W. Bro. Hepburn of Christchurch, the M. & P.M Lodge publication "Questions and Answers", Freemasons Guide and Compendium and our own Constitution and Laws, and Dr T. S. Roy DD of Massachusetts.

My particular thanks to V.W. Bro. L. Parker and W. Bro. S. M. Lownes, for their comments, guidance and general assistance in preparation of this paper. It has only touched the surface of the subject. More detailed information including official and semi-official statements over the years, together with criticisms and "exposures" of Freemasonry, are catalogued in our library. Any Brother more particularly interested in this subject, could spend many hours of study with a view to better using the information. I would particularly recommend to you, Chapters 12 and 13 of "Questions and Answers".

I would like to conclude this paper by reciting a poem written by Leigh Hunt, 1784-1859 - a poem I learned when I was very young. With the thoughts provoked by this paper, this poem has more meaning today than it did when I first learned it.

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel, writing in a book of gold.
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold
And to the Presence in the room he said -
"what writest thou?" The vision raised its head
And, with a look made of sweet accord
Answered.
"The names of those who love the Lord"
"And is mine one?" said Abou, "Nay, not so,"
Replied the Angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerily still; and said, "I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow-men."
The Angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom Love of God had blest -
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest!

DISCUSSION.

W. Bro. E. S. TUCK.

I congratulate W. Bro. Goldsmith on this paper. It is evident that he has devoted much thought and research to the subject. Probably a fair number of Brethren have, up till now, had only a hazy idea of how to deal with this kind of criticism. All of us must have encountered something similar from time to time.

I think W. Bro. Goldsmith is inviting us to really study and think about the deeper meaning of Freemasonry. He is reminding us that it is founded upon the purest principles of piety and virtue and that it possesses many great and invaluable privileges.

Not the least of these privileges is an appreciation of the greatest of all human studies - a clearer knowledge of ourselves.

This paper points out clearly a number of the harsh things said of Freemasonry: but it also provides guide lines to help us meet and reply to our detractors. To be effective we should try to increase our knowledge of the philosophy of the Craft.

That, I think, is a most important aim.

W. Bro. Rev. L. N. BURTON.

Why non-Masons don't like Freemasonry, and particularly some clergy, is mainly ignorance and lack of knowledge. In the case of a young Mason being confronted with someone asking about the Craft or someone criticizing the Craft, it is not an easy position to be in. He should seek some guidance and go back to the person concerned. Those who criticize Masonry most only know half the story.

My reply to the question early in the paper, "It would not have happened if you were not a Freemason."

One fault common to Church and Freemasons is loyalty, and loyalties must be in the right order Firstly to a member's home and family, if church activities and masonic activities take first place in one's life, be they male or female, broken marriages can and have resulted. Many keen Masters are the worst offenders, instead of visiting members who have not been regular in their attendance and encourage them to attend, have instead been visiting other Lodges in their official capacity, often to their own honour and glory, resulting in a drop in attendance on Lodge nights.

A husband and wife should have outside interests but not to the detriment of their home and family, then Lodge and Church activities come next. A broken home is a bad advertisement when Freemasonry is blamed.

Bro. H. D. RICHMOND.

It has been the policy of Freemasonry not to argue with any person who is antagonistic to the Craft. My experience confirms this as the correct line to adopt, because these sorts of critics have formulated an opinion and, no matter what evidence is produced to the contrary, they will persist in their view.

I think the writer has answered the criticism fully and frankly, bearing in mind that the Craft is not answerable to any outside organisation for the stance it has adopted for the past 250 years.

I would like to point out to all who may wish to be better informed, that the public libraries have available books on Freemasonry. This, surely destroys the myth that the Craft is a secret society.

The following destroys the argument that it is a religion - Because it has none of the marks of a religion, has no creed, and no confession of faith in a doctrinal statement, no theology, nor any symbols as found in a church.

Our symbols are related to the development of character and to relationship man to man. They are the working tools used in the building of a life to relationship.

V.W. Bro. R. E. PUGH-WILLIAMS.

I do not believe in arguing with those antagonistic to the Craft but I strongly believe we should come out in the open for all to see what Freemasonry stands for – its aims and objects, complete and undiluted and let them ponder awhile rather than let them make blind accusations based on half-truths.

It saddens me to think that because of involvement with Freemasonry it makes a man, in the eyes of the church, "a second class citizen". I look at my own environment. Within my parish we could, with ease, form a Lodge consisting of active, practising churchmen merely because our Craft complements our religious activities and does not dominate it. Not one of those who could be so involved would even dream of replacing their Church with Freemasonry. Those who consider us "second classers" are sadly in need of instruction as to what Freemasonry really stands for. To do so means we in the Craft must go out to them and explain in simple language the aims and objects of Freemasonry. Do not expect them to come to you, such would be wishful thinking. We are sadly in need of a really big public relations exercise hands of professionals. We need to counteract the adverse publicity of the Italian P.2 scandal and the Scotland Yard affair. All this, not with a view to argue or foment controversy, but to explain in simple terms what Freemasonry is in such a manner that the citizens of New Zealand can appreciate all the Craft stands for.

W. Bro. Goldsmith, I take exception to your reference to oaths. Freemasonry does not require an oath from its candidates, they demand an obligation which is something quite different. I can well understand the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards Freemasonry, due in the main to Freemasons themselves. The Church had every reason to produce Papal Bulls when you consider the way men used Masonic Lodges (particularly on the Continent of Europe) to cloak nefarious anti-cleric and political activities. Bearing in mind the P.2 Scandal this situation is apparently still rife in the 20th century. We not only need Masonic education outside the Craft, but also very much within its walls. We are not doing enough for all Masons (senior to junior) in the way of education and information which would enable them to discuss matters relating to the Craft. Let us hope we can embark on a new phase of Masonic education under the leadership of our new Grand Master and with the active co-operation of Provincial Grand Masters and Research Lodges throughout New Zealand.