

The Lodge

History, Beliefs and Practices

Identity: “The Lodge” in this evaluation has reference to secret societies and organizations that include religious themes, teachings and practices in their initiation rites, regular meeting activities, and funeral rituals. Freemasonry serves as a primary example of such an organization that espouses and promotes teachings and practices that conflict with the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith. The concerns raised concerning Freemasonry apply also--though usually to a lesser degree— to other lodge organizations such as the Moose, Eagles, Elks, and Oddfellows, along with the women’s and youth auxiliaries of these lodges, particularly those associated with the Masonic lodge.

Founders: For information regarding individuals who were instrumental in founding each of the lodges in general, and Freemasonry in particular, readers are urged to consult the web sites of these organizations. In addition, a resource such as the following can be especially helpful: Alan Axelrod, *The International Encyclopedia of Secret Societies & Fraternal Orders* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1997).

Statistics: See web sites of pertinent organizations for current statistics.

History: The history of lodge organizations [and, in particular, Freemasonry] can be traced to medieval (ancient) Europe and the rise of the craft guilds, particularly the stonemasons who built the large cathedrals in that period of European history. The concept of a lodge comes from the literal establishment of lodging facilities for the itinerant (free) masons as they moved from one building site to another. Over the centuries these “operative” masons began to “accept” those who did not practice the craft of stonemasons into their developing organization and meetings. Hence the expression by which modern Masons are known: Ancient, Free, and Accepted Masons.

Modern Freemasonry can be traced to the year 1717 when, under the leadership of a Church of Scotland minister, Dr. James Anderson, four London lodges united to form the first Grand Lodge. The *Book of Constitutions* produced by Dr. Anderson attempted to formalize the Masonic Landmarks and Charges in existence at that time. Landmarks are aspects of Freemasonry that are not to be changed and Charges are guidelines to Masonic behavior in various life situations. Today the ritualistic degrees and practices of Freemasonry have developed to a point where there is no officially recognized authority accepted by all the lodges. However, the initiation rites and other rituals of Freemasonry and other lodge organizations have become available for study and review by non-lodge members. In addition, numerous books commenting upon and evaluating Freemasonry have been written by highly respected Masonic “authorities” so that an accurate evaluation of concerns from a Christian perspective can be made.

Beliefs and Practices:

Lodge organizations commonly insist that they are not a “religion” and that they do not establish a set of “doctrines” to which adherence is required for membership. The description below does not focus on these claims—however true or not true they may be in actual practice—but points to *religious tenets or themes* present and even espoused, both explicitly and implicitly, in the official rites and literature of the organization in question. In the discussion below, Freemasonry remains the primary example.

- *Nature of God*

One of the Landmarks of Freemasonry is the belief in the existence of a Supreme Being. However, the Supreme Being of Freemasonry is *officially* a generic god designed by intent to be universally acceptable to all who would seek admittance to the Masonic lodge. This god is a unitarian, not trinitarian, Supreme Being. Presumably, required acknowledgement of the existence of such a deity will not be offensive to Masons who are not Christian. Albert Pike, one of several “authorities” accepted by most Masons, writes in his *Morals and Dogma*: “To every Mason there is a God; One, Supreme, Infinite in Goodness, Wisdom, Foresight, Justice, and Benevolence; Creator, Disposer, and Preserver of all things. How, or by what intermediates He creates and acts, and in what way He unfolds and manifests Himself, Masonry leaves to creeds and Religions to inquire” (525). “Great (Grand) Architect of the Universe,” sometimes abbreviated as G.A.O.T.U., is a name Freemasonry uses to identify its Supreme Being. Other secretive names for God in various rituals are Ma-Ha-Bone and Jah-Bul-On.

- *Person of Jesus Christ*

While Freemasonry generally does not directly or explicitly deny Jesus Christ—for to do so would be regarded as sectarian—Jesus Christ, whom Christians regard as the only way in which one may have access to the Father, is conspicuous by His absence. All official prayers in Masonic lodge meetings are directed to the Grand Architect of the Universe apart from any reference to Jesus Christ. Whenever Scripture passages are quoted, references to Jesus Christ are purposely omitted. One example of this would be the use of 2 Thessalonians 3:6 in the Masonic ritual. The opening words of the verse “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” are omitted. Furthermore, in restricting a Mason from interfering with the religious beliefs of another, the lodge thereby discourages, and perhaps even in some cases prohibits, any bearing of public witness to Christ in the lodge. Other lodges have similar restrictions.

- *Nature of Man*

According to Freemasonry man is not totally sinful, just imperfect. In the first degree of Masonry the perfectibility of man is taught with reference to rough and smooth ashlar, stones that have been hewn by hand and made square. The rituals state: “By the Rough Ashlar we are reminded of our rude and imperfect state by nature; by the Perfect Ashlar, of that state of perfection at which we hope to arrive by a virtuous education, by our own endeavors, and by the blessing of God.” Freemasonry’s view of human nature parallels closely the modern New Age view that man is in some sense divine and has the capacity to become his own god. Recognized Masonic “authority” Joseph Fort Newton writes that “the great secret of Masonry is that it makes a man aware of the divinity within him.” He further states that “God becomes man that man may become God.”

- *Salvation*

Official rites of Freemasonry suggest the acceptance and promotion of a “salvation” by works. The initiated Mason is given a lambskin to wear “as a badge of Masonry” in order to remind him of “that purity of life and conduct which is so essentially necessary to his gaining admission into the Celestial Lodge above.” In the second degree ritual the Mason is reminded that he should wear his apron (lambskin) “as an emblem of that purity of heart and conscience that is necessary to obtain for you the approval of the Grand Architect of the Universe.” In the Masonic funeral service the family of the deceased is told that the lodge member’s soul went to heaven. The ritual includes the words: “Masonry ... seeks to constantly build the temple of the soul and thus to fit us for that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Other lodge organizations in their funeral ceremonies offer the hope of an eternal reward to their members apart from any reference to God’s grace in Christ.

- *Bible*

Masonic rituals make frequent references to the Bible. In countries where Christianity is the predominant religion, the Bible is considered one of the three great lights of Masonry along with the Square and Compass. However, in countries where other major religions are dominant, the holy books of those religions are placed

on Masonic altars. In his extensive preface to the Masonic Bible, Newton writes: “Thus, by the very honor which Masonry pays to the Bible, it teaches us to revere every book of faith in which men find help for today and hope for the morrow, joining hands with the man of Islam as he takes oath on the Koran,....” For Freemasonry the Bible is merely a “symbol of that eternal Book of the Will of God” (Newton) and “an indispensable part of the furniture of a Christian Lodge” (Pike).

A Lutheran Response

A response to the religious teachings of lodge organizations has been implied as the above concerns have been described. Lutheran Christians believe in the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—as He has revealed Himself in the Holy Scriptures and as the Christian church universally has confessed Him in the ecumenical creeds from the early years of the Christian era (Apostles’ Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds). God has clearly revealed Himself in the Bible as the one and only true God (Is. 44:6). The Scriptures consistently and repeatedly teach that Jesus is God together with the Father (John 1:1,14) and that the Holy Spirit is also God (Acts 5:29). Thus, the true God is the Triune God—three Persons (Matthew 28:19) but one God (Deut. 6:4).

Furthermore, since the Father can neither be known nor confessed apart from the Son (John 5:23; 14:6), prayer to God is always to be offered through faith in the name of Christ (John 14:13; 15:16). Man is more than an “imperfect Ashlar.” He is by nature dead in his trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). He is powerless (Rom 8:8) and an enemy of God (Romans 5:6, 10), incapable of hewing the rough edges off his life to make himself acceptable to God (Romans 3:20-24). A person can be reconciled to God only because salvation is completely of God (2 Cor. 5:18) through the saving work, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6). The benefits of this salvation are not received because of human effort to obtain them but are God’s gift received through faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16). St. Paul summarizes the primary conflict between the “religion” of the lodge and the central teaching of the Christian faith: “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law [“purity of life and conduct’], Christ died for nothing” (Gal. 2:21). St. Paul rejects and condemns any teaching that people may be saved by the addition of human works as “another Gospel” (Galatians 1).

The Scriptures teach that Christians with integrity are to confess Christ and His Gospel boldly and without compromise, mindful that God’s Name—which they are commanded to keep holy—is God as He has revealed Himself to us in His Word (John 17; Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Tim. 6:12; 1 John 2:23, etc.). In the view of this evaluation, it is a compromise of the Christian confession to take part in ritual, religious acts, in the name of a generic deity, that intentionally delete the Name of the true God and Jesus Christ whom God has sent to be the only Savior of the world (Luke 12:8).

For Further Reading....

John Ankerberg and John Weldon. *The Secret Teachings of the Masonic Lodge: A Christian Perspective*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1989.

Alan Axelrod. *The International Encyclopedia of Secret Societies and Fraternal Orders*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1997.

George A. Mather and Larry A. Nichols. *Masonic Lodge*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.

Henry Wilson Coil. *Coil’s Masonic Encyclopedia*. New York: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply, 1961. (See especially the article on “Religion”)

L. James Rongstad. *How to Respond to the Lodge*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1977, 1995.

Links and Websites

See “Freemasonry” and “Freemasonry and the Church” at:

<http://www.lcms.org/ca/www/cyclopedia/02/display.asp?t1=F&t2=r>

<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/Masons.html>

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09771a.htm>

See also Bylaw 1.8 in the *2004 Handbook* of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at:

<http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2160>