

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
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BOOK REVIEW of THE HIRAM KEY

Presented by R.W. Bro. F. Packford, Golcistream Lodge No.161, B.C.R.

HIRAM KEY is a well documented work presented to us by Christopher Knight and Dr. Robert Lomas, English researchers and Freemasons.

Their journey through the three degrees of Freemasonry started a research project into the roots of the Craft and a multi- year search of the chain of events leading to our modern rituals.

Much knowledge as we know it today is a combination of fact and conjecture - educated guesses -based on our experiences, biases, and religious beliefs. As the vast base of human knowledge is exploding because of modern technological methods traditional ideas are increasingly under attack. The authors ask us to review ideas backed by their research which will cause many readers to want to cast the book aside as blasphemous or so much fantasy. However, persevere!

The book starts with the authors' search to overcome the sheer pointlessness of Freemasonry and to find what binds the world's almost five million Freemasons together Their research quickly led them into a fascinating trip through ancient civilizations and eventually to a path through history to the development of modern Freemasonry and its impact on the world.

The authors in their attempts to show the path of masonic development through history take - in my opinion -some quantum leaps of faith. But really their research is just as valid as that of other historical scholars and it should be read with an open mind.

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Whether you treat "The Hiram Key" and the sequel "The Second Messiah" as a worthwhile read of well documented and researched historical works or as entertaining novels based on facts and myths, I strongly recommend you take the time to read and digest these two books. There is a wealth of information concerning our Masonic roots contained in each.

THE SECOND MESSIAH by Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas. The sequel to The Hiram Key

- modern scientific techniques applied to events of ancient history and the continuing story of the Jewish nation and the Knights Templar.

FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS by Graham Hancock

"A worldwide quest to put together the vast and fascinating jigsaw puzzle of mankind's hidden past."

THE GIFTS OF THE JEWS by Thomas Cahill

"How did a tribe of desert nomads forever alter the way we experience our world."

HOW THE IRISH SAVED CIVILIZATION by Thomas Cahill

St. Patrick and the isolation of Ireland in the dark ages save ancient manuscripts.

WHO WROTE THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS by Norman Golb

THE MESSAGE OF THE SCROLLS by Yigael Yadin

The authors deal with the revelations and the contributions since the 1947 discovery of the Scrolls.

(The following "Short Talk Bulletin"(VOL.72, No.1 1.) prepared by The Masonic Information Centre for The Masonic Service Association of the United States is acknowledged with thanks and we trust will be an appropriate prelude to the address by Bro. the Rev Dr. Gary Leazer at Britannia Lodge, 14/10/99]

A RESPONSE TO CRITICS OF FREEMASONRY.
1999 - 4B

From Northern Ireland to Iran, from the Middle East to the United States, religious extremism is a growing force throughout the world. Jarred by the rapid pace of social and cultural change, especially the apparent disintegration of moral values and the break-up of the family, some people within this movement have sought refuge from the complexity of modern life by embracing absolute views and rejecting tolerance of other beliefs.

Simple, easy, seemingly stable answers bring comfort in a rapidly changing world. For example, some churches have responded to the personal anguish of their members by circling the wagons, that is, by strictly defining theological concepts and insisting their members "purify" their fellowship by renouncing any other beliefs. The next step already taken by various churches, is to yield degrees of control within their ranks to vocal factions espousing extremist views. These splinter groups focus the congregation's generalized anxieties on specific targets. The proffered cure-all is to destroy the supposed enemy. Freemasonry has become one of these targets precisely because it encourages members to form their own opinion on many important topics, including religion. Thus some churches have expressed concerns, even condemnations of Freemasonry. Generally, these actions are based on misunderstandings. A case in point is the June 1993 report to the Southern Baptist Convention by the Convention's Home Mission Board. This report defined eight alleged conflicts between the tenets and teachings of the Masonic Fraternity and Southern Baptist theology.

Let's briefly look at those areas, as representative of the thinking of some well-meaning but

misinformed church members today, and see if the concerns are real or simply a matter of misinformation or misunderstanding.

Most of the issues really deal with language in one way or another. Almost every organization

has a special vocabulary of words which are understood by the group. It's hardly appropriate for someone outside a group, and without the special knowledge of the group, to object to the terms unless he or she

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fully understands them and why they are used.

If someone wants to read the Journal of the American Medical Association, for example, that is his right-but he doesn't have a right to complain the articles use medical terms. A person reading a cookbook had better know terms like fold, cream the butter, or soft ball have special meanings - or he'll make a mess instead of a cake. The same is true of a non-Mason reading Masonic materials. As to the critique of Freemasonry by the Southern Baptist Convention (which, incidentally, had several positive things to say about Freemasonry), here is a brief explanatory discussion of each point.

1. Because they do not see specific words in their historic context some critics complain of the prevalent use in Masonry of offensive titles and terms such as Worshipful Master for the leader of a Lodge. The leader of a Masonic Lodge is called the Master of the Lodge for the same reason the head of a Boy Scout troop is called a Scoutmaster, an orchestra's leader is termed the Concert

Master, or a highly-skilled electrician is called a Master Electrician. The term arose in the guilds of the Middle Ages when the most skillful workman was called the Master. Much Masonic vocabulary dates from that period. Worshipful in Worshipful Master has nothing to do with worship in any religious sense. Masonically, Worshipful is a term of honor and, in this sense, it is a term still used in England and Canada today to refer to such officials as mayors of cities. Worshipful John Doe means exactly the same thing as the Honorable John Doe. In the same vein, the Mayor of London is addressed as the Worshipful Lord Mayor. Certainly there is nothing irreligious here in the use of Worshipful or Lord. Such terms are a matter of history and tradition, not religion

2. Some critics of Freemasonry object to what they term archaic and offensive rituals or so-called bloody oaths in Masonry. There is nothing offensive in the rituals to anyone who understands them. They are ancient, not archaic, since many of them are so old their origins are lost in history. But there is nothing bad in that. The Declaration of Independence is about the same age as the Master Mason Degree, but few complain it is "archaic."

The alleged bloody oaths refer to the penalties associated with the Masonic obligations. They originated in the medieval legal system of England and were actual punishments inflicted by the state on persons convicted of opposing political or religious tyranny. Masonry's obligations do not contain any promise ever to inflict any of the penalties or to participate in the execution of them. In Masonry, they are entirely symbolic and refer exclusively to the shame a good man should feel at the thought he had broken a promise.

3. Certain critics claim the recommended readings for the Degrees of Masonry are "pagan" in origin. "Pagan", as they are using the term, simply means "pre-Christian." The major purpose of Masonry is the study of man's intellectual and moral history for the purpose of developing ourselves morally and intellectually. Such a study has to start with the concepts of man and God as held by early cultures and evidenced in their mythologies. The Greeks and Romans, as well as earlier peoples, had much of importance to say on many topics, including religion. The idea that a physician must act in the best interests of his patient comes from the pagan Hippocrates, and the concept that the government cannot break into your house and take what it wants on a whim comes from the pagan Aristotle. None of us would want to live in a world without these ideas.

In almost every field - law, government, music, philosophy mathematics, etc. - it is necessary to review the work of early writers and thinkers. Masonry is no exception. But to study the work of ancient cultures is not the same thing as to do what they did or believe what they believed. And no Mason is ever told what he should believe in matters of faith. That is not the task of a fraternity, nor a public library, nor the government. That is the duty of a person's revealed religion and is appropriately expressed through his or her church.

4. Ironically, some people complain about the Bible used in Lodge being referred to as the "furniture" of the Lodge. No disrespect is intended. Indeed, just the opposite is true. Masons use the word "furniture" in its original meaning of essential equipment. Since no Lodge can meet without an open Volume of the Sacred Law, (which in North America is almost always the Bible) the Bible is essential and given a special place of honor as the "furniture" for every regular Lodge.

5. The Masonic use of the term "light" is often misunderstood by non-Masons. This confusion may lead some to think Masons are speaking of salvation rather than knowledge or truth. Nowhere in Masonic ritual is "light" implied to mean anything other than knowledge. Light was a symbol of knowledge long

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before it was a symbol of salvation. The lamp of learning appears on almost every graduation card and college diploma. Masonry uses Light as a symbol of the

search for truth and knowledge. It's very unlikely that any Mason would think that Light represents salvation.

6. Masonry does not imply salvation may be attained by one's good works. Masonry does not teach any path to salvation. That is the duty of a Church, not a Fraternity. The closest Masonry comes to this issue is to point to the open Bible, and tell the Mason to search there for the path to eternal life. Masonry does believe in the importance of good works, but as a matter of gratitude to God for His many great gifts and as a matter of individual moral and social responsibility. The path to salvation is found in each Mason's house of worship, not in his Lodge.

7. Various critics accuse Masonic writers of teaching the "heresy of universalism." Universalism is the doctrine that all men and women are ultimately saved. Masonry does not teach universalism or any other doctrine of salvation. Again, that's the province of the church, not a fraternity. You have to look rather hard to find Masonic writers who "teach universalism." Even if you could find one, it's important to remember that any Masonic author writes for himself alone, not as an official of the Fraternity. Masonry simply does not have a position official or otherwise on salvation. Since men of all faiths are welcome in the Fraternity, Masons are careful not to offend the faith of any. Possibly this in itself may seem to be universalism to some critics. Masons call it common courtesy.

8. Some critics, less eager to put their own houses in order than to find fault with others contend most Lodges refuse to admit African Americans as members. Masonry today is not a whites only organization as the hundreds of thousands of Black, Native American, Hispanic and oriental Masons can testify. Petitions for membership do not ask the race of the petitioner, and it would be considered completely wrong to do so. At the same time it must be said that Freemasonry, like American society and churches in general, has not lived up entirely to its high ideal of brotherhood in dealing with African-Americans and other minorities. This is a situation which most Freemasons, like most Americans, are trying to overcome.

There is a schism in Freemasonry dating back over 200 years to when "Prince Hall" Masons, who are African-Americans, declared themselves independent. This schism is similar to the division of the United Methodist Church from the A.M.E.. C.M.E.. and United Methodist Church from the A.M.E.. S.M.E., and A.M.E. Zion churches or the National Baptists from the American and Southern Baptists.

In each of these three examples, the organizations are working to repair the damages of centuries of segregation. For each, complete reunification remains an elusive goal hindered by social resistance on both sides, but not by organizational ideals. In the case of Freemasonry, mutual recognition between "black" and "white" Grand Lodges has proceeded at a steady pace for nearly ten years, while African-American members are increasingly common in formerly "white" Lodges.

For instance, at the international celebration of the 275th anniversary of the Grand Lodge of England in 1992 (the most recent Masonic gathering of about the same size as the Southern Baptist Convention), there were far more Blacks present than there were at the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston in 1993. Freemasonry's movement regarding racial matters affirms Masonry's genuine evolution with the rest of American society and churches toward genuine brotherhood among all races.

In summary, looking over the concerns raised in the report, none are tenets and teachings as the report claims. Four of the concerns are merely misunderstandings of Masonic vocabulary by non-Masons. The complaint that some

of the writers whose work Masonry studies are pre-Christian could be raised against any study of man, government, or philosophy. Almost all areas of study start with the ancient (pagan) Greeks. All members of the Fraternity know that Masonry does not invade the area of the Church to teach any doctrine of salvation, neither universalism, salvation by works, nor any other. And the objection that Masonry is some sort of whites only club is refuted by the myriad of non-whites wearing the Square and Compasses. Freemasonry is simply a Fraternity, - an organization of men, banded together to further develop themselves ethically and morally, and to benefit the community at large.

The Queen's English

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| We will begin with box the plural is boxes. | And if I give |
| you a boot would a pair be called beet? | |
| But the plural of ox is oxen, not oxes. | If one is a tooth, |
| and a whole set are teeth, | |
| The fowl is of goose, but two are called geese. | Why shouldn't |
| the plural of booth be called beeth? | |
| Yet the plural of mouse is never meese. | If the singular's |
| this and the plural these, | |
| You may find a lone mouse, or a whole nest of mice, | Should the plural of |
| kiss ever be kees | |
| 21. | |

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| But the plural is houses, not hice. | We speak of a brother and |
| also of brethren, | |
| If the plural of man is always men, | But though we say mother, |
| we never say methren | |
| Why shouldn't the plural of pan be called pen? | Then the |
| masculine pronouns are he, his and him, | |
| If I speak of a foot and you show me two feet. | But imagine |
| the feminine, she, shis and shim | |

Anon.
