

## **The Freemasons: an Endangered Old Boys' Club?,**

Who are the Freemasons? Strange stories are told about them, but they are not always true to fact. One cannot always believe what one hears. Some people look upon the Freemasonry organization as an underground movement devoted to murder and revolution; others view it as an innocent benevolent old boys' club, made up of members who voluntarily take an oath to seek each other's good and to give help whenever it is needed. Some contend that Freemasonry is not worthy of serious notice since its membership is steadily declining. Ray Hiller, lodge master of the King Solomon Masonic Lodge in Thamesford, Ontario, claims that falling membership is "a sign of the times" because people in two-income families don't have time for extra activities. He also said that the Masonic movement is seeking to attract younger people and to be more visible in the marketplace. *Time* magazine (May 25, 1998) reported that young people are apparently starting to show interest. Some time ago I met a man who toured Ontario on behalf of the Freemasons with the mission to dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding the movement and to attract new members. Yet he told me that the Masons do not personally invite men to join them; only those considered worthy of membership are allowed to join.

It is difficult to categorize Freemasonry, as it so diverse in organization and beliefs. And what makes it even more complicated is the fact that thousands of masons do not know the religious position of their organization. I wonder how many of them are acquainted with the basic teachings of Masonry as set forth in the authoritative Encyclopedia of Freemasonry. Their knowledge is mainly based on their experience in a local lodge.

### **History of Freemasonry**

The origin of Freemasonry has been a subject of highly convoluted speculation. Some Freemasons claim great antiquity for their movement and even suggest that its founder was Adam. The ideals of Freemasonry were then passed on to Noah, Nimrod, Solomon, and eventually to Hugh des Payens, a 12th century knight from Burgundy and founder of the order the Templars, whose official name is "the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon." Graham Hancock, author of *The Sign and the Seal: The Quest for the Lost Ark of the Covenant*, argues that the Masonic system inherited many of the most central traditions of the order of Templars, which were passed on to the British Isles in the years 1307-14 when members fled to Scotland to escape papal persecution. A Masonic tradition claims that the oldest Scottish lodge was founded by King Robert the Bruce (1274-1329). In the 18th century Baron Carl von Hund, a leading German Mason, declared that "Freemasonry originated in the Knight Templary, and that, in consequence, every Mason is a Templar." Others believe that the ancestors of Freemasonry were the Druids; some suggest that the pre-Christian Jewish "monks" were its founders; others insist that it had its roots in the Isis-Osiris cult of ancient Egypt. The latter theorists think that the Freemasonry ceremonies of initiation were established there. The Encyclopedia of Freemasonry states that the Masons have always looked to Egypt with peculiar interest as the cradle of "the mysterious science of symbolism,

whose peculiar modes of teaching they alone, of all modern institutions, have preserved to this day."

But Masonic historians do confess, however, that they cannot find any evidence for the claims to great antiquity. They generally accept that Freemasonry as it is practiced today can be traced back no further than the 17th century; although its beliefs are drawn from many sources - such as Gnosticism, Hinduism, the Kabbala, and so on. Stephen Knight observes that despite the exhaustive literature on Masonry (some 50,000 items by the 1950s), it is impossible to determine from where and when their teachings come from, as there is no authoritative statement of what Masons believe or what they stand for.

However, a study of the Encyclopedia of Freemasonry gives the reader a good insight into its beliefs and practices. And although Freemasonry is supposed to be a secret society "to prevent anyone from being admitted to a lodge who should not be there," Masonic literature is readily obtainable.

Freemasonry originated in 17th century England in the Companies of Freemasonry. In the beginning it was a builder's guild with masters, journeymen and apprentices. The membership gradually changed. The guild became a fraternal and social organization. It developed into lodges which accepted members interested in history, philosophy and science. A mason was no longer a "working mason." Even King William III of the House of Orange (1650-1702), a confessional Christian, became a member. This demonstrates the original religious neutrality of the Masons. Out of the guild association, the potential of a secret society arose. The "official" beginning of Freemasonry was not until 1717, the year the Grand Lodge of England was founded.

### **The spread of Freemasonry**

In the 18th century Freemasonry spread rapidly. It was introduced in the Netherlands in 1731 by the Grand Lodge of England. Between that year and 1735 an English and a Dutch Lodge were instituted, despite the opposition of Calvinist pastors, and 46 more lodges had been established by 1871. In 1735 the Dutch government prohibited all Masonic meetings (an act which was repealed in 1737) and forbade the clergy from any interference with the order.

German lodges were first founded in 1738 when King Frederick the Great became a member, not quite two years before he ascended the throne. In a letter to the Freemasons in 1777, the king showered them with praise. He called Freemasonry "a society which employs itself only in sowing the seed and bringing forth the fruit of every kind of virtue in my dominions."

Twentieth century German National Socialism opposed Freemasonry. Its confused and utterly shallow ideologist, Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946), propounded his anti-Semitic views, drawing on *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* for his inspiration. (The latter is a spurious 19th century work claiming to expound a Jewish conspiracy to achieve world domination). Rosenberg was also convinced that the tumultuous course of world

history was the sinister result of the evil ministrations of ancient secret societies, including the Freemasons. Freemasons as an international organization was considered to be Jew-ridden. Hence, the Nazis included in their list of enemies the Freemasons. Adolf Hitler closed lodges, destroyed ritual paraphernalia, and put some members into concentration camps.

Because the early history of Masonry in France lacks authentic documents, its origin is uncertain. The French astronomer Lalande (1732-1807) asserted that the first French lodge was established in Paris in 1725. Other trace its roots to 1743, the year the Grand Lodge of France was founded. After a schism within its ranks, one wing, strictly atheistic, became centres of anti-Christian activity. Although these lodge members were small minorities in France, they were influential in state and society. Their lodges became a serious threat to the Roman Catholic Church. G.R. Cragg comments in *The Church and the Age of Reason* (1648-1789) that the pervasive influence of Freemasonry met certain needs for the intellectual satisfaction of men who had formerly turned to the Roman Catholic Church to meet those needs. Many of the clergy to a greater or lesser degree had subscribed to the views of the Enlightenment (a new 18th century movement of ideas which had as its basis that truth could only be reached through reason, observation, and experiment). Despite the negative influence of Freemasonry on the Church and the Papal prohibitions against joining it, many priests and prelates became members of a lodge. Scholars reckoned that by about 1789, a quarter of the membership of the French Freemasons belonged to Roman Catholic clergy or ecclesiastical orders.

In France, Freemasonry always had and still has a strong political influence.

It has been closely identified with the Socialists for most of the last 80 years. According to Fred Zeller, Grand Master of the Grand Orient of France in 1971 and 1973, the 1974 presidential election would have been won by the Socialists if Valery Giscard d'Estaing had not become a Freemason and "colluded with sympathetic forces in the Brotherhood, which eventually persuaded French Freemasons that it was in their best interest to vote for Giscard."

The Grand Lodge of England introduced Masonry into Spain in 1727. It had a turbulent history. In 1741, King Philip V issued a royal ordinance against the Masons. It was not until 1820 that the Grand Lodge could carry out its activities. In 1853, the persecutions against Freemasonry ceased. The Spanish Freemasons were politically active. Hence the restrictions imposed upon them by various governments. For example, Spanish Freemasonry supported the ideal of a free and prosperous Philippines under a democratic regime. In 1889 the *Logia Revolution* was organized exclusively for the Filipinos. A year later, the Logia Solidaridad was founded in Madrid. These lodges, chartered by the Gran Oriete Espanol, became centers of propaganda and political activities. This kind of Masonry spread from Spain to the Philippines and became the backbone of the revolutionary reform movement. In 1891, the Logia Nilad was organized secretly in Manila, the first Filipino lodge from which others were to spring. In the 20th century, Spanish Fascists, like the German Nazis, attempted to destroy

Freemasonry. After the Spanish Civil War (1936-9) the Fascist dictator Generalissimo Franco closed all the Masonic lodges in which the Masons had given their support to the elected republican government.

Because of its colonial ties with Great Britain, Freemasonry was immediately promoted in the American colonies. It became a mass movement. American statesman, scientist, and inventor Benjamin Franklin (1706-90) joined the lodge in 1731. George Washington's initiation was in 1752. Eventually, American Freemasonry became organized on a state by state basis. Today, each state has its own Grand Lodge. By 1800 Freemasonry and other lodges had become a vital part of American society. The lodge was not seen as an enemy of Christianity. Many Christians joined lodges. In time, clergy even approved of lodges. For instance, Ashbel Baldwin, a Congregational clergyman in Connecticut, became the chaplain of the Grand Lodge of his state in 1797. A son of Jonathan Edwards, the 19th century Reformed theologian, served as a Grand Master of the Connecticut lodge. The Bible was considered the basis for Masonic myth and ritual. And clergymen affiliated with lodges insisted that the morality which Masonry championed was the morality which Christianity affirmed.

Freemasonry suffered a serious setback in 1826 in response to the abduction and presumed murder of William Morgan. He was a leading member who was converted to Christianity, left the movement and exposed the so-called secrets of the Masonic order in a book. Thousands left the Masons in reaction. The inscription on his tombstone in Batavia, New York, says that "he was abducted from this spot in the year 1826, by free-masons and murdered for revealing the secrets of their order. The court records of Genesee County, and files of the Batavia Advocate kept in the recorder's office contain the history of the events that caused the erection of this monument." In 1831 an anti-Masonic political party was founded. The object of this party was to nominate and elect candidates for the presidency and vice-presidency in order to "deprive Masonry of the support which it derives from the power and the patronage of the executive branch of the United States government." Many anti-Masonic publications were published. But the anti-Masonic party was annihilated at the ballot box.

Today, American Masonry is generally known as a benign, fraternal, philanthropic movement of the masses. In numerous small towns many white Protestants belong to a Masonic lodge. Even pastors and elders are members of these lodges. In North America its influence is confined mainly to the inner circle of its membership. When Dr. Kurt Koch, a German expert on sects and cults, was on a tour in the United States, he preached in a church where the symbols of Freemasonry were behind the altar. Dr. Koch said to its minister, "if I had known that this was a Freemasons' church I wouldn't have accepted the invitation to preach here."

The first Canadian lodge was founded in 1749. No fewer than nine Canadian Grand Lodges were eventually formed. In Ontario, the first lodge meetings were held in Fort Niagara about 1755-80. Also in Canada, Freemasonry is accepted as a benevolent society without any sinister yearnings. In a letter to the editor of the *London Free Press*

(July 6, 1998) a Mason reassured the public that Freemasonry is not meant to take the place of a church in anyone's life. "Freemasons are expected to be church supporters." Freemasonry vs. the Roman Catholic Church in the Roman Catholic-dominated countries of Spain, Belgium, Portugal and Italy, Freemasonry historically opposed the Roman Catholic Church to a degree unknown in British and North American Freemasonry. The first Italian lodge was founded in Florence in 1733 by an Englishman, Lord Sackville. By 1750 it was already a force to be reckoned with. Because of its open involvement in politics and religion, Italian Freemasonry was not recognized by the United Grand Lodge of England until 1973.

In the 18th century, the pope was the temporal ruler of much of central modern-day Italy. This fact must be kept in mind as one reads the history of Freemasons and their campaign for a strong, unified, secular state. No wonder that the pope considered the Freemasons to be subversive. Pope Clement XII issued the first bill against Freemasonry on April 28, 1738. Pope Benedict XIV confirmed this prohibition in 1751 and since then a succession of other popes have spelled out the Church's position regarding Masonry. Italian Masonry suffered loss of prestige and members. It did not revive until 1860.

Pius IX attacked the Masons in an encyclical in 1869 -just before Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-82), a Masonic Grand Master, wrested Rome from him in 1870. The most famous encyclical on the subject was *Humanum genus* by Leo XIII in 1894. He accused Masonry of being subversive against Church and state, and he condemned it for its rejection of Christian revelation and for teaching that all religions are equally valid. He urged the bishops to whom the Encyclical was addressed "first of all to tear away the mask of Freemasonry, and let it be seen for what it really is." There were further condemnations in 1894, in 1902 and in 1917.

Stephen Knight suggests that one reason for the unusual frequency of these papal condemnations is that Freemasonry has always had sympathizers, even members, clerical as well as lay, in the Roman Catholic Church. In short, the Church states that no Catholic may join the Masonic lodge or any affiliated Masonic organization without incurring excommunication. A Freemason who wishes to become a member of the Roman Catholic Church must first sever all connections with the lodge. Another objection of the Roman Catholic Church was that it favoured a religion of naturalism and the imposition of an unlawful solemn oath. The anti-Christian nature of Italian Freemasonry was theatrically expressed in the hymn *A Satana* by Giosue Carducci (1835-1907), whose poetry earned him the Nobel Prize. The following stanzas are part of a text used as a Masonic festival song:

To thee is unleashed  
The bold verse,  
I call to thee, O Satan,  
King of the feast.  
Away with the censor, Priest, and thy metre  
[i.e chants against Satan]

No, priest, Satan  
Turns not back!  
Alone lives Satan;  
He holds the empire  
In the quivering flash  
Of a dark eye,  
Greetings, O Satan,  
O Rebellion,  
O avenging power Of reason.

In this poem Satan becomes the highest good and God is stripped of His goodness and becomes evil.

The existing prohibition against membership in the Freemasons by Catholics was eased in 1974 through a letter written in 1974 by Cardinal Franjo Seper. This letter said that Catholic laymen may join Masonic lodges which do not plot against the Church. But the letter also said: "Clerics, religious and members of secular institutions are still forbidden in every case to join any Masonic association." But after John Paul II ascended the papal throne, the relationship with the Masons returned to its original status. A declaration was issued stating that the 1974 letter had given rise to "erroneous and tendentious" interpretations. It insisted that "canonical discipline regarding Freemasonry remains in force and has not been modified in any way, consequently neither excommunication nor the other penalties envisaged have been abrogated."

And Freemasonry still has strong political overtones today. For example, in 1975 more than a hundred Masons were members of the Italian parliament. Most of them belonged to the anticlerical lay parties, but some very important leaders in the Catholic-endorsed Christian Democratic party were associated with the Masons. In 1981, membership in a Masonic Order led to the downfall of the Italian government. Christian Democrat Premier Arnaldo Forlani's government and three of its cabinet ministers were linked to the secret *Propaganda Due (R2)* lodge. However, it was not a lodge in the traditional sense. It was a secret grouping of Masons who were never officially constituted and never held regular meetings of all its members. *Christianity Today* (June 26, 1981) reported that alleged blackmail and criminal activities were involved, but that much of the controversy had arisen from the fact that the cabinet ministers, 30 members of Parliament, military officials, diplomats, judges, and other influential figures belonged to a secret society outlawed by the Italian constitution. A parliamentary committee investigating the scandal charged that the lodge was involved in a plot to set up an authoritarian government in Italy.

### **Prominent Freemasons**

Throughout its history, Freemasonry has attracted notable and famous supporters. The German dramatist Gotthold Lessing (1729-81), was a Freemason. He was a son of a Lutheran pastor, but left Christian orthodoxy and considered Christianity on the same level as Judaism and Islam. Freemason scholars claim that in his two

works *Ernst and Falk* and *Nathan der Weise*, he has given "profound and comprehensive views on the genius and spirit of Freemasonry."

The Austrian composer Mozart (1756-91) was a Freemason. Henry Raynor suggests in his work, *A Social History of Music From the Middle Ages to Beethoven*, that Viennese aristocracy, whose support as patrons, concert-goers and sponsors of performances was vital to him, abandoned Mozart because of his political opinions, his moral attitudes and his fervent adherence to Freemasonry. His comic opera *The Magic Flute* (1791) was an allegory about Freemasonry, expressing his ideal of "the regeneration of humanity by moral means." Masonic ritual and symbolism were interwoven in the text.

The British royal families have been among the Freemasons' most prominent supporters. The first royal Grand Master was the Duke of Cumberland, younger son of George II, who was installed in 1782. In 1787 both the Prince of Wales (the future George IV and his brother (the future William IV) were initiated. In the years 1874-1901 the Prince of Wales was the Grand Master and was succeeded by the Duke of Connaught.

When Prince Charles became 21, in 1969, the Freemasons assumed that he would become a member. He refused to be pressed into membership. He said that he did not "want to join a secret society." In a *Sunday Mirror* article, Audrey Whiting, an authoritative writer on Royal affairs, commented that "if he persists [in refusing] he will become in due time the first monarch in centuries who has not been the titular head of Freemasonry in Britain." Queen Elizabeth II is the present Grand Patroness.