

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

MASONIC-CATHOLIC RELATIONS

Reprinted from the Lecture given by

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(The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the Author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research.)

To completely understand the present relationship between Masonry and Catholicism one needs to know something of their past. relations and attitudes.

During those formative years of Masonry, when the Cathedral builders of the 10th and 11th centuries were first organized into labor guilds from which operative masonry and later Speculative Masonry evolved, there was only one Christian Church known to our forefathers. This was the Catholic Church, the Universal Church, or the Mother Church, from which our Protestant churches evolved. The earliest known members of our Masonic fraternity were therefore all Catholics. The early mason took his vows to be faithful to his Craft and to the Church.

It is interesting to note at this point that the Roman College of Artificers was controlled by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church and only men of great knowledge in all fields of science were admitted into that portion of the fraternity. It is also interesting to note that generally speaking the priests were all members of the Craft.

Christopher Columbus is said to have been a mason. I have been told that the tomb in the Church in Havana, Cuba, where the body of Columbus was once buried bears the masonic square and compasses. It is well known that papers from his brethren in Italy provided him with the necessary introduction to enable him to obtain lodging in Spain for himself and his son during his long wait for Queen Isabella to make up her mind with regard to financing his voyage.

You are all familiar with the origins of the various Protestant religions and I am sure you realize that a result of the formation of these various creeds was that the masons of those days were from all these religious sects, not Catholic alone.

Catholics continued to become members of the masonic fraternity until Pope Clement the 12th, in 1737 forbid Catholics belonging to certain societies, including Freemasonry.

Masons often question the motive of Pope Clement and wonder why such drastic action was taken against the fraternity, knowing that at that period practically all priests of the church were masons. I am not certain that it is true, but it has been written that Clement while still a young priest and not very popular with his contemporaries was blackballed by the fraternity. As the years went on, before he became Pope, this rejection by the fraternity must have been a constant source of irritation for one whose success was so pronounced. In 1737, when he became Pope, he found the means of condemning the society because

Freemasonry's crowning glory requires only that a candidate must believe in and place his trust in the one living God. It received into its lodges the Christian, the Jew, the Moslem and the Parsee, and united them in the holy bonds of brotherhood. But in the eye of the Papacy it is a crime to fraternize with heretics, and hence it is that the allocation of 1737 was quickly followed on April 27, 1738 by the well-known bull "In Eminenti", also issued by Clement XII. This bull was entitled, "A Condemnation of the Society or Association Known as the Free Masons."

The Papal bull issued by him specified that a freemason was ipso facto excommunicated if he continued his membership or if he joined the society -- thus he was deprived of all spiritual privileges while living and of the rites of burial by the church when dead. Several subsequent Popes issued similar bulls against Masonry. For many years the Roman Church has shown a prejudice toward Masonry --and I am happy to say that at no time has a responsible masonic body issued any legislation that would prevent a catholic from becoming a member of our fraternity. However, in all fairness we must admit that many individual Masons have been just as prejudiced against Catholics as individual Catholics have been against Masonry. But during this long interval when Catholicism seemed to be unalterably opposed

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to anything masonic, our fraternity officially remained aloof to both these and other sectarian movements. We should remember that there are other sectarian religions that forbid their members to belong to our fraternity.

Although the founder of the Mormon religion, Joseph Smith, had been a Master Mason -- as indeed was also Brigham Young, a Temple Mormon cannot belong -- neither can a good member of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Sometimes history chooses a century in which to turn an important corner. We see this in the political arena around us. This has happened in religious history as well. It happened back in the 4th century when Constantine made Christianity the official religion of Rome. It happened in the 11th century when the Orthodox and the Roman Church broke from one another. It happened in the 16th century in the vitality of the reformation. Could it be that in the latter half of the 20th century we are to experience another decisive outburst?

Martin Marty of the Christian Century (he is a Missouri Synod Lutheran Pastor) said, "For 400 years Protestants and Roman Catholics have engaged in monologues about each other. Now it is time that they begin to engage in dialogues with each other." The same could apply to masons and Catholics.

These dialogues have begun. Pope John took a mighty step in this direction, and with the dialogues between religions, groups have begun dialogues between Catholics and Masons.

Allow me to quote from an address by the Rev. John A. O'Brien, Ph.D., of the faculty of the University of Notre Dame. He was speaking at the Chicago Lawyers Shrine Club at the La Salle Hotel in Chicago. He said in September, 1972:

"As a Catholic, a research professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame and priest for more than half a century. I want to pay a long overdue tribute to the Free-masons for the distinguished contributions which they have made to the civic, commercial, scientific, cultural and spiritual life of our Nation. They have given us some of our

greatest presidents, generals, legislators, statesmen, citizens and patriots. If that rich and many faceted contribution were withdrawn, our nation would be impoverished indeed.

During a priestly ministry of more than fifty years, many of my closest and dearest friends have been Masons, and I count their friendship as a pearl beyond all price. I pray that the omnipotent and omniscient God, who can write straight with crooked lines, will guide our groping hands so that we can build a bridge of friendship that will close the gap which has too long divided us. Surely under the benign guidance of Almighty God, mutual esteem, friendship and love will unite us in a great brotherhood, which will bring blessings and happiness to us all and mean so much for the unity and solidarity of America and the peace and freedom of the world."

Cardinal Terence Cooke, in an address before some 3,000 Masons in New York, said he was pleased with the distinction of being the first Catholic Cardinal in the United States to address a large Masonic gathering. He stated, "Whatever happened in the past should not stand between us and the future. "I'm sure it will not," the Cardinal said. "Your invitation to me is a joyful event on the road of friendship between the Masons and the Catholics of America."

A friend of mine recently gave me a copy of the weekly news bulletin issued by a Roman Catholic Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Under the heading, "Catholics Now Permitted to Be Masons", the Bulletin states, "According to a letter sent by the Vatican's Sacred Congregation of the Faith to John Cardinal Krol of Philadelphia, the President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, lay persons may become members of Masonic groups provided the groups are not actively hostile to the Church. The

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letter states that Canon Law 2335 which forbids Catholics to join the Masons implies the existence of such hostility - as indeed was the case many years ago. If a given Masonic group today is not hostile to the Church, then the prohibition against joining does not apply.'

For a number of years the Masons and the Knights of Columbus in Connecticut have joined together in supporting charitable causes. The same applies to the two groups in several other states.

I usually attend the annual meeting of the Grand Lodge of New York. The Grand Knight of the Knights of Columbus for the State is always a guest of honor at the banquet and is seated next to the Grand Master. And when the Knights of Columbus hold their state-wide convention the Grand Master of Masons is their most honored guest.

Throughout Central and South America Catholics have always been permitted to be masons, and the majority of the Masons in those areas are Catholics.

I have a news clipping from Korea in 1972, as follows: "Father Michael J. McFadden, a Catholic Priest, was initiated, passed and raised in MacArthur Lodge No. 183, F. & A.M. in Seoul, Korea."

In the 1820's the first Catholic Missionary Priest who attempted to open a church in the Protestant City of Alexandria, Virginia, later petitioned Alexandria Washington Lodge No 22 and was raised a Master Mason.

Last July I initiated 13 prominent masons in the Philippines into the Royal Order of Scotland. They are the leaders of the Craft in that country. They

were all either Past Grand Masters or 33° Scottish Rite Masons. Seven of the 13 listed Roman Catholicism as their religion.

I like to believe that the masonic fraternity has always remained aloof from the sectarian disputes between Catholics and those of other creeds. We should be proud of our demands for religious liberty and truth, but Masonry is not wholly without blame in the long-time division between Masonry and Catholicism. I know some Masons, both now and in the past, that are bitter toward the Catholic Church. They must be enlightened. Modern technology has reduced the size of our earth and forced us to live closer together. This has dispelled many of our prejudices of the past.. As we come to know people of diverse views we find that fundamentally they are not much different from us and most differences are superficial and of little value.

I am happy to note the wonderful progress that is being made in our time to heal the wounds between Catholics and Masons. I am pleased to know that a number of Catholics in this country are now becoming members of our fraternity.

Masonry is and should continue to be concerned only with great fundamental truths. All the peoples of the world are the children of the same Heavenly Father and thus we are all Brethren. Isn't it time that we all practice that Brotherhood?

ADDENDUM* FROM MID-1978 CATHOLIC PUBLICATIONS

SUNDAY VISITOR: June 18, 1978

Q. Please state the official stand of the Roman Catholic Church as to its members and Freemasonry. May Catholics belong to this organization?

-- Name Withheld, Gary, Indiana.

A. While legislation against Catholic membership in Masonic Lodges remains in effect, Cardinal Franjo

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Seper, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, ruled in 1974 that Catholic laymen may join Masonic lodges which do not plot against the Church. Clerics, Religious and members of secular institutes are still forbidden in every case to join any Masonic association. The reason for the ban was that Masonic Lodges, particularly in Europe and Latin America, became centers of anti-clericalism and anti-Catholicism; this was also true in some cases in the United States. In more modern times, most lodges in the United States became more fraternal organizations with no anti-Catholic policies.

CATHOLIC STANDARD: August 24, 1978 - Fr. John Dietzen, Question B

Q. In a recent column, you stated that the prohibition against Catholics joining the Masons has been relaxed. You said that, except in places where "anti-Catholic activities are still so evident that Catholic membership in the movement would be a cause of scandal to others," Catholic laymen, but not priests or Religious, may become Masons. When exactly did the Catholic Church relax its ban? Can you give an example of where such anti-Catholic activities still exist? Could it be in my country, Canada? You also say that priests could join with special permission. Has this happened recently?

A. In 1971{ the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the former Holy Office) sent a letter to the heads of all the national conferences of bishops in the world concerning this matter./received inter alia by Philadelphia Cardinal John Krol/ The letter noted that the law of the Church prohibiting membership

in "secret societies" refers "only to Catholics who enroll in associations which truly plot against the Church."

It is not the purpose of such a document to point out specifically if or where such a condition might exist. That would be the responsibility of Church authorities in the locality.

In the same document the congregation clearly notes a distinction between laymen and priests or Religious, noting that "the prohibition remains in effect for clerics, Religious and members of secular institutes."

Insofar as the prohibition against joining such societies is a Church law, responsible authorities in the Church could dispense [as to Religious] from that law. Whether this has even happened I don't know, but as I said previously it could be done. [Ed. note: This has frequently occurred in the United States and other countries for ordained Priests.]

NATIONAL CATHOLIC REGISTER: June 4th, 1978.

Italian Masonic Grand Master LINO SALVIVI emphasized that. there are now " very fine relations between the Church and the Masons." He said that "we have priests and even bishops" who are members.

* by W.M. Robert N. Hargrave.
