

## Faith and Freemasonry — Some thoughts

Some time ago I was asked whether, as a Christian minister, I found any conflict between my faith and my membership of Freemasonry. I pointed out that only those who professed a belief in a Supreme Being could become Masons.

I must admit that sometimes I have been tempted to ask prospective candidates what difference such confession made to their lives. One day I will!

I also explained how Lodge meetings begin and end in a prayer, and how central to Masonic ritual is the book Masons call the Volume of the Sacred Law — that book which is sacred to each member, of whatever faith.

When Masons refer to it as "directing our steps in the paths of happiness" and add that it "will lead you to all truth", that is exactly what it will do — but only if we read it for ourselves!

An unopened book will teach us nothing, and that volume only becomes holy as we use it to teach us the way to God.

If you remove all religious references from the rituals, there is virtually nothing left. Although Masons are enjoined to refrain from topics of religious discussion, that does not preclude religious contemplation.

Masons state that Freemasonry is not a religion — nor is it.

But it should be a society of religious men who, at each stage of their progress through the three Degrees, through Installation and through the other Degrees in Freemasonry, are commended to the care and guidance of that Supreme Being, whose faith we have professed.

Seeking the right way to exercise Masonry in the Lodge and in the community, Freemasons should be guided by faith and commitment to the One who sees all, and knows all. If we succeed, then non-Masons may cease to query whether our faith stands in the way of our Freemasonry.

I have sometimes pointed out to young Masons that, in the First Degree, we are called upon to exercise nearly all the virtues which should mark us out as men of very high calibre.

In the prayer we ask that the candidate "may so dedicate and devote his life to Thy (God's) service as to become a true and faithful brother." We seek "divine wisdom" upon Him that He may "be enabled to unfold the beauties of true godliness."

The candidate's Obligation is taken with his hand on the Volume of the Sacred Law, and he finishes it with the words: "So help me God" and is told that "the sacred writings are to govern our faith."

The candidate is told to "practice... every moral and social virtue". Most crucially, and alas, all too often unsuccessfully, he is recommended to a "most serious contemplation (of) the Volume of the Sacred Law" In which he will discover the duties he owes to God, to his neighbour and himself.

He is called upon to be a law-abiding subject, and to the practice of "every domestic as well as public virtue", Prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice should also be marks of his good character. Secrecy, fidelity and obedience are three more such marks.

I would contend that all these traits are the qualities which should be ours because of our faith in the one true and living God — by whatever name we call Him.

Faith and Freemasonry march hand-in-hand, and should inspire what we are, and what we do in the name of the Supreme Being, whose faith we professed at our initial interview to become a Mason.

**The author, Ernest Smart, is a Minister in the United Reformed Church, a Past Assistant Grand Chaplain and Provincial Grand Chaplain for Buckinghamshire.**

\*\*\*\*\*