

Freemasonry: Defender of Personal Conscience

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Bro. and Dr. Boettjer is a member of Cypress Lodge # 295 of Naples Fl. He is the managing Editor of The Scottish Rite Journal and was invited to address the editors association of the Baptist Press in June, 1993 at the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston, Texas. The following STB is a portion of that address. While the remarks were directed to a Baptist audience, the issues raised and the answers given are clearly significantly important in discussing Freemasonry with any religious Group! – Editor

My thesis is that Freemasonry has been misunderstood and then, for whatever reason, demonized and vilified, sometimes by members of churches, to the extent that a response to the critics of Freemasonry was and still remains necessary.

We all cringe at the words of some Masons even well respected writers, and, in particular, when anti-Masonic writers select quotations from supposed Masonic authorities when there is no accepted Masonic authority except for the Grand Master of each Grand Lodge of a state – and then he is only an authority within his jurisdiction and only for the year or years of his term in office. Worse yet, Freemasonry's critics tend to twist whatever juicy quotations they have found, taking them out of context, editing them, and so slanting them that they say just about anything the anti-Mason wishes the quotations to say.

First a bit of history. Freemasonry has by tradition and, in some cases, by rule, not responded to its critics. This silence has been misinterpreted by many. They presume that silence gives consent or that Masons do not have the facts to refute attacks and, therefore, remain silent. Somewhat over a year ago, however, the attacks on Freemasonry became so virulent that we felt a response was necessary. Please understand, we do not object to differences of opinion or reasoned criticisms. Freemasonry is not perfect. There are many things to correct or improve. We are working to resolve many of these problems and thus improve Freemasonry.

Historically, the right to private judgment is as much a part of Freemasonry as it is of the Southern Baptist tradition. As early as 1798, Charleston, South Carolina Southern Baptists advised the matter of Southern Baptist membership in Freemasonry, "be left with the judgment of the individual." Similarly, George W. Truett, one of the greatest leaders of Southern Baptists,

and a Freemason said: "The right to private judgment is the crown jewel of humanity, and for any person or institution to dare to come between the soul and God is a blasphemous impertinence and a defamation of the crown-rights of the Son of God.

Let me say this clearly and emphatically: Freemasonry is NOT a religion. It is a Fraternity based on moral principles and dedicated to the overall ethical and educational improvement of its members. If it has any relation to religion at all, it is as a complement to faith. We often say, "Masonry makes good men better." Many, many new Masons become more active in their church after becoming Masons. Why? Because Freemasonry stresses values central to most churches and to our nation. Freemasonry was a crusader for "family values" before the term became politically correct. Freemasonry has been a defender of personal conscience, political freedom, and individual liberty long before George Washington and Benjamin Franklin took Masonic vows to support and extend the Masonic ideals of Brotherhood, Relief, and Truth.

Because Freemasonry stands squarely for the constitution and all the fundamental freedoms bequeathed to us by the writers of that great document, 13 of the 39 signers being Freemasons, Freemasonry has always been attacked by those who would limit liberty. Freemasons were among the first to be persecuted by Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Stalin, and the Ayatollah Khomeini. And so it has always been. Freedom is the lifeblood of Freemasonry. That is why Freemasons were central to the creation of these United States and why tyrants and dictators of every sort, upon coming to power, immediately stigmatize Freemasonry and persecute its members. Today, as in the past, Freemasons are defenders of First Amendment rights and the concept of liberty. We are not opposed to differences of opinion, but we are opposed to lies and deliberate manipulations of the truth.

We believe the attacks on Freemasonry have come to malicious slander and the unjustified and unconscionable tearing down of one's neighbor rather than building, with him, of bridges of understanding and cooperation. Undoubtedly, some of the anti-Masons are sincere. Possibly, they cannot see beyond the misconceptions foisted on them by those who promote themselves at the expense of others. Freemasons are saddened to see this exploitation.

We are outraged, however, when men of God promote what they must know to be falsehood. What excuse can one offer, for instance, for Rev. Pat Robinson's "The New World Order?" Despite the ready assistance of a research staff, Robertson trucks out, with no qualifications at all, what we Scottish Rite Masons call "the lie that will not die," the assertion that Albert Pike, a late 19th-century leader of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, advocated a, quote, "Luciferian doctrine" advising Masons to worship the Father of Lies, Lucifer.

Pike NEVER wrote these words. They come from a notorious atheist and pornographer, Gabriel Jogand-Page, who wrote under the pen name of Leo Taxil. Taxil wrote some bogus "Instructions" to Scottish Rite Masons, supposedly from Pike, as a device to expose the

credulity of the Catholic Church , an institution he hated as much as the Masonic Lodge that had, with good sense, rejected his application for membership.

Taxil publicly exposed his own hoax on April 19, 1897, but the hoax lives on, savored by anti-Masons who never tire of trundling out this hoary story though even the slightest of research efforts would reveal it was unmasked by its inventor and disproved nearly a century ago!

Similarly, Rev. Ron Carlson of Eden Prairie, Minnesota, in one of his broadcast sermons quotes Albert Pike's *Morals and Dogma*. (Ironically, Pike is read by more of Masonry's foes than by Masons!) Rev. Carlson in what must be the 10,000th exposé of so-called Masonic secrets, quotes Pike as saying on page 545 of *Morals and Dogma*:

"All mysteries [meaning Masonic mysteries] should be kept concealed, guarded by faithful silence, lest it should be inconsiderately divulged to the ears of of the Profane, He sins against God who divulges to the unworthy the Mysteries confided to him. The danger is not merely in violating the truth, but in telling the truth."

[Then Carlson continues saying,] "Albert Pike says it is a sin to divulge the truth. Now how different this is from what we read in God's word."

Ironically, the truth is that Rev. Carlson is not quoting Albert Pike. Here is what Pike actually wrote in *Morals and dogma*. Previous to the quotation noted above are the words, "St. Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, who was born in 340, and died in 394, says in his work *De Mysteriis*." In fact, the words Carlson attributes to Pike are actually the words of St. Ambrose. Pike was quoting St. Ambrose on what that Christian Father taught regarding the Christian Mysteries, NOT any alleged Masonic mystery.

This is what we object to: not differences of opinion or open, fact-supported discussions but the fabrication of slanted truth, half truth, and outright untruth. I do not know if the intent of such anti-Masonic authors as Robertson and Holly (whose fathers are Masons) and Carlson may be to deceive the gullible or if they themselves are deceived by their biased view of Freemasonry.

Most certainly, Freemasonry is not about paganism or devil worship. Most certainly it is not un-Christian or anti-Christian. Most certainly it is not "secretive" or "closed." All men of good character who believe in God are welcomed to Freemasonry. Then, through a series of Masonic lessons, what we call "Degrees," moral principles are taught that Support a man's personal faith, whatever his denomination; that enhance his dedication to his family and country that encourage his participation in the life of his community in a variety of civic and philanthropic ways.

Masons, for instance, are justifiably well-known for the support of orthopedic hospitals, burn centers, childhood language disorders clinics, Alzheimer's and schizophrenia research , programs for the unsighted, and many, many other charities. Masonic philanthropy today extends more than \$525 million per year or \$ 1.4 million per day to charity, and 58% of this

goes to members of the general public, all totally free. Nor do we claim this Masonic philanthropic outreach as any means of personal salvation, or a way by which a Mason might believe he is paving his way to Heaven. Salvation, grace, and faith are within the province of the Church. Freemasonry, as a fraternity, has nothing to say about salvation. The Bible is guide enough for every individual when it says faith without works is dead.

Clearly, faith without understanding or toleration can only divide people. Religions, transformed into single-minded zealotry, become fiercely competitive. Many claim for themselves the exclusive mandate to speak and act for God. In contrast, Masonry believes religious difference between human beings are how we respond to God, the Father of all, Who is continually pouring His love and His blessings on us. The Masonic Fraternity has its deepest roots in Christianity and therefore espouses the central teaching of the "New Law" as taught by our Lord Jesus Christ, "to love one another." Freemasonry is dedicated to helping men of every faith to live by principles fundamental to Christianity. The attacks on Freemasonry, in my opinion, display little of the love, joy, and peace of Christ. Instead of love, they offer hate; instead of knowledge they offer bias; instead of the joy of spiritual self-fulfillment. they offer a thirst for battle; instead of peace and harmony, they offer violent verbal attacks.

If I may be so bold as to offer my voice as that of all Freemasons and Americans as well as the voice of the many thousands of spirit filled, Bible-believing, Church-supporting Southern Baptists who are also Lodge-attending and Lodge-supporting Masons, I again offer the truth so well stated by that great Southern Baptist and Freemason, George W. Truett: "The right to private judgment is the crown jewel of humanity, and for any person or institution to dare to come between the soul and God is a blasphemous impertinence and a defamation of the crown-rights of the Son of God."

(And the insert FOCUS)

SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION VOTE VITALIZES MASONRY

The first milestone of the Center for Masonic Information has been reached – and successfully Passed!

On June 16, 1993, in an overwhelming vote estimated by Masons and non-Masons alike to be as high as 9 to 1, the 18,000+ messengers (delegates) to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Houston, Texas, approved a Home Mission Board, SBC, report saying, in part: "we therefore recommend that consistent with our denomination's deep convictions regarding the priesthood of the believer and the autonomy of the local church, membership in a Masonic Order be a matter of personal conscience."

This vote avoided the possibility of an outright (and unjustified) condemnation of Freemasonry as advocated by a vocal extreme group within the Convention. Such a negative vote by

America's largest Protestant denomination (over 15 million members) would have had to do serious damage both to Freemasonry and to the Southern Baptist denomination itself.

A large part of the credit for the successful outcome of the vote must be given to Brother John J. Robinson. Without his initial leadership, hard work and generous financial support, The Center of Masonic Information would not have been created nor could it have been represented at Houston. As a result of John Robinson's vision; Bro. and Dr. John W. Boettjer, Managing Editor of the Scottish Rite Journal, was able to represent the Center for Masonic Education at Houston in the SBC press room, on the Convention floor, and at the hospitality suite/media center set up by the Center at the Four Seasons Hotel near the Convention hall,

The Center also provided a high positive profile to Freemasonry at the convention in several other ways. The Center sponsored Brother Boettjer as the guest speaker at a banquet held by the Baptist Press Editors Association, provided 100 well-stocked press packets, developed an attractive brochure titled "Facts About Freemasonry" (copy enclosed). ran full-page ads in Houston's two daily newspapers on June 15, the day before the vote (for a copy of the ad, see the reverse side of this sheet), and coordinated the availability of thousands of pro-Masonic printed materials (such as the February and May 1993 special issues of the Scottish Rite Journal at the Convention's doors.

With the historic milestone of the Southern Baptist Convention successfully behind and the Fraternity revitalized from having been tested and proved true, the ten-member steering committee of the Center for Masonic Information is already planning additional ways the center can continue to maintain a positive thrust for Freemasonry in America. Your suggestions are welcome!