



A PRIMER on FREEMASONRY

- Pastoral Guidelines
- Historical Background
- Religious Aspects of Freemasonry



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**A PRIMER on
FREEMASONRY**

Abridged Version

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FOREWORD

St. Paul, the apostle of the nations, wrote his disciple St. Titus: "God's grace has been revealed to save the whole human race; it has taught us that we should give up everything contrary to true religion and all our worldly passions; we must be self-restrained and live upright and religious lives in this present world, waiting in hope for the blessing which will come with the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. He offered himself for us in order to ransom us from all our faults and to purify a people to be his very own and eager to do good" (Titus 2:11-14).

We, as pastors of the flock which Christ has called to be his own, echo the same exhortation of St. Paul as we present to you the teachings of the Church on Freemasonry. We have put together the recent declarations coming from the Holy See, the Philippine Bishops' Conference as well as those from other Bishops' Conferences. We pray that the Catholic faithful (clergy, laity, religious) may understand clearly why the Church, for the past three centuries, has consistently stated that the principles of Freemasonry are incompatible with the Christian faith.

We are aware that many Catholics with good will and with good intentions have enrolled in Masonic associations but without an in-depth knowledge of the essence of Freemasonry. We appeal to such Catholics to take into account, and give more weight to, what the Church is saying on such a grave matter directly touching on the foundations of our faith. The fact is that Freemasonry has a set of beliefs and rituals which make it in essence a "naturalistic religion."

Two thousand years have passed since "the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men"; the fullness of time has come in which God has sent His Only-Begotten Son for our redemption (Cf

Galatians 4:4). We who have received this grace must embrace it with full commitment, and renounce “everything contrary to true religion.” This is of such importance for our happiness that God presented it to us in the form of a commandment: “Listen, Israel: the Lord our God is the one Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

For the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines:

+ ORLANDO B. QUEVEDO, OMI, D.D.
Archbishop of Cotobato
President, CBCP
2003

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS on FREEMASONRY

I. PASTORAL GUIDELINES

1. What is the latest declaration of the Catholic Church on Freemasonry?

On November 26, 1983 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued, with the approval of Pope John Paul II, "A Declaration on Masonic Associations". (Cf Appendix 1)

2. Why did the Catholic Church issue that Declaration?

That Declaration was in answer to questions whether the negative judgment of the Church in regard to Freemasonry had been changed by reason of the fact that there is no explicit mention of Freemasonry in the new Code of Canon Law (1983) as there was in the old Code (1917).

3. What is the main teaching contained in the same Declaration?

The third paragraph of the Declaration says: "Therefore, the Church's negative judgment in regard to Masonic associations remains unchanged since their principles have always been considered irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Church and therefore membership in them remains forbidden. The faithful who enroll in Masonic associations are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion."

4. Isn't this statement equivalent to a judgement on the conscience of Catholics who have joined Freemasonry?

No. It is rather a statement of the objectively serious wrongness of such membership. The subjective moral culpability of each individual is determined by himself in his conscience, after an honest consideration of what the Christian Faith teaches through the Church.

5. What are those principles of Freemasonry which are irreconcilable with the Christian Faith?

First, with regard to religion in general, Freemasonry considers all religions of the world as mere competitive attempts to know God, who remains unknowable. Consequently, to say that Christianity is the true religion would be unacceptable in Freemasonry.

Second, Freemasonry considers itself as above and beyond all religions, a source of unity among men because it upholds only those beliefs in which all men agree. "We are religious, but Freemasonry is not a religion," its members would describe themselves.

Third, Freemasonry makes human reason as the only source of knowledge. What reason cannot totally comprehend—such as the mysteries of Christianity—is disregarded as superstitious.

Fourth, and as a consequence of the above, Freemasonry teaches that the truth about God and man is unattainable; thus, in Freemasonry, whatever sounds dogmatic (in Christian faith and morals) is dismissed as bigotry and fanaticism.

Fifth, Freemasonry seeks the perfection of man only in the development of his natural virtues. Whereas Christianity gives primary importance to supernatural grace received in the Sacraments, Freemasonry grounds man's "enlightenment" and moral perfection on man's human effort alone. (Cf. Appendix 3)

6. Since when has the Church declared that Freemasonry is incompatible with the Christian faith?

Since 1738, with the constitution "*In Eminenti*" of Pope Clement XII, twenty-one years after Freemasonry was established in 1717.

7. Was the same teaching of Pope Clement XII maintained by his successors?

Yes. Eleven popes, including John Paul II, maintained the same teaching. For example, in the 19th century Pope Pius IX issued three formal statements, Pope Leo XIII issued four, foremost of which was the encyclical "*Humanum Genus*" in 1884.

8. What are the canons in the 1983 Code of Canon Law relevant to Freemasonry?

Canon 1364 §1 says: "An apostate from the faith, a heretic or a schismatic incurs a *latae sententiae* excommunication, without prejudice to the provision of can. 194 §1, n.2; a cleric, moreover, may be punished with the penalties mentioned in can. 1336 §1, nn. 1, 2, and 3." (Note: Canons 194 and 1336 refer only to clerics.)

Canon 1374 says: "A person who joins an association which plots against the Church is to be punished with a just penalty; one who promotes or takes office in such an association is to be punished with an interdict."

9. What did the Code of Canon Law of 1917 say about Freemasonry?

Canon 2335 stated that "Those who join a Masonic sect or other societies of the same sort, which plot against the Church or against legitimate civil authority, incur excommunication".

10. Why was Freemasonry not mentioned in Canon 1374 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law?

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in the second paragraph of "A Declaration on Masonic Associations" mentioned in no. 1 above, explains the reason: "This Sacred Congregation is in a position to reply that this circumstance is due to an editorial criterion which was followed also in the case of other associations likewise unmentioned inasmuch as they are contained in wider categories".

11. What happens to a Catholic if he is excommunicated?

A Catholic who is excommunicated is deprived of the right to receive the Sacraments —not even the Sacrament of Penance

(Confession)— and to participate in public acts of worship. If he is a cleric he is forbidden to celebrate the Holy Mass and all the other Sacraments; neither is he allowed to receive the Sacraments. It is a penalty that is intended to make the faithful realize the gravity of his sin. Only after the excommunication is lifted by the competent Church authority can a Catholic receive the Sacraments again.

12. What is meant by *latae sententiae* excommunication?

Latae sententiae means that the offender automatically incurs excommunication upon committing the offense, that is, without any need for a formal judgment issued by the competent ecclesiastical court.

13. What does it mean to be an apostate from the faith? What is a heretic and a schismatic?

An apostate is a baptized Catholic who willfully and completely abandons his faith either by becoming an atheist (one who rejects belief in God) or by joining a non-Christian religion. A heretic, strictly speaking, is a Catholic who willfully rejects any important element of the Christian faith that forms part of divine revelation as contained in Holy Scripture, Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church. A schismatic is a Catholic who formally breaks his union with the visible structure of the Church (under the leadership of the Pope and the bishops in communion with him).

14. Does a Catholic who joins Freemasonry become an apostate?

Insofar as Freemasonry's basic principles are incompatible with Christianity (see no. 5 above and Part II), a Catholic commits apostasy if he joins it and adheres to the same principles with full conviction.

15. If a Catholic joins Freemasonry but does not maintain a convinced adherence to its principles and philosophy, does he incur excommunication *latae sententiae*?

No, he does not, but the prohibition of membership remains: he is still obliged to withdraw his membership. As mentioned in no. 3 above, objectively speaking, "the faithful who enroll in Masonic associations are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion".

16. What is an interdict, referred to in Canon 1374?

When a Catholic is under interdict, he is still a member of the Church (i.e., he is not excommunicated), but he is forbidden to receive the Sacraments and an ecclesiastical burial, and to participate in public acts of worship such as hearing Mass, acting as sponsors in baptism and confirmation. An interdict is incurred only after it is imposed and declared by the ecclesiastical authority (Cf. Appendix 2).

17. Is a Freemason who is a leader in his lodge (takes office) and promotes Freemasonry liable to an interdict?

Yes, in accordance with Canon 1374. And if, subjectively, he maintains a convinced adherence to the philosophy of Freemasonry, he is in fact incurring an excommunication *latae sententiae* (Cf. Appendix 2).

18. If a Catholic's purpose in joining Freemasonry is merely to establish professional or social contacts, does that justify his membership?

No. The end does not justify the means. Right judgement and discernment should govern the person's right to association. Moreover, he would be exposing himself, without any important reason, to beliefs that can water down his Christian faith. The First Commandment enjoins the faithful not only to follow the truth about God but also to protect that truth from error. (Cf Appendix 4) There are many other civic or professional associations whose basic ideologies are not at variance with Christianity that can satisfy a Catholic professional's need to belong to a group.

19. Why can't a Catholic join a particular Masonic lodge where the religious beliefs of the members are not even discussed?

Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Humanum genus* explains why: "If those who are admitted as members are not commanded to abjure by any form of words the Catholic doctrines, this omission, so far from being adverse to the designs of the Freemasons, is more useful for their purposes. First, in this way they easily deceive the simple-minded and the heedless, and can induce a far greater number to become members. Again, as all who offer themselves are received

whatever may be their form of religion, they thereby teach the great error of this age—that a regard for religion should be held as an indifferent matter, and that all religions are alike. This manner of reasoning is calculated to bring about the ruin of all forms of religion, and especially of the Catholic religion, which, as it is the only one that is true, cannot, without great injustice, be regarded as merely equal to other religions.” (no. 16)

20. What is the most recent Declaration of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines on Freemasonry?

The CBCP, on July 6, 2002, during its Plenary Assembly, issued a Joint Declaration applying the provisions of Canon Law on sanctions against membership in Freemasonry. The Declaration states that:

(1) Any Catholic who is publicly known to be a member of any Masonic Association and actively participates in its program and activities, or promotes its views, or holds any office therein, and refuses to renounce such membership despite at least one warning (Cf. Canon 1347) is to be punished with an interdict (cf. Canon 1374), that is:

- a) he is not to be admitted to Holy Communion and other sacraments (Cf. Canon 1332);
- b) is prohibited to act as sponsor in Baptism and Confirmation;
- c) is not to be admitted as member of parish or diocesan structures;
- d) is to be denied funeral rites, unless some signs of repentance before death have been shown (cf. Canon 1184, §1, no. 3);
- e) where Church funeral rites are allowed by the bishop no Masonic services shall be allowed in the Church or cemetery immediately before or after the Church rites in order to avoid public scandal (Cf. Canon 1184, §1, no. 3, and Canon 1374).

(2) Any Catholic who is a convinced member of Freemasonry, notoriously adhering to the Masonic vision, is already considered excommunicated *latae sententiae* (Cf. Canon 1364). (See Appendix 2 for the complete text.)

21. What is the purpose of these sanctions?

These sanctions are meant to help the members of the Church see clearly that the incompatibility between Christianity and the

principles of Freemasonry touches on important matters. "(They intend) to enlighten the consciences of the faithful about a grave consequence which must derive from their belonging to a Masonic lodge." (Cf Appendix 4) The law of the Church only seeks to promote and safeguard the spiritual good of her members.

22. How should a Catholic treat other Catholics who have joined Freemasonry?

Since Catholic Masons are members of the Church, they deserve the prayers and charity Christians owe to one another (Romans 13:8). But charity is the same motive behind the need to explain to them why they cannot be simultaneously Freemasons and Catholics. At the same time this should be done in such a way that, while the Church guidelines are not watered down, the personal and individual situation of a Catholic Mason is considered, so that gradually he may freely follow those guidelines. This is why it is recommended that a Mason speak with his parish priest or bishop to receive personal spiritual guidance on this matter.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

23. What does the word "Freemason" mean?

"Freemason" originally meant a medieval stone mason whose special skill was to work on "free" stones, not stone walls. Later on, when honorary members of the masons' trade guilds were allowed to join they were called "Accepted Masons". Thus, the complete name of Masonry in the Philippines is "The Grand Lodge of the Free and Accepted Masons of the Philippines". (A *lodge* is the basic unit of a group of Masons; the Grand Lodge is like a federation of lodges, headed by a Grand Master. *Lodge* is also the meeting place of Masons)

24. When was Freemasonry established?

Freemasonry as it is now, with its philosophical underpinnings, is also known as "Speculative Masonry". The year 1717 is taken to

be the beginning of Speculative Masonry, when the Grand Lodge of England was established. Many legends in Freemasonry literature try to link it with the ancient builders of King Solomon's Temple under King Hiram of Tyre, if not with the Knights Templars, a military-religious Order established in the 12th century, and abolished in 1312. But these claims have no real historical basis.

25. Why the name "Masonry"?

Freemasonry adopted the tools and hierarchy of the stone masons of the Middle Ages (called "operative masons") and gave them symbolic meanings. Masonic tools include the mason's apron, compass and the square. Freemasonry is called "the Craft" or "the Brotherhood". "Speculative Masonry, now known as Freemasonry, is, therefore, the scientific application and the religious consecration of the rules and principles, the technical language and the implements and materials, of operative Masonry to the worship of God as the Grand Architect of the Universe, and to the purification of the heart and the inculcation of the dogmas of a religious philosophy" (A. Mackey, *Masonic Ritualist*. New York: Clark & Maynard, 1869).

26. What are the philosophical principles underlying "Speculative Freemasonry"?

Freemasonry is founded on "Deism", "Naturalism" and "Relativism". (Cf Appendices 5-7)

27. What is Deism?

Deism teaches that after God created man and the material world, he left man on his own such that man is no longer accountable to God in all that he does in this world. In Deism man becomes the master of the world in an absolute sense, so one cannot speak of God's Providence or Revelation to man. God is aptly called in Freemasonry as the "Great Architect of the Universe" — a non-personal God, very different from the God revealed in the Old and New Testaments. In the last analysis, the God of Deism is an unknown and distant God, open to each man's subjective interpretation. Deism prepared the ground for the so-called "Enlightenment", the cultural trend in 18th century-Europe which, in the religious sphere, promoted agnosticism

and atheism. In the Enlightenment, "Reason" was deified; faith was condemned as superstition. Deism was born in 17th century-England; its chief thinkers were Herbert of Cherbury, John Toland and the Earl of Shaftesbury.

28. What is Naturalism?

Naturalism teaches that man has no supernatural destiny. Man's purpose is simply to cultivate his natural powers, especially his reason. Man is self-sufficient in his pursuit of happiness; his perfection is not to be found in his union with God in this life and in the next. Supernatural realities like sanctifying grace, Redemption and divine mercy, God's gifts like faith, hope and charity have no place in Naturalism. Naturalism is at the heart of Deism.

29. What is Relativism?

Relativism teaches that no one can claim to possess the truth in an absolute way. Applied to man's religious life, this means that no one can say that he has the true religion. Applied to morality, this means that objective and universal moral standards do not exist. Man becomes the last arbiter of what is right and wrong (in the absence of objective moral standards, the only alternative is to fall into "subjectivism"). Consequently, Relativism would not admit that the teaching authority of the Church could present an article of faith or morals as something to be firmly held by members of the Church.

30. What are the early writings about Freemasonry?

Two Protestant ministers, John Theophilus Desaguliers and James Anderson, wrote the "Book of Constitutions", later on known as "Anderson's Constitutions" (1723). In the US, Albert Pike (d. 1891) wrote "Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry" in 1871, a source book of Freemasonry's governing principles used by Freemasons in the U.S. and Canada in the 19th century. Pike is considered one of the authorities on Masonic philosophy. Albert Mackey, who is considered the historian of Freemasonry, wrote the "Encyclopedia of Freemasonry" in 1873. Since then, literature on Freemasonry has become quite extensive.

31. What are the so-called “Degrees” and “Rites” in Freemasonry?

The basic degrees of Freemasonry are three: 1st, Entered Apprentice; 2nd, Fellow Craft; 3rd, Master Mason. These three degrees constitute the “Blue Lodge” (Blue is the color of Freemasonry.) A Master Mason may choose to go up the Masonic hierarchy by entering the higher degrees within the “Rites” — either the Scottish rite or York rite.

In the Scottish rite a Mason will reach up to the 32nd degree; the 33rd degree is honorary. In the York rite there are ten degrees, the highest of which is the “Order of the Knights Templar”.

Freemasonry has branched into two main traditions: first, the Anglo-Saxon Masonry (English-speaking Masons); the other is the Grand Orient Masonry (France, Italy, Spain and Latin America). The Grand Orient lodges were openly anti-Church, especially in the 19th century. In 1877 the Grand Orient of France rejected the requirement of belief in God and removed the Bible from the lodges.

32. When was Freemasonry established in the Philippines?

In 1856, by two Spanish navy officials, under the charter of the Grand Orient Lodge of Portugal. Membership was limited to non-natives. In 1892 Filipinos who had joined Freemasonry in Spain set up the first Filipino Masonic lodge called *Nilad*, connected with the Grand Orient of Spain. Later on, with the coming of the Americans, the Grand Lodge of Scottish Rite was established in 1912, composed of three American lodges with charters from the Grand Lodge of California.

33. Have there been initiatives of dialogue between the Catholic Church and Filipino Freemasons?

Yes. As early as 1959 William Quasha, Grand Master of Masons in the Philippines at that time, held some discussions with the Office of the Secretary of State of the Vatican. In February 1968 Teodoro Kalaw, Jr. requested Cardinal Santos to reconsider the Church’s stand on Freemasonry. Later on the CBCP appointed a committee to meet with the Masonic panel. The Church was given the assurance that Freemasonry is not anti-Catholic, that it is willing to cooperate with the Catholic Church. As a result, the CBCP filed a petition to the Holy

See so that the excommunication that was in force then (canon 2335 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law) be not imposed on Filipino Catholics who joined Masonry in good faith (but applied only to the first three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason). But with the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law and the corresponding **Declaration on Masonic Associations** (Cf Part I above) it has become clear that the Church's disapproval of Freemasonry is based more on questions of religious principles than on whether a particular Masonic lodge is anti-Catholic or not. (Cf Appendix 4)

III. RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF FREEMASONRY

34. Is Freemasonry a religion?

In the *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, Albert Mackey says that it is a religion, but it is a religion that is not sectarian: "I contend without any sort of hesitation, that Masonry is ... an eminently religious institution ... that without this religious element, it would scarcely be worthy of cultivation by the wise and good... Who can deny that it is eminently a religious institution? But the religion of Masonry is not sectarian... It is not Judaism, though there is nothing in it to offend a Jew; it is not Christianity, but there is nothing in it repugnant to the faith of a Christian. Its religion is that general one of nature and primitive revelation — handed down to us from some ancient and patriarchal priesthood — in which all men may agree and in which no men can differ. It inculcates the practice of virtue, but supplies no scheme of redemption for sin ... Masonry, then, is indeed a religious institution; and on this ground mainly, if not alone, should the religious Mason defend it". Albert Pike said: "Every Masonic lodge is a temple of religion, and its teachings are instruction in religion" (*Morals and Dogma*, p. 213). In the same work, he wrote: "But Masonry teaches, and has preserved in their purity, the cardinal tenets of the old primitive faith, which underlie and are the foundation of all religions. All that ever existed have had a basis of truth; all have overlaid that truth with error."

“Not only does Freemasonry see itself as a religion, but it sees itself as the universal religion, while Christianity is simply another of the dozens of sects whose particular opinions have divided mankind over the ages” (Prof. William Whalen, Report on Freemasonry for US Bishops, 1985).

35. What do the Masonic initiation ceremonies imply?

“Without question Masonry demands of its adherent a denial of the Christian (and of every other so-called sectarian) religion. He must come as one in darkness, seeking light from the lodge, as one who is in spiritual ignorance, seeking wisdom. Since the lodge is nothing if not religious ... it is religious light, religious wisdom, which is promised to its candidates. And by declaring that they are in darkness, the applicants formally, though not always consciously, reject the religious teachings of their Church as darkness. There is no escape from the conclusion that Masonry promises all of its members that they will find a higher, better religion in the lodge than is offered by the Christian Church.” (Theodore, Graebner, *Is Masonry a Religion?*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946, p. 24)

36. What symbols convey enlightenment to an initiate in Freemasonry?

The rituals for the first degree (“Entered Apprentice”) call for the candidate to wear a blindfold (called a hoodwink), a slipper on his right foot, and a blue silk rope (called a cable tow) around his neck. After making his oath, the candidate’s hoodwink is removed. The Master explains the light of Freemasonry: “My brother, on being brought to light in this degree, you discover both points of the compass hid by the square, which is to signify that you are yet in darkness as respects Masonry, you having only received the degree of an Entered Apprentice. You also discover the three great lights of Masonry, by the help of the three lesser. The three great lights in Masonry are the Holy Bible, square, and compass, which are thus explained: the Holy Bible is the rule and guide of our faith and practice; the square our actions; the compass, to circumscribe and keep us within bounds with all mankind, but more especially with a brother Mason. The three lesser lights are the three burning tapers which you see placed

in a triangular form about this altar. They represent the sun, moon, and Master of the Lodge; and as the sun rules the day, and the moon governs the night, so ought the Worshipful Master to endeavor to rule and govern this Lodge with equal regularity." (Cf Whalen, William, *Christianity and American Freemasonry*, 3rd ed., Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1998, pp. 40-56)

37. How does Freemasonry regard Christianity and other religions?

Freemasonry honors Jesus Christ as it honors the great thinkers and moral leaders of man's history. Freemasonry, in accordance with its principles, cannot admit the divinity of Jesus Christ nor the completeness of revelation in His Person and teachings. "The religious conception of the Mason is relativistic: All religions are competitive attempts to explain the truth about God which, in the last analysis, is unattainable. Therefore, only the language of Masonic symbols, which is ambiguous and left to the subjective interpretation of the individual Mason, is adapted to this truth about God" (From the statement of the German Bishops' Conference on Freemasonry, 1980).

38. How does Freemasonry regard the Bible?

A Masonic lodge would have a Bible on its altar, but that can be substituted by the Koran in a lodge where Moslems are a majority, or by the Vedas in a predominantly Hindu lodge. The Digest of Masonic Law states: "To say that the candidate profess a belief in the divine authority of the Bible is a *serious innovation* in the very body of Masonry. The Jews, the Chinese, the Turks, each reject either the Old or the New Testament, or both, and yet we see no good reason why they should not be made Masons. In fact Blue Lodge Masonry has nothing whatever to do with the Bible. It is not founded on the Bible. If it were, it would not be Masonry."

39. Isn't it a teaching of the Catholic Church that a Catholic should respect the religious beliefs of non-Christians?

The Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions (*Nostra aetate*, 2) states: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct,

the precepts and teachings, which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men". However, this respect that leads the Church to promote inter-religious dialogue with non-Christians is guided and inspired by the command of Jesus Christ to make the Good News known to all men. "Equality, which is a presupposition of *inter-religious dialogue*, refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ — who is God himself made man — in relation to the founders of the other religions" (*Declaration Dominus Iesus*, On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, no. 22. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, August 6, 2000).

Respect for religious freedom is not the same as "religious indifferentism" (an offshoot of Relativism). In Relativism, the search for the truth about man and God, under the guidance of Revelation and the teaching office of the Church, is substituted by a misguided tolerance — wherein truth and error are no longer differentiated.

40. Freemasonry, in order to avoid divisions among men due to their differences in religious beliefs, teaches that all that men have to believe in are those truths in which all men agree. Isn't that enough to be a good person?

Freemasonry teaches the existence of God, immortality of the soul, good moral life, reward and punishment in the next life. In Catholic doctrine, these truths are called "natural truths" about God and man; they are "natural" because they can be known by any human person using the light of his natural reason. But when God spoke to man in the Old Testament and especially in the New Testament through Jesus Christ, "supernatural truths" were revealed to him: for example, that man is created in God's image and likeness; that man was called by God to share in His divine life through grace; that man can establish a very personal relationship with God (man can call him "Father", not merely "my Creator"); and that God was willing to restore man's nature, wounded by sin, through the Incarnation, Life, Death and Resurrection of the Second Person of the Trinity who took on man's human nature (i.e., Jesus Christ); that Christ established a Church to continue His work of salvation for the benefit of all mankind until the end of time.

These supernatural truths (truths which man could not have known if God had not revealed them) are contained in the Catholic Creed (from the Latin Credo, "I believe"), also known as "Profession of Faith". For man's happiness and perfection now and in the afterlife, it is not enough for him to adhere to the natural truths about God and man. God has offered man such an unmerited superior kind of life (the supernatural life) that man would remain incomplete if he were to reject it. This being so, "especially in those things that concern God and his Church, all persons are required to seek the truth, and when they come to know it, to embrace it and hold fast to it" (Vatican II, Declaration *Dignitatis humanae*, 1)

41. Freemasonry aims at fostering brotherhood and philanthropy among persons and nations. Isn't that a noble ideal?

Yes, it is. Freemasonry promotes various social projects that help the needy. However, genuine brotherhood among men needs to be founded on something higher than man — the Fatherhood of God, revealed to us by His Only-Begotten Son made man, Jesus Christ. Cut off from the supernatural bond of charity linking him with God and other men, a human being could transcend his selfish ends only with great difficulty. To the apostles Jesus gave this condition for our works to become pleasing to God: "As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5). As it is not enough to have a vague belief in a Supreme Being (since we are called to have supernatural faith), so it is not enough to practice philanthropy (since we are called to practice supernatural charity).

42. What makes brotherhood in Freemasonry different from Christian brotherhood?

Freemasonry is by nature a closed association in terms of membership, a characteristic that does not contribute to the openness to others expected of the members of the Church. "On the one hand, a Catholic Christian cannot at the same time share in the full communion of Christian brotherhood and, on the other, look upon his Christian brother, from the Masonic perspective,

as an outsider" ("Irreconcilability between Christian Faith and Freemasonry", *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 11, 1985). "Profane" is the name given by Masons to non-Masons. In the US, blacks are not allowed to become regular Masons, so they have to join what are known as "Prince Hall" lodges, which are not recognized by Regular Masonry. "The legitimization of social intermingling between black and white Masons has remained anathema in mainstream Freemasonry" (Loretta J. Williams, *Black Freemasonry and Middle-Class Realities*, University of Missouri Press, 1980, p. 98).

43. What is wrong with the oaths that candidates to Freemasonry make?

Solemn oaths taken with the Bible without an important motive are forbidden by the Second Commandment. Regarding the initiation ceremonies of Freemasonry, the dilemma is this: "Either the oaths mean what they say or they do not. If they do mean what they say, then the candidate is entering into a pact *consenting* to his own *murder* by barbarous *torture* and *mutilation* should he break it. If they do not mean what they say, then he is swearing high-sounding schoolboy nonsense on the Bible, which verges on blasphemy" (Hannah, Walton, *Darkness Visible: A Revelation and Interpretation of Freemasonry*, 1975, p. 21)

44. What does the oath say?

As an example, the last paragraph of the oath made by a Mason to enter the degree of Master Mason (i.e., the third degree) says: "All this I most solemnly, sincerely promise and swear, with a firm and steady resolution to perform the same, without any hesitation, mental reservation or secret evasion of mind whatever, binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my body severed in two, my bowels taken from thence and burned to ashes, the ashes scattered before the four winds of heaven, that no more remembrance might be had of so vile and wicked a wretch as I would be, should I ever knowingly violate this my master Mason's obligation. So help me God, and keep me steadfast in the due performance of the same."

45. But Freemasons claim that their rituals and oaths are merely ceremonial in nature, that they do not bind in conscience the person making them.

Contrary to that claim, the rituals and oaths of Freemasonry "show, from the words used and through the symbols, a character similar to that of the Sacraments. This leads to the impression that, in such circumstances, with symbolic actions, something objective takes place in man, which transforms him. The content is a symbolic initiation of man which, for all its characteristics, clearly coincides with man's sacramental transformation." (Declaration of the German Episcopal Conference.)

46. Are ceremonies in the Blue Lodges (first three Degrees) different from those of the higher degrees?

Yes. The most objectionable ceremonies are for the 30th degree of the Scottish rite — the "Knight Kadosh". Some parts of the ceremonies are: The Grand Master, in the presence of the candidates, goes to a table with three skulls. One skull wears a papal tiara, another a wreath of laurel, and the third a regal crown. The Grand Master stabs the skull with the papal tiara, and the candidate repeats, "Down with Imposture! Down with crime!" Both the Grand Master and the candidate kneel before the second skull and chorus, "Everlasting glory to the immortal martyr of virtue." Passing to the third crowned skull, the two repeat, "Down with tyranny! Down with crime!" Later on the candidate is asked to trample on the Pope's tiara while shouting "Down with Imposture". Before that he makes the oath: "I, _____, solemnly and sincerely promise and swear wholly to devote myself to the emancipation of humanity; to practice toleration, in political and religious matters especially, toward all men. To strive unceasingly for the happiness of my fellow beings, for the propagation of light and for the overthrow of superstition, fanaticism, imposture, and intolerance. I furthermore solemnly promise and swear to help my brethren even at the peril of my life, if they should be persecuted for their religion, for the holy cause of liberty, or as members of the higher Masonic bodies. So help me God" (Cf Whalen, William, *Christianity and American Freemasonry*, op. cit., pp. 88-93).

47. Is the Catholic Church alone in opposing the doctrine of Freemasonry?

No. The Orthodox Church maintains the same position as the Catholic Church's. The Lutheran Cyclopedia says: "While frankly anti-Christian in its French, German and Italian branches, Freemasonry in England and the United States has always called itself a supporter of the morality and doctrine of the Protestant church. Very few candidates realize that they are joining an organization which is essentially antagonistic to the Christian belief in the inspiration of the Bible and the divinity of Jesus Christ."

In 1985 the General Synod of the Church of England established a Working Group to study whether or not Freemasonry and Christianity are compatible. Despite the well-known fact that many Anglicans and their pastors are Freemasons, still the Working Group (in its report published in 1987) expressed serious reservations on the Masonic Rituals and on their underlying philosophical-theological errors, such as Pelagianism and Deism with its offshoot—religious indifferentism. (Pelagius, an English monk who died in early 5th century, undervalued the role of grace in Christian life, while he exaggerated man's capacity for good as if human nature had not suffered the consequences of original sin.)

The English Methodists have reached similar conclusions in a report submitted to the Methodist Conference in 1985. Other Protestant denominations have no definitive stand on Freemasonry.

Appendix 1

DECLARATION ON MASONIC ASSOCIATIONS¹

**CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH
- 26 NOVEMBER 1983**

It has been asked whether there has been any change in the Church's decision in regard to Masonic associations since the new Code of Canon Law does not mention them expressly, unlike the previous Code.

This Sacred Congregation is in a position to reply that this circumstance is due to an editorial criterion which was followed also in the case of other associations likewise unmentioned inasmuch as they are contained in wider categories.

Therefore the Church's negative judgment in regard to Masonic associations remains unchanged since their principles have always been considered irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Church and therefore membership in them remains forbidden. The faithful who enrol in Masonic associations are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion.

It is not within the competence of local ecclesiastical authorities to give a judgment on the nature of Masonic associations which would imply a derogation from what has been decided above, and this in line with the Declaration of this Sacred Congregation issued on 17 February 1981 (cf. AAS 73 [1981] pp. 240-241).

In an audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect, the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II approved and ordered the publication of this Declaration which had been decided in an ordinary meeting of this Sacred Congregation.

Rome, from the Office of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 26 November 1983.

(Sgd) +JOSEPH Card. RATZINGER
Prefect
Fr JEROME HAMER, O.P.
Titular Archbishop of Lorium
Secretary

¹ First published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English weekly edition, 5 December 1983, p. 12.

Appendix 2

JOINT DECLARATION OF THE CBCP ON SANCTIONS FOR CATHOLICS WHO JOIN FREEMASONRY

6 JULY 2002

We, the members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, gathered at Tagaytay City for our 85th Plenary Assembly, in the exercise of our pastoral duty to guide the members of the Church towards a sincere discipleship of Jesus Christ, hereby issue this Joint Declaration in order to apply the provisions of Canon Law on sanctions for Catholics who join Freemasonry. We decree that:

(1) Any Catholic who is publicly known to be a member of any Masonic Association and actively participates in its program and activities, or promotes its views, or holds any office therein, and refuses to renounce such membership despite at least one warning (Cf. Canon 1347) is to be punished with an interdict (cf. Canon 1374), that is:

- a) he is not to be admitted to Holy Communion and other sacraments (Cf. Canon 1332);
- b) is prohibited to act as sponsor in Baptism and Confirmation;
- c) is not to be admitted as member of parish or diocesan structures;
- d) is to be denied funeral rites, unless some signs of repentance before death have been shown (cf. Canon 1184, §1, no. 3);
- e) where Church funeral rites are allowed by the bishop no Masonic services shall be allowed in the Church or cemetery immediately before or after the Church rites in order to avoid public scandal (Cf. Canon 1184, §1, no. 3, and Canon 1374).

(2) Any Catholic who is a convinced member of Freemasonry, notoriously adhering to the Masonic vision, is already considered excommunicated *latae sententiae* (Cf. Canon 1364). As such, the censures described in Canon 1331 automatically take their full effect on this person.

Canon 1331 states:

§1 An excommunicated person is forbidden:

1. to have any ministerial participation in celebrating the Eucharistic Sacrifice or in any other ceremonies whatsoever of public worship;
2. to celebrate the sacraments and sacramentals and to receive the sacraments;
3. to discharge any ecclesiastical offices, ministries, or functions whatsoever, or to place acts of governance.

§2 If the excommunication has been imposed or declared, the guilty party:

1. wishing to act against the prescription of §1 is to be prevented from doing so or the liturgical action is to stop unless a serious cause intervenes;
2. invalidly places acts of governance which are only illicit in accord with the norms of §1 no. 3;
3. is forbidden to enjoy privileges formerly granted;
4. cannot validly acquire a dignity, office or other functions in the Church;
5. cannot appropriate the revenues from any dignity, office, function or pension in the Church."

(3) Further, all the individual bishops, in virtue of Canon 455 §4, decided to strictly disallow in their respective jurisdictions these Masons from being witnesses in Marriage, and as members of any associations of the faithful.

These sanctions clearly manifest that the incompatibility between Christianity and the principles of Freemasonry touches on important matters of Christian life.

In the spirit of the Good Shepherd, we trust that these sanctions be received by men and women of good will as signs of our solicitude for their spiritual welfare.

Since Catholic Masons are members of the Church, they deserve the prayers and charity Christians owe to one another. While the Church's guidelines should not be watered down, the personal and individual situation of a Catholic Mason should be considered, so that gradually he may freely follow these guidelines. It is recommended that a Mason see his parish priest or bishop to receive personal and spiritual guidance on this matter.

(Sgd) +ORLANDO B. QUEVEDO, OMI, D.D.
President, CBCP

Appendix 3

DECLARATION OF THE CBCP COMMISSION ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH ¹

For the information of the faithful, the Church maintains the following criteria regarding membership to Masonry:

In 1983, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a statement, approved by Pope John Paul II, to the effect that membership in Masonic associations remains forbidden. It said that Catholics who enroll in such associations are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion.

In 1990, the Bishops of the Philippines declared that “any Catholic who is publicly known as Mason, i.e., whose membership in any Masonic Association can be proven in the external forum: a) may not receive Holy Communion; b) may not be allowed to act as sponsor in Baptism, Confirmation, and weddings; c) may not be admitted as member of religious organizations; d) Church funeral rites may be denied unless some signs of repentance before death has been shown; e) where Church funeral rites were allowed by the Ordinary, no Masonic services shall be allowed in the church or cemetery immediately before or after the Church rites in order to avoid any public scandal.”²

These penalties reflect the serious irreconcilable points between Christian faith and the philosophy of Masonry. Just to mention some main Masonic tenets: a) God is “the great architect” of the world but He leaves it on its own: thus we cannot speak of God revealing Himself to man in history; b) Much less could we speak of God revealing Himself in the person of Jesus Christ; c) Jesus Christ’s divinity has no place in Masonic philosophy: he was a good man, that’s all; d) There is no objective truth in morals and doctrine: that would be bigotry; e) Thus, one religion is as good as any other; f) In the end, man’s perfection is not to be

¹ Source: The CBCP Monitor, 27 August 2000, p. 9.

² The above-mentioned sanctions: b) may not be allowed to act as sponsor in Baptism, confirmation, and weddings; c) may not be admitted as member of religious organizations, are to be applied in accordance with the “Joint Declaration” of July 6, 2002 (Appendix 2, no. 3).

found in his love for a personal God, but only in the development of his natural powers; man has an immortal soul but has no supernatural destiny.

Catholics who want to join any associations need first to study deeply its philosophy. In the case of Masonry, the decision of a Catholic to join it must first take into account the reasons why the Church, since the 18th century, has kept a negative judgment towards it. In doing so, the Church is not persecuting anybody; in her difficult service to the truth the Church is guided by only one principle—the good of souls, here and hereafter.

(Sgd) +PEDRO R. DEAN, D.D.

Archbishop of Palo

Chairman, Commission on the Doctrine of the Faith

Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

Appendix 4

IRRECONCILABILITY BETWEEN CHRISTIAN FAITH AND FREEMASONRY ¹

REFLECTIONS A YEAR AFTER THE DECLARATION OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

On 26 November 1983 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a declaration on Masonic associations (cf. AAS LXXVI [1984], 300). A little more than a year after its publication, it may be useful to outline briefly the significance of this document.

Since the Church began to declare her mind concerning Freemasonry, her negative judgment has been inspired by many reasons, both practical and doctrinal. She judged Freemasonry not merely responsible for subversive activity in her regard, but from the earliest pontifical documents on the subject and in particular in the Encyclical *Humanum Genus* by Leo XIII (20 April 1884), the Magisterium of the Church has denounced in Freemasonry philosophical ideas and moral conceptions opposed to Catholic doctrine. For Leo XIII, they essentially led back to a rationalistic naturalism, the inspiration of its plans and activities against the Church. In his Letter to the Italian People *Custodi* (8 December 1892), he wrote: "Let us remember that Christianity and Freemasonry are essentially irreconcilable, so that enrolment in one means separation from the other".

One could not therefore omit to take into consideration the positions of Freemasonry from the doctrinal point of view when, during the years from 1970-1980, the Sacred Congregation was in correspondence with some Episcopal Conferences especially interested in this problem because of the dialogue undertaken by some Catholic personages with representatives of some lodges which declared that they were not hostile, but were even favourable, to the Church.

Now more thorough study has led the S.C.D.F. to confirm its conviction of the basic irreconcilability between the principles of Freemasonry and those of the Christian faith.

¹ Source: *L'Osservatore Romano*, English weekly edition, 11 March 1985.

Prescinding therefore from consideration of the practical attitude of the various lodges, whether of hostility towards the Church or not, with its declaration of 26 November 1983 the S.C.D.F. intended to take a position on the most profound and, for that matter, the most essential part of the problem: that is, on the level of the irreconcilability of the principles, which means on the level of the faith and its moral requirements.

Beginning from this doctrinal point of view, and in continuity, moreover, with the traditional position of the Church as the aforementioned documents of Leo XIII attest, there arise then the necessary consequences, which are valid for all those faithful who may possibly be members of Freemasonry.

Nevertheless, with regard to the affirmation of the irreconcilability between the principles of Freemasonry and the Catholic faith, from some parts are now heard the objection that essential to Freemasonry would be precisely the fact that it does not impose any "principles", in the sense of a philosophical or religious position which is binding for all of its members, but rather that it gathers together, beyond the limits of the various religions and world views, men of good will on the basis of humanistic values comprehensible and acceptable to everyone.

Freemasonry would constitute a cohesive element for all those who believe in the Architect of the Universe and who feel committed with regard to those fundamental moral orientations which are defined, for example, in the Decalogue; it would not separate anyone from his religion, but on the contrary would constitute an incentive to embrace that religion more strongly.

The multiple historical and philosophical problems which are hidden in these affirmations cannot be discussed here. It is certainly not necessary to emphasize that following the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church too is pressing in the direction of collaboration between all men of good will. Nevertheless, becoming a member of Freemasonry decidedly exceeds this legitimate collaboration and has a much more important and final significance than this.

Above all, it must be remembered that the community of "Freemasons" and its moral obligations are presented as a progressive system of symbols of an extremely binding nature. The rigid rule of secrecy which prevails there further strengthens the weight of the interaction of signs and ideas. For the members, this climate

of secrecy entails above all the risk of becoming an instrument of strategies unknown to them.

Even if it is stated that relativism is not assumed as dogma, nevertheless there is really proposed a relativistic symbolic concept and therefore the relativizing value of such a moral-ritual community, far from being eliminated, proves on the contrary to be decisive.

In this context the various religious communities to which the individual members of the lodges belong can be considered only as simple institutionalizations of a broader and elusive truth. The value of these institutionalizations therefore appears to be inevitably relative with respect to this broader truth, which instead is shown in the community of good will, that is, in the Masonic fraternity.

In any case, for a Catholic Christian, it is not possible to live his relation with God in a twofold mode, that is, dividing it into a supraconfessional humanitarian form and an interior Christian form. He cannot cultivate relations of two types with God, nor express his relation with the Creator through symbolic forms of two types. That would be something completely different from that collaboration, which to him is obvious, with all those who are committed to doing good, even if beginning from different principles. On the one hand, a Catholic Christian cannot at the same time share in the full communion of Christian brotherhood and, on the other, look upon his Christian brother, from the Masonic perspective, as an "outsider".

Even when, as stated earlier, there were no explicit obligation to profess relativism as doctrine, nevertheless the relativizing force of such a brotherhood, by its very intrinsic logic, has the capacity to transform the structure of the act of faith in such a radical way as to become unacceptable to a Christian, "to whom his faith is dear" (Leo XIII).

Moreover, this distortion of the fundamental structure of the act of faith is carried out for the most part in a gentle way and without being noticed: firm adherence to the truth of God, revealed in the Church, becomes simple membership in an institution, considered as a particular expressive form alongside other expressive forms, more or less just as possible and valid, of man's turning toward the eternal.

The temptation to go in this direction is much stronger today, in as much as it corresponds fully to certain convictions prevalent in contemporary mentality. The opinion that truth cannot be known is a

typical characteristic of our era and, at the same time, an essential element in its general crisis.

Precisely by considering all these elements, the Declaration of the Sacred Congregation affirms that membership in Masonic associations "remains forbidden by the Church", and the faithful who enrol in them "are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion".

With this last statement, the Sacred Congregation points out to the faithful that this membership objectively constitutes a grave sin and, by specifying that the members of a Masonic association may not receive Holy Communion, it intends to enlighten the conscience of the faithful about a grave consequence which must derive from their belonging to a Masonic lodge.

Finally, the Sacred Congregation declares that "it is not within the competence of local ecclesiastical authorities to give a judgment on the nature of Masonic associations which would imply a derogation from what has been decided above". In this regard, the text also refers to the Declaration of 17 February 1981, which already reserved to the Apostolic See all pronouncements on the nature of these associations which may have implied derogations from the Canon Law then in force (Can. 2335).

In the same way, the new document issued by the S.C.D.F. in November 1983 expresses identical intentions of reserve concerning pronouncements which would differ from the judgment expressed here on the irreconcilability of Masonic principles with the Catholic faith, on the gravity of the act of joining a lodge and on the consequences which arise from it for receiving Holy Communion. This disposition points out that, despite the diversity which may exist among Masonic obediences, in particular in their declared attitude towards the Church, the Apostolic See discerns some common principles in them which require the same evaluation by all ecclesiastical authorities.

In making this Declaration, the S.C.D.F. has not intended to disown the efforts made by those who, with the due authorization of this Congregation, have sought to establish a dialogue with representatives of Freemasonry. But since there was the possibility of spreading among the faithful the erroneous opinion that membership in a Masonic lodge was lawful, it felt that it was its duty to make known to them the authentic thought of the Church in this regard and to warn them about a membership incompatible with the Catholic

faith.

Only Jesus Christ is, in fact, the Teacher of Truth, and only in him can Christians find the light and the strength to live according to God's plan, working for the true good of their brethren.

Appendix 5

MASONRY AND NATURALISTIC RELIGION¹

STATEMENT OF THE US BISHOPS' COMMITTEE FOR PASTORAL RESEARCH AND PRACTICES, 19 APRIL 1985

I. HISTORY OF THE MASONS' SITUATION

RECENTLY (Nov. 6, 1983) the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith responded to an inquiry whether the church's position regarding Masonic organizations has been altered, especially since no explicit mention is made of them in the new Code of Canon Law, as there was in the old code.

The congregation stated that the Masons and other organizations were omitted in the new code due to a different criterion adopted in drafting the code. They were included in broader categories. The congregation did not, however, specify the categories it had in mind (it might have been thinking of such canons as Canon 1364), but it insisted that the church is still opposed to Masonic associations, since their principles are irreconcilable with the church's doctrine, and that it would be seriously wrong to join them.

In the old code an excommunication was incurred by those who joined the Masons or other organizations "that plotted against the church or legitimate civil authority."

In a response given by Cardinal Seper in 1973 regarding the force and meaning of Canon 2335, it was stated that the canon still remained in force but that since penal laws are subject to strict interpretation the penalty would be incurred in a particular case only by those who join associations which plot against the church. If the particular organization did not plot against the church, the excommunication would not be incurred by the person who joined them.

This was interpreted by some bishops to mean that it was permissible to join the Masons if the particular organization did not plot against the church, etc.

In 1981, since the previous letter had "given rise to erroneous and tendentious interpretations," the Congregation for the Doctrine

¹ Published in *Origins*, official publication of the USCC, 27 June 1985. Available at www.john654.org.

of the Faith affirmed the current (at that time) canonical discipline, and while still admitting a strict interpretation of the penalty, denied any intention of remanding to bishops' conferences the making of public pronouncements of a general nature on the nature of Masonic associations, etc. But since the congregation spoke in the context of the old code (Canon 2335), it is not entirely relevant today.

The whole issue came into sharper focus with the advent of the new code and the absence of a censure for joining organizations that plotted against the church. The response of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on Nov. 6, 1983, was to this issue.

What is at stake is the distinction between penal law and morality. There is a difference between the two. Not everything that is immoral is penalized in the church. Nor can one conclude from the fact that penal law does not cover some sin or that it is removed from it (or changed), that it is permissible to commit it. A clear example of this is abortion. Even if the excommunication were removed from abortion, it would still be wrong. Similarly, even if the excommunication was removed from joining an organization that plotted against the church, it would still be wrong to join such an organization.

Moreover, even if the Masons did not plot against the church, it might be seriously wrong to join them for other reasons. The congregation presents as the reason for its judgment the fact that the principles of Masonry are "irreconcilable" with those of the church. The six-year study of Masonry by the German bishops and the study of American Masonry by Professor William Whalen (commissioned by the Pastoral Research and Practices Committee) both confirm that the *principles* and basic *rituals* of Masonry embody a naturalistic religion active participation in which is *incompatible* with Christian faith and practice. Those who knowingly embrace such principles are *committing serious sin* (they might also fall under the penalty in Canon 1364 in the new code).

Briefly, the **conclusion** is that even though there is no longer an excommunication attached to joining organizations that plot against the faith, it would still be wrong to join such an organization. And even though Masonic organizations may not in particular cases plot against the faith, it would *still* be *wrong* to join them because their *basic principles* are irreconcilable with those of the Catholic faith.

II. PROBLEMS WITH THE MASONIC QUESTION

The committee recognizes *two problems* in regard to the Masonic question:

1. A pastoral problem for those who have *become* or *continue* to be Masons in *good faith* on the basis of the less-restrictive interpretation which followed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's letter to Cardinal Krol. It is the question of applying the traditional principles for leaving them in good faith.
2. A *public-relations* problem resulting from the common American perception of Masonry as a *purely* social and *phil-anthropic* organization.

Appendix 6

THE PASTORAL PROBLEM OF MASONIC MEMBERSHIP

PROFESSOR WILLIAM WHALEN'S REPORT¹

(Commissioned by the Pastoral Research and Practices Committee, US Catholic Conference. Published together with the committee's statement)

Modern speculative Freemasonry began in 1717 with the establishment in London of the Grand Lodge of England. A little more than two decades later, Clement XII *forbade* Catholic membership in these lodges, and the opposition of the Catholic Church has been *restated* by *seven* other popes.

The *most recent* statement was given by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Nov. 26, 1983. In part it declared, "The church's negative position on Masonic associations therefore remains **unaltered** since their principles have always been regarded as **irreconcilable** with the church's doctrine." The document added that "Catholics enrolled in Masonic associations are involved in *serious sin and may not approach holy communion.*"

This paper will examine the reasons for the historical and present position of the church vis-a-vis Freemasonry and will do so in the American context.

Not Unified

We should understand that worldwide Freemasonry shares many beliefs and customs but is *not a unified organization*; it includes the United Grand Lodge of England; the 50 independent grand lodges in the United States; lodges in Canada, Australia and New Zealand; Prince Hall Masonry; the so-called Christian Masonry of Germany and three Scandinavian countries; the various Grand Orientes of Europe and Latin America; co-Masonic bodies; irregular lodges such as the Italian P2 lodge; and others.

¹ Professor Whalen, of Purdue University, is the author of some books on this topic. See Bibliography.

PASTORAL PROBLEM DUE TO MISUNDERSTANDINGS

That the church has for centuries *condemned* Freemasonry and excommunicated Catholics who joined the lodge or *refused baptism* to those who declined to sever their lodge affiliations is *clear*. That the church today considers Masonic membership serious enough to *deny* the *Eucharist* to "Catholic Masons" is also clear. What has created a pastoral problem in some dioceses is that for a period of some years membership by the laity in Masonic lodges *seemed* to be an *option*. From 1974 to 1981 and even beyond, an undetermined number of Catholic men *joined* the lodge, and many *retain* their membership.

Misleading Articles

Articles in the Catholic press told readers that under certain circumstances such membership was now *allowed*. The general public, Catholic and non-Catholic, got the impression that the church had *softened* its *stand* against membership in Freemasonry.

We will examine the **major reasons** why the church has taken the attitude it has since the mid-18th century and why these reasons justify the present position. But first we should take a brief look at the *documents* which *created* the *recent confusion*.

Seper to Krol: Letter 1974

Cardinal Franjo Seper, then prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, sent a letter dated July 19, 1974, to Cardinal John Krol which concluded that "Canon 2335 regards only those Catholics who join associations which *plot* against the church." Even if it were determined that a particular Masonic association did *not plot* against the church, membership was *still forbidden* to clerics, religious and members of secular institutes.

Presumably the local ordinary was expected to conduct an investigation to see whether a particular secret society in his diocese was engaged in a plot against the church. Cardinal Seper's letter made *no reference* to the traditional objections to Freemasonry, namely its religious **naturalism** and its **oaths**. Nor did the letter suggest a *methodology* by which a bishop might conduct his investigation, in view of the fact the members of the lodge, like members of the Irish Republican Army, the Mafia and other secret organizations, were sworn to *secrecy*.

As late as October 1984, a nationally syndicated columnist for the Catholic press was *assuring* his readers that Catholics “may indeed hold membership in organizations, Masonic and otherwise, which are *not* basically anti-Catholic and do *not plot* against the church.” The columnist told his readers that “direction and guidance concerning the various organizations in your own locality can easily be obtained from the chancery office of your diocese.” Would that it were so. At the very least one would suppose that anyone professing minimum expertise in the area of Freemasonry would have studied the ritual of the lodge as well as basic Masonic sources such as Pike’s “Morals and Dogma”, “*Humanum Genus*” by Leo XIII and such criticisms as Father Walton Hannah’s “Darkness Visible and Christian by Degrees” and Whalen’s “Christianity and American Freemasonry”. One wonders how many people in the typical chancery have spent even this amount of time on the question so that they could answer inquirers’ questions with confidence?

Some bishops evidently conducted such investigations or perhaps decided they had no way of determining the character of a particular secret society and *allowed* Catholic men in their dioceses to join the lodges. Other bishops *denied* requests to join.

A clarification from the congregation was published March 2, 1981. It referred to “erroneous and tendentious interpretations” of the “confidential letter” of July 19, 1974. The clarification affirmed that

- a) the present canonical discipline had not been modified in any way,
- b) that neither the excommunication nor other penalties had been abrogated and
- c) that it was not the intention of the congregation “to remand to the bishops’ conferences the making of public pronouncements with a judgment of a general nature on the nature of the Masonic associations, such as would imply the derogation of the aforesaid norms.”

Canon 2335 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law had stated, “Those who join a Masonic sect or other societies of the same sort, which plot against the church or against legitimate civil authority, *incur excommunication.*” When the new Code of Canon Law was published, no mention was made of the traditional penalty of excommunication for Catholics who joined the Masonic lodge. Again the possibility of

misunderstanding arose because the general public was *not aware* that the number of offenses for which excommunication was applied had been reduced from 37 to seven. The 1981 clarification had received little publicity. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger then issued the Nov. 26, 1983, document which *reaffirmed* the historic position against Freemasonry. This statement had also been specifically approved by John Paul II.

REASONS FOR CONDEMNATION

The March 11, 1985, issue of *L'Osservatore Romano* carried an article titled "Irreconcilability Between Christian Faith and Freemasonry" as a comment on the Nov. 26, 1983, declaration. In part the Vatican newspaper said a Christian "*cannot* cultivate relations of two types with God nor express his relation with the Creator through symbolic forms of two types. That would be something completely different from that collaboration, which to him is obvious, with all those who are committed to doing good, even if beginning from different principles. On the one hand, a Catholic Christian *cannot* at the same time share in the full communion of Christian brotherhood and, on the other, look upon his Christian brother, from the Masonic perspective, as an 'outsider.'"

Italian P2 Scandal

Some have suggested that the reaffirmation of the historic condemnation by the church was prompted by the P2 scandal. Grand Master Licio Gelli directed this secret Masonic lodge known as Propaganda Two or P2, whose aim seems to have been to *restore fascism* in Italy and to bolster *right-wing* governments in Latin America. When Italian police raided his villa in 1981, they discovered the lodge's membership roster, which listed 953 people including the heads of Italy's intelligence agencies, generals, cabinet ministers, judges, bankers, industrialists and the like. Gelli had persuaded a number of individuals, such as financier Roberto Calvi, that membership in the Masonic lodge was now allowed by the church. Actually, it appears that the P2 lodge *plotted* more *against* the Italian *state* than the church, although the Masonic financiers who were called in to handle the Vatican's investments (such as Sindona) cost the church many millions of dollars. The P2 case did demonstrate that Masonic secrecy could *camouflage* and *facilitate conspiracies* of the political right even in the shadows of St. Peter's.

On the other hand, a recent book by Stephen Knight alleges that

the KGB used the secrecy and networking of English Freemasonry to place spies in top intelligence jobs. It encouraged its operatives to try to join Masonic lodges to gain preferential treatment in their careers. In particular, the author charges that Freemasons propelled Sir Roger Hollis into a series of rapid promotions which led to his being named head of M15 counterintelligence in 1956. A book by Chapman Pincher, published in 1981, attempted to prove that Hollis was a Soviet agent. Knight's book was published in the United States in November 1984 by Stein and Day of New York, "The Brotherhood: The Secret World of Freemasons".

Both the right and the left have seen the advantages of using the Masonic organizations to further their causes. At one time Masonry was known as a chief bulwark of *republican* forms of governments. Actually in the United States today most observers would probably label the lodges as both politically reactionary and racist.

Not Limited to Europe

Although the 1981 clarification by the sacred congregation came shortly after the exposure of the P2 conspiracy, nothing in the statement indicated that its intent was limited to Italian or continental Masonry. An estimated 30,000 Masons belong to 500 lodges within three jurisdictions in Italy. Everyone knows that the Grand Orient lodges of Europe and Latin America have been **anti-clerical** from the start. For the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to advise Catholics against joining these Grand Orient lodges would be like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People advising blacks against applying for membership in the Ku Klux Klan. Those who say that the church really directs her condemnation against the Grand Orient lodges must assume that the Vatican does not know that Freemasonry is English in origin and overwhelmingly English-speaking in membership.

Membership Worldwide

Of the estimated 6 million members in all the various types of Masonic lodges worldwide, about 4 million live in the United States, 750,000 in the United Kingdom, 250,000 in Canada, and 400,000 in Australia and New Zealand. Perhaps nine out of 10 Masons live in an English-speaking country.

For U.S. bishops and priests the pastoral problem not only involves those Catholic lay men who joined Masonic lodges during

the period of confusion in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It extends to the general public, Catholic and non-Catholic, which does not understand why the Catholic Church in an era of ecumenism persists in condemning an organization often known for its charities and good works. We have no reason to doubt the testimony of so many American Masons that they have never heard a word of criticism of the Roman church in lodge meetings or functions. In fact Masonry rules out discussions of religion and politics in the lodge.

MASONIC STANDS, RITUAL AND PRINCIPLES

We should understand that Masonry basically consists of the three degrees of the Blue lodge: 1) entered apprentice, 2) fellow craft and 3) master Mason. The lodges are grouped in independent grand lodges in the 50 states.

If he wishes, a master Mason may elect to continue his Masonic career by entering the so-called higher degrees: The Scottish or the York (or American) rite. (Jews are, however, barred from the York rite.) Membership in the Scottish rite leads to the 32nd degree and the honorary 33rd degree. The fourth to the 32nd degrees are ordinarily conferred on a class over a weekend in a Scottish-rite cathedral; in Europe the candidate must spend many years to reach the 32nd degree, which is another contrast between the mass Masonry in the United States and the elite Masonry of the continent.

The goal of all those who choose to go up the York-rite ladder is membership in the Knights Templar. Both 32nd-degree Scottish-rite Masons and Knights Templar are eligible to join the Shrine, which serves as the playground of American Masonry and supports notable charitable institutions such as its hospitals for crippled children. Father Hannah called its pseudo-Islamic ritual the "adolescent and occasionally Rabelaisian nadir of driveling tomfoolery and burlesque blasphemies." English Freemasonry would never tolerate an organization such as the Shrine, but obviously hundreds of thousands of U.S. Masons find in the Shrine the fun they do not find in the teetotalling, sober Blue lodges.

Many other organizations require Masonic membership but they do not form an integral part of Freemasonry. These include the Grotto, Square and Compass Clubs, National Sojourners, High Twelve clubs, Tall Cedars of Lebanon, etc. A Mason who quits or is expelled from his

Blue lodge forfeits membership in any other Masonic organizations. Attendance requirements are unknown in the Blue lodge, so that simple payment of dues keeps members in good standing.

If the American Blue lodges are not especially anti-Catholic, the religious neutrality of an organization such as the Southern jurisdiction of the Scottish rite, which enrolls 600,000 Masons in 33 Southern and Western states, is another matter. The hostility of this group to parochial schools remains unabated, and readers of the *New Age* are well aware of the attitude of the Southern jurisdiction to Roman Catholicism.

In a 1978 article in the *Review of Religious Research*, two (non-Catholic) scholars examined "Fraternal Associations and Civil Religion: Scottish-Rite Freemasonry." Among many observations the authors noted:

"In their support of civil religion, the Masons are militantly 'anti-particularistic,' to use Sidney Mead's term. They vigorously denounce parochial schools for challenging the public school system and, implicitly, the unifying civil religion. Sectarian religion has positive values, but it is relegated to the sphere of private morality and private faith" (Pamela M. Jolicoeur and Louis L. Knowles, Vol. 20, No. 1, Fall 1978, pp. 13-14).

Those who direct the Scottish rite, Southern jurisdiction, would be delighted if every parochial school closed tomorrow. This may not technically involve a plot against the church, but it raises the question of allowing, much less encouraging, Catholics in these Southern and Western states from participating in the Scottish rite.

If anti-Catholicism and racism in U.S. Masonry were the major reasons for the church's condemnation, we might envision some sort of rapprochement in the foreseeable future. The irreconcilable principles to which the 1983 letter refers remain the basic reason for the condemnation by the Catholic Church and other Christian bodies. We agree with the assessment of the German hierarchy, which studied the Masonic question between 1974 and 1980 and observed in part:

"Although it may be important to distinguish between favorable, neutral or hostile Masonry with regard to the church, the same distinction, in this context, leads to error because it insinuates that for Catholics, only membership in a hostile branch would be inadmissible."

If we try to make “plotting against the church” the sole criterion for allowing or disallowing membership, we in effect are saying that we do not concern ourselves with the nature of an organization or what it teaches. By the same token, we should allow membership by Catholics in organizations of spiritualists, theosophists and occultists so long as these groups do not plot against the church. But the church’s historic stand has not been based primarily on whether the Masonic lodges are hostile or neutral toward the church, but on the principles for which the lodge stands.

To grasp the fundamental objections to Freemasonry we have to briefly review the history of the craft.

Unlike other craftsmen in the Middle Ages, the stonemasons who built the great cathedrals of Europe were forced to move from place to place to follow their occupation. To protect their skills and to recognize fellow masons, they devised a system of signs and passwords. These served the purpose of a union card. Their worksheds were called lodges.

With the decline of cathedral building, some of the lodges of stonemasons began to admit non-working or honorary masons. In time the number of honorary free and accepted Masons outnumbered the working masons. They used the tools, symbols, signs, grips and passwords of the masons’ trade union to create what we know as speculative Freemasonry. This new craft Masonry usually defines itself as “a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.”

The masons of early medieval times were Catholics, like almost everyone else in Europe. But under the influence of deism, all traces of Christianity were excised from speculative Freemasonry. In the 1723 Book of Constitutions the new attitude toward religious belief was spelled out: “A Mason is obliged by his tenure to obey the moral law; and if he rightly understands the art, he will never be a stupid atheist nor an irreligious libertine. But though in ancient times Masons were charged in every country to be of the religion of that country or nation, whatever it was, yet ‘tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves.”

FREEMASONRY AS UNIVERSAL RELIGION

Clearly whatever constitutes “that religion in which all men

agree," it is not Christianity or revealed religion. Masons as Masons believe in the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of mankind and the immortality of the soul. These are beliefs which they maintain can be discovered by human reason. The inspiration of the Bible, the unique claims of Jesus Christ, the authority and teaching role of the church, and the sacraments as means of grace are "particular opinions" which Freemasons are asked to keep to themselves rather than disturb the brothers in the lodge.

A century ago, in his encyclical on Freemasonry "Humanum Genus", Leo XIII defined naturalism, which he saw as the primary objection to the Masonic system:

"Now the fundamental doctrine of the naturalists, which they sufficiently make known by their very name, is that human nature and human reason ought in all things be mistress and guide... For they deny that anything has been taught by God; they allow no dogma of religion or truth which cannot be understood by human intelligence nor any teacher who ought to be believed by reason of his authority."

In keeping with the naturalism of the lodge, no prayers in the Blue lodges are ever offered in the name of Jesus Christ. God, whom Christians have been told to address as our Father, is worshipped as the deistic Great Architect of the Universe. As the authors of the recent article in the Review of Religious Research put it:

"The nature of the Masonic God is best seen in their favorite title for him: the Supreme Architect. The Masonic God is first of all a deistic God, who is found at the top of the ladder of Masonic wisdom" (Jolicoeur and Knowles, pp. 14-15).

In U.S. Freemasonry all women, men under 21 and blacks are barred from Masonic initiation in regular lodges. Otherwise only the atheist, technically the "stupid atheist," and the "irreligious libertine" are unwelcome. By jettisoning the vestiges of Christianity, modern Freemasonry opened its doors to deists, Jews, Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists and any who acknowledge the existence of the Grand Architect of the Universe and believe in the immortality of the soul. Perhaps a religious naturalism is better than no religious belief at all, but for the professing Christian it represents a retreat from the Gospel.

Masonry is a Religion

We can agree with Albert Pike when he wrote, "Every Masonic lodge is a temple of religion and its teachings are instruction in religion" ("Morals and Dogma", p. 213). Pike served as sovereign grand inspector of the Southern jurisdiction of the Scottish rite for many years and is sometimes considered American Freemasonry's most eminent philosopher. His book *Morals and Dogma* is traditionally presented to those who attain the 32nd degree of the Scottish rite.

Not only does Freemasonry see itself as a religion, but it sees itself as the universal religion, while Christianity is simply another of the dozens of sects whose particular opinions have divided mankind over the ages. Again we may refer to Brother Pike:

"But Masonry teaches, and has preserved in their purity, the cardinal tenets of the old primitive faith, which underlie and are the foundation of all religions. All that ever existed have had a basis of truth; all have overlaid that truth with error" (p. 161).

"Religion, to obtain currency and influence with the great mass of mankind, must needs be alloyed with such an amount of error as to place it far below the standard attainable by the higher human capacities" (p. 224).

"Catholicism was a vital truth in its earliest ages, but it became obsolete, and Protestantism arose, flourished and deteriorated" (p. 38).

In his *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, Albert G. Mackey writes:

"I contend, without any sort of hesitation, that Masonry is, in every sense of the word, except one, and that its least philosophical, an eminently religious institution... that without this religious element it would scarcely be worthy of cultivation by the wise and good... Who can deny that it is eminently a religious institution?... But the religion of Masonry is not sectarian... It is not Judaism, though there is nothing in it to offend a Jew; it is not Christianity, but there is nothing in it repugnant to the faith of a Christian. Its religion is that general one of nature and primitive revelation—handed down to us from some ancient and patriarchal priesthood—in which all men may agree and in which no men can differ. It inculcates the practice of virtue, but supplies no scheme of redemp-

tion for sin...Masonry, then, is indeed a religious institution; and on this ground mainly, if not alone, should the religious Mason defend it" (pp. 617-619).

Hannah comments: "On reading the ritual carefully, Masonry will be found to present itself as a complete and self-sufficient system of moral and spiritual guidance through this world and the next. It teaches one's whole duty to God and to man, and a way of justification by works which, if followed, will lead to salvation. Nowhere does it give the slightest hint that anything further is necessary to the religious life" ("Darkness Visible", p. 40).

While religious, Freemasonry clearly rejects dogma and the possibility of absolute truth. After six years the German episcopal conference reported its conclusion in the June 1980 issue of *Amtsblatt des Erzbistums Koln*, pp. 102-111. On this particular point the German hierarchy observed:

"The religious conception of the Mason is relativistic: All religions are competitive attempts to explain the truth about God which, in the last analysis, is unattainable. Therefore, only the language of Masonic symbols, which is ambiguous and left to the subjective interpretation of the individual Mason is adapted to this truth about God."

ATTITUDE TOWARD CHRIST, BIBLE

Some Protestant defenders of the lodge try to deny its religious character. Other Protestants and Catholics ask, What element is missing in Freemasonry which we find in a religion? Freemasonry has a creed and ritual, prayers to the Great Architect of the Universe, an altar and temples, feast days, chaplains, an initiation ceremony, a creed and a system of morality. As its funeral service makes plain, the lodge promises its members salvation and entry into the Grand Lodge Above if they follow the precepts of the craft.

The lodge honors Jesus Christ as it honors Socrates, Buddha and Mohammed. It cannot acknowledge any special spiritual claims by Jesus, since this would violate the basis of Freemasonry.

True, other fraternal and service organizations appoint chaplains and include prayers in their meetings, but the claims to a superior path to spiritual advancement and a superior morality are peculiar to Freemasonry.

Every lodge works with an open Bible on its altar, and to some Masons this seems to affirm its Christian orientation. The preferred

term and the one used in English Freemasonry is the Volume of the Sacred Law. That no special authority is attached to the Old and New Testaments is clear since a lodge of Moslems may substitute the Koran, a predominantly Hindu lodge, the Vedas, etc. As the Digest of Masonic Law makes clear:

“To say that a candidate profess a belief in the divine authority of the Bible is a serious innovation in the very body of Masonry. The Jews, the Chinese, the Turks, each reject either the Old or the New Testament, or both, and yet we see no good reason why they should not be made Masons. In fact, Blue Lodge Masonry has nothing whatever to do with the Bible. It is not founded on the Bible. If it were, it would not be Masonry” (p. 206).

Again we turn to Brother Pike:

“The Bible is an indispensable part of the furniture of a Christian lodge only because it is the sacred book of the Christian religion. The Hebrew Pentateuch in a Hebrew lodge and the Koran in a Mohammedan one, belong on the altar; and one of these, and the square and the compass, properly understood, are the Great Lights by which a Mason must walk and work. The obligation of the candidate is always to be taken on the sacred book or books of his religion, that he may deem it more solemn and binding; and therefore it was that you were asked of what religion you were. We have no other concern with your religious creed” (p. 11).

USE OF OATHS

The second major reason for the church's hostility is the Masonic oath or rather the series of oaths required of initiates. Unlike some of the Protestant sects such as the Mennonites or Quakers, the Roman Catholic Church has interpreted the biblical injunction against swearing to allow for exceptions in serious cases, e.g. in a court of law.

The use of solemn oaths taken on the Bible in order to join a fraternal society or advance to its higher degrees has never been countenanced. Objectively speaking, those who swear such oaths are guilty of either vain or rash swearing. For most American Masons the oaths are given for what turns out to be the supposed secrecy of a few passwords and

handshakes. Anyone who has investigated Masonry knows what these "secrets" are anyway. In fact, someone has said that the greatest secret about Freemasonry is that there are no secrets. If there are not, then Christians have no justification for making such solemn oaths.

Hannah posed the basic dilemma of the Masonic oaths when he wrote:

"Either the oaths mean what they say or they do not. If they do mean what they say, then the candidate is entering into a pact consenting to his own murder by barbarous torture and mutilation should he break it. If they do not mean what they say, then he is swearing high-sounding schoolboy nonsense on the Bible, which verges on blasphemy" ("*Darkness Visible*", p. 21).

For example, this is the oath of the master Mason's degree (each grand lodge controls its own ritual so there may be minor variations in wording from state to state):

"I, (name), of my own free will and accord, in the presence of Almighty God, and his worshipful lodge, erected to him and dedicated to the holy Sts. John, do hereby and hereon most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear that I will always hail, ever conceal and never reveal any of the secrets, arts, parts, point or points of the master Masons' degree to any person or persons whomsoever, except that it be to a true and lawful brother of this degree, or in a regularly constituted lodge of master Masons, nor unto him or them, until by strict trial, due examination or lawful information, I shall have found him or them as lawfully entitled to the same as I am myself.

"I furthermore promise and swear that I will stand to and abide by all laws, rules and regulations of the master Mason's degree and of the lodge of which I may hereafter become a member, as far as the same shall come to my knowledge; and that I will ever maintain and support the constitution, laws and edicts of the grand lodge under which the same shall be holden.

"Further, that I will acknowledge and obey all due signs and summonses sent to me from a master Masons' lodge or given me by a brother of that degree, if within the length of my cable tow.

"Further, that I will always aid and assist all poor, distressed, worthy master Masons, their widows and orphans, knowing them to be such, as far as their necessities may require and my ability permit, without material injury to myself and family.

"Further, that I will keep a worthy brother master Mason's secrets inviolable, when communicated to and received by me as such, murder and treason excepted.

"Further, that I will not aid nor be present at the initiation, passing or raising of a woman, an old man in his dotage, a young man in his nonage, an atheist, a madman or a fool, knowing them to be such.

"Further, that I will not sit in a lodge of clandestine-made Masons nor converse on the subject of Masonry with a clandestine-made Mason nor one who has been expelled or suspended from a lodge, while under that sentence, knowing him or them to be such.

"Further, I will not cheat, wrong nor defraud a master Mason's lodge nor a brother of this degree knowingly, nor supplant him in any of his laudable undertakings, but will give him due and timely notice, that he may ward off all danger.

"Further, that I will not knowingly strike a brother master Mason or otherwise do him personal violence in anger, except in the necessary defense of my family or property.

"Further, that I will not have illegal carnal intercourse with a master Mason's wife, his mother, sister or daughter, knowing them to be such, nor suffer the same to be done by others, if in my power to prevent.

"Further, that I will not give the grand Masonic word, in any other manner or form than that in which I shall receive it and then in a low breath.

"Further, that I will not give the grand hailing sign of distress except in case of the most imminent danger, in a just and lawful lodge, or for the benefit of instruction; and if ever I should see it given or hear the words accompanying it by a worthy brother in distress, I will fly to his relief, if there is a greater probability of saving his life than losing my own.

"All this I most solemnly, sincerely promise and swear, with a firm and steady resolution to perform the same, without any hesitation, mental reservation or secret evasion of mind whatever, binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my body severed in two, my bowels taken from thence and burned to ashes, the ashes scattered before the four winds of heaven, that no more remembrance might be had of so vile and wicked a wretch as I would be, should I ever knowingly violate this my master Mason's obligation. So help me God, and keep me steadfast in the due performance of the same."

OPPOSITION OF OTHER CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

Like opposition to abortion, opposition to Freemasonry is often seen as solely a Roman Catholic position. But the Catholic Church is hardly the only Christian body to recognize the essential difference between the Masonic and Christian religions. In fact most Christians around the world belong to churches which forbid or discourage Masonic affiliation.

The Inter-Orthodox commission which met on Mount Athos (1933) and represented all the autocephalous Eastern Orthodox churches characterized Freemasonry as a "false and anti-Christian system." This remains the position of Orthodoxy.

Other groups hostile to lodge membership include many branches of Lutheranism, the Christian Reformed Church, most Pentecostals, the Church of the Nazarene, the Seventh-day Adventists, the Holiness churches, the Quakers, the United Brethren in Christ, the Mennonites, the Free Methodists, the Church of the Brethren, the Assemblies of God, the Wesleyans, the Regular Baptists, the Salvation Army and significant minorities in such mainline churches as the Episcopal.

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also oppose Masonry.

Mormons. Joseph Smith Jr. joined the Masonic lodge in Nauvoo, Ill., and turned to the lodge ritual to find elements for his secret temple rites. Masons in the mob which stormed the Carthage jail and murdered the prophet ignored his grand hailing sign of distress. The Grand Lodge of Utah refuses to initiate a Mormon, and any Mormon who joins the lodge outside of Utah finds his advancement in the hierarchy severely curtailed.

Obviously the problem all these religious groups have with Freemasonry is **not** its anti-Catholic character.

The Lutheran Cyclopedia explains: "While frankly anti-Christian in its French, German and Italian branches, Freemasonry in England and the United States has always called itself a supporter of the morality and doctrine of the Protestant church. Very few candidates realize that they are joining an organization which is essentially antagonistic to the Christian belief in the inspiration of the Bible and the divinity of Jesus Christ" (p. 392).

For millions of other American Protestants, such as Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, dual membership in the church and the lodge is acceptable. Individual members, however, may have reservations about the compatibility of the Grand Architect of the Universe and the triune God. British Methodism has been less favorably inclined toward Freemasonry, perhaps reflecting John Wesley's observation about the lodge: "What an amazing banter on all mankind is Freemasonry."

Currently a commission of English Methodists is studying the lodge question. Within the past year a general synod of the Church of England also voted to investigate Freemasonry to determine if Masonic beliefs and practices are compatible with Christianity.

Since neither the religious naturalism nor the required oaths of Freemasonry are ever likely to change, the hope that these **irreconcilable principles** can ever be reconciled is dim. Another objection to U.S. Masonry which should give pause to any Christian is the *blatant* racism of the lodges. This may someday change, but the lodges have lagged far behind the rest of American society in this matter.

Simply stated, the predominant Blue lodges refuse to initiate anyone known to be black. There is a single exception: Alpha Lodge No. 116 of Newark, N.J., which is recognized by the Grand Lodge of New Jersey. Stories have circulated in recent years about a black candidate in Wisconsin or some other state being initiated, but these are unverified.

Blacks long ago established their own parallel organization of Masonry known as Prince Hall, along with black counterparts of the Scottish rite, Shrine, etc. These are viewed as clandestine and irregular by white Masonry. A Prince Hall Mason cannot be admitted to a meeting of the Blue lodges, and a black man who evidences an interest in Masonry will be politely directed to a Prince Hall lodge.

This situation is an embarrassment to many American Masons as well as to the Grand Lodge of England, the mother lodge, which does not practice such racial discrimination. Sooner or later, we believe, the American lodges will have to re-examine their racist standards and bring them into alignment with the rest of society.

ECUMENICAL ATTITUDES

No doubt the ecumenical spirit has contributed to the desire on the part of many that the church relax its ban on Masonic membership. Maintenance of the ban may indeed hamper some ecumenical efforts, but a few things should be kept in mind. As we saw, most of the world's Christians now belong to churches which forbid or discourage Masonic membership. This may be a situation in which those who belong to denominations which allow membership should ask themselves why Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, many Lutherans and fellow Protestants take the stand they do against the lodge. Father Walton Hannah observed, "No church that has seriously investigated the religious teachings and implications of Freemasonry has ever yet failed to condemn it" (*Darkness Visible*, p. 78)

In his critique of Freemasonry the distinguished Anglican theologian Dr. Hubert S. Box examined the claim of the lodge that its chief purpose is to teach men about the nature of God and observed:

"But to teach men about the nature of God is properly the responsibility of the church, by virtue of its divine commission, so that the church, being aware that some of its members are receiving instructions on the nature of God within the barricaded secrecy of a *rival teaching body* having no divine commission to exercise such a function, has the right to make inquiries as to the sort of instruction they are receiving" ("*The Nature of Freemasonry*", p. 5).

The Catholic Church and other churches need not apologize for their stand on lodge membership. One of the boasts of Freemasonry has been that it fosters brotherhood; the church's refusal to allow dual membership in the church and the lodge may seem mean-spirited to some. We can, however, ask our non-Catholic friends which institution best exemplifies brotherhood: American Freemasonry or the church, which is open to men and women, blacks and whites, young and old, rich and poor?

Does this mean that antagonism between Freemasonry and the Christian churches which forbid membership should be fostered? In no way. Dialogue between Christians and Masons can lessen hostility between these groups. Cooperation in civic and charitable works can be encouraged. Some Catholics believe the most fantastic things about Masonry and should be helped to form a rational judgment on the lodge. Some Masons see the church of Rome as the church of the Inquisition, the Crusades, the prop for discredited monarchies. No one benefits from such *caricatures*.

The Catholic Church now engages in dialogue with many Protestant, Eastern Orthodox and even non-Christian bodies. The fact that a Roman Catholic may not at the same time profess Islam does not mean that fruitful Catholic-Moslem dialogue is impossible or useless.

PROBLEM OF CATHOLICS AS RECENT MEMBERS

The serious problem of Catholic men who joined a Masonic lodge during those recent years in which such membership was apparently tolerated remains, and the approach *requires great tact*. There are 32nd-degree Masons who are daily communicants and active members of Catholic parishes.

In good faith many of these men asked their pastor and/or bishop for permission to join the lodge. Some converts were received into the church during these years and were not asked to relinquish their Masonic affiliation. (In Freemasonry no one is supposed to be solicited to join the lodge, and no one is supposed to become a Mason by the consent of another. Some Masons viewed the 1974 statement by Cardinal Seper as requiring Catholics to obtain the consent of the bishop in order to petition for membership and as such this constituted unMasonic conduct).

One possible solution for these men would be to *allow* them to retain passive membership in their Masonic lodges. The apostolic delegation was empowered to *approve* such passive membership in a decree of the Holy Office of May 31, 1911, in "*Una Scrantonen*", if the following conditions were verified:

1. If petitioners gave their names to the sect in good faith before they knew it was condemned.
2. If there is no scandal or if it can be removed with an appropriate declaration, they can remain in the sect passively and

for a time so they do not lose the right to benefits, abstaining from communion with the group and from any participation, even material.

3. If serious harm would result for them or their family from their renunciation.
4. If there is no danger of perversion for them or their family, especially in the case of sickness or death.

This possible solution is far from perfect. In effect the church is saying that if an individual meets these conditions he may pay his dues but not attend meetings, read Masonic literature, consent to a Masonic funeral, etc. "You may remain a Mason but don't take Masonry seriously."

(Many bishops and priests seem to think that the Masonic lodge is a fraternal benefit society similar to the Knights of Columbus. Masons may expect some measure of financial assistance from fellow Masons, as may their widows and orphans, but Freemasonry is not an *insurance company*. Masons do not buy insurance from their grand lodges, and resignation from the lodge does not mean forfeiture of insurance benefits).

In some respects most Masons are passive members. The week-to-week business of a Masonic lodge is simply dull and consists mainly in putting candidates through the three degrees. A lodge with hundreds of members may have difficulty rounding up enough members to conduct the ritual. American Masons who read much more than an occasional Masonic newsletter are rare, and most are unaware of the standard Masonic books by Pike, Mackey, et al. They may absorb the *naturalism* of Freemasonry unconsciously but seldom make a serious study of its Weltanschauung. Not to be smug about it, we should acknowledge that millions of Catholics are also passive or nominal members of the church.

Except in certain communities, often in the South or rural areas, the Masonic lodge has lost most of its erstwhile attraction. The term often applied to English Freemasonry, the "Mafia of the Mediocre," seems even more applicable to the American lodges. A recent article in the Texas Monthly (December 1983) points up the problems for the lodge in a state which has traditionally had a strong grand lodge.

"Unless enrollment trends change soon, by the turn of the century few Masons will be left in Texas. The number of people who ask to join has been declining in both orders (white

and black lodges) since the years immediately following World War II...Other fraternal orders that have fared better, such as the Lions and Rotary clubs, are wired to commerce; they are practical clubs for modern men, and joining them (by invitation) is simple. Joining the Masons (by application), with all their traditions and odd rituals of brotherhood, is akin to joining a college fraternity, but today's men of the world no longer seem interested in whiling away their hours by fraternizing in the lodge or memorizing ritual codes."

The lodges have conspicuously failed to attract the diploma elite. Even politicians no longer see the need to wear the Masonic apron. Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, Carter and Reagan managed to win the White House without Masonic affiliation. Johnson received the first or entered-apprentice degree, but never advanced to master Mason.

This suggests that the requests from Catholic men to join the lodge are not likely to increase. The opportunities for making business contacts and enjoying fellowship in other organizations are so plentiful that no Catholic need feel he is sacrificing much by following the precepts of his church in shunning the lodge. He can join the Kiwanis, Lions, Elks, Eagles, Chamber of Commerce, Jaycees, Moose, Knights of Columbus, American Legion, VFW, Serra Club, Optimists, Exchange, Rotary and dozens of other civic and service organizations.

A separate pastoral problem arises when we turn to the affiliated Masonic organizations which enroll both Masons and non-Masons. An example would be the Order of the Eastern Star, whose membership is open to master Masons and their wives, widows, mothers, sisters and daughters. Thousands of Catholic women fall into this eligibility category. Other Masonic-related groups include the DeMolay order for young men, Job's Daughters and Rainbow Girls for young women and the Acacia college fraternity.

Although the possibility of scandal may exist, the fact remains that these women and young people do not swear Masonic oaths and are not considered Masons. We can apply the general canonical principle that "favorable laws are to be interpreted broadly and odious laws are to be interpreted strictly" (*odios a restringenda favorabilia extendenda*). This would not mean that pastors would encourage such affiliation.

The Catholic Church should not launch any kind of new vendetta against Freemasonry and should welcome the lessening of anti-Catholicism, whether in the lodge, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod or any other group. At the same time it must affirm that membership by Catholics in the lodge is inappropriate.

CONCLUSION

My conclusion is the same as that of the German episcopal conference: "In-depth research on the ritual and on the Masonic mentality makes it clear that it is impossible to belong to the Catholic Church and to Freemasonry at the same time."

The **false ecumenism** which seeks to ignore basic differences between Masonic naturalism and Christianity, and the desire of a few Catholic men to find in the lodge a fellowship, a better chance for promotion or a wider base of customers than they can find through other organizations are no reasons to ignore the serious objections to Freemasonry raised by the church.

Perhaps some *accommodations* may be made for pastoral reasons in *exceptional cases*. Converts might be permitted to retain passive membership. Those Catholic men who joined the lodge in good faith during the recent years of confusion might be offered the same option. Membership in Masonic-related organizations such as the Eastern Star should be discouraged, but does *not carry* the same penalty of exclusion from the eucharist. Otherwise the position of the church remains what it has been for many years: Catholics in the United States and elsewhere may not be Freemasons.

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