

Review: Mr. John Lawrence-Freemasonry, a Religion, Kingsway Publications Ltd, Eastbourne, East Sussex, 1987

Pages: 192

The Secret Religion in Plain Sight

The author, an Anglican vicar, covers interesting information on 'the craft' from an English perspective, including its opaque history, religious nature, testimonies, and actual 'Master Mason' and 'Holy Royal Arch rituals.

The stated goal is to determine Freemasonry's compatibility with Christianity, rather than an exposé of Masonic personalities or corruptions. This somewhat neutral approach gives more credit to conclusions, that it most certainly is a religion, and one at variance with Christ.

If the reader is one of the estimated 3.2M+ Masons, he should come away knowing that from the Entered Apprentice degree they have bound themselves to a dark spiritual system and need to be brought to the true light, Jesus Christ.

Author's Note (p. 6)

There was a Grand Lodge meeting on 11/6/1986 that traditional physical penalties be removed from obligations. It is thought permissive variations passed in December 1964 were made compulsory.

Introduction (pp. 7-10)

Masonry is known as 'the craft'. Christian-Masons' hearts 'move elsewhere'.

As banker for ten years, all of the author's managers were Masons.

Stephen Knight's *The Brotherhood* focuses more on corruption and individuals.

I) Why the Concern (pp. 11-15)

Masons do not believe God can only be approached through Christ.

The author gives an English membership figure of 300,000.

The 1799 Unlawful Societies Act forced each lodge to submit an annual return of member particulars to the local Clerk of the Peace. The Criminal Act 1967 (chp. 58) changed this.

II) Basic Masonic Beliefs (pp. 16-19)

Freemasonry has no systematized statement of beliefs, however, each Mason must practice 'the sacred duties of morality.'

Lodges have various sacred volumes open implying an equality.

The three Great Lights of Freemasonry are:

- (i) Volume of Sacred Law, to govern faith.
- (ii) Square, to regulate actions.
- (iii) Compasses, to keep in due bounds.

All religious discussions within the lodge are forbidden.

Each lodge has a chaplain.

III) A Brief History-Creation, Evolution and Christian Excision (pp. 20-32)

-Masonry has developed in many directions.

-Rituals, passwords, and signs have various origins.

- Pre-18th C records are rare.
- It is a society with secrets.

One outrageous theory is Adam was the first Mason!

There is consensus the craft arose in Britain from *operative* (as opposed to 'speculative') Masons. Stone-masonry guild records do not go back before 14thC, although 'manuscript 1278' mentions Vale Road Abbey Lodge.

Apprenticeships date from 1382.

From 1500-1700 masons' real wages fell 50%, partly due to lesser-skilled 'cowan' [Scottish] competition. This was one cause of the organisation, to monopolise Masonry with skill barriers to entry.

In Scotland, 1598, cowan employment was made illegal.

The oldest Masonic documents, Regius [Halliwell] and [Matthew] Cooke state that skill was an employment prerequisite, not secret passwords.

The 1689 Act of Toleration disappointed Masons but it granted freedom to deists.

By 1717 operative [real] masonry had waned and 'a taste for the occult' had attracted many recruits.

The Grand Lodge 1583 no. 1 manuscript invokes the Trinity.

Dr James Anderson's 1723 *Anderson's Constitutions* is a crucial founding document. He had a reputation as a Talmudic scholar.

In the initiation ceremony the breast is uncovered and the leg ungartered.

One view is Socinianism [destruction of Christianity (Catholicism) and rationalism's ascendance advocated by Loelius Socinius] is the root. An 1893 letter from Grand Master Adriano Lemmi of the Italian Grand Orient stated Italy was Masonry's cradle and Socinius its real father.

By 1725 sixty-four lodges existed.

Pure Ancient Masonry consists only of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason degrees. Masonry's Blazing Star is meant to be the star of Bethlehem.

By about 1760 Christian references in the lower degrees had been removed.

In 1762, a Jewish mason Stephen Morin brought the twenty-five Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite degrees to America, where they added eight more making the infamous thirty-three. Higher degrees all bear a 'Hebrew' stamp.

The 1877 schism happened when the French Grand Orient removed from its constitution the need to believe in the Supreme Architect, and forbade using the Bible as the Volume of Sacred Law during oath administration.

Royalty has been involved in masonry:

*1936-7: Edward VIII and George VI appointed Pro Grand Master.

*1946: Christian of Denmark (").

*1947: Gustav V of Sweden (").

*5/12/1952: Duke of Edinburgh initiation.

*1966: Gustav VI of Sweden (").

*1967: Duke of Kent (Grand Master).

IV) The Church of Rome (pp. 33-44)

It is impossible to belong to the Catholic Church and Freemasonry simultaneously.

V) Other Church's Investigations (pp. 45-52)

In the 1927 Wesleyan Conference, a booklet by Rev. C. Penny Hunt resulted in three unanimous decisions by the 600 members, that:

- (i) Freemasonry is theistic.
- (ii) Christians seeking to join must devote extra effort to the faith.
- (iii) Masonic services should generally not be held on Methodist properties.

There was unease about swearing secrecy when its object was as yet unknown.

The Royal Arch degree's identification of the Supreme Being as JAH-BUL-ON is a syncretistic blasphemy.

John Wesley's idea was to unite on the one essential and allow individual liberty on secondary matters.

VI) The Church of England (pp. 53-62)

A great majority of English masons belong to the 'C of E'

Testimony by one Dr D. R. Denman states as an initiate while hearing the utterances of the first Masonic ritual he was aware of great evil.

VII) The Craft Degrees-the Mainstream of Freemasonry (pp. 63-93)

Any male over 21 can join provided he has a proposer and a seconder. It would take three dissidents to deny entrance.

The Grand Lodge claims no one is ever invited.

Accepted candidates attend a Lodge of Instruction. The candidate removes his jacket, collar and tie and must leave behind all metal items. His shirt is unbuttoned over the left breast, right sleeve rolled up to the elbow, and left trouser rolled up above the knee. He wears an open-back slipper, is blindfolded, noose placed around his neck with end hanging down his back.

An 'Inner Guard' makes three knocks to the 'Tyler' and candidate [in a 'state of darkness'] on the other side. Once inside the Junior Deacon leads the candidate in front of all the members.

The 'Worshipful Master' states Masonry is founded on the purest principles of piety and virtue and that no vow contradicts civil, moral, or religious duties.

In Lodge No. 7178 in Singapore there were four volumes on the pedestal. In Iran's Grand Lodge is the Koran, the Zend Avesta, and the KJV.

The first degree sign is right hand with thumb extended in the form of a square dragged from the left across the windpipe. One password is Boaz.

Another password is Shibboleth.

The Entered Apprentice's working tools are: the gauge (whose 24 inches represent the hours of the day), gavel (force of conscience to keep down vain thoughts), and chisel.

The 'G' is the Grand Geometrician of the Universe.

The betrayal penalty is having the left breast laid open, heart torn out and given to ravenous birds and beasts of the field.

The Fellow Craft password is 'Jachin' and they wear two blue rosettes on their apron. They must make the liberal Arts and Sciences their future study.

Masonic commentator J. S. M. Ward states the Fellow Craft can by themselves and in themselves discover and realise God.

The Master Mason candidate has another grip, and password ('Tubal Cain'). Both arms, breasts, and knees are made bare and heels slipshod. A sheet depicting a grave is laid along a centre line in front of the WM's pedestal (some lodges have an actual grave pit). Extended compasses are held against the breast, then above the head.

He must advance 'East' by the proper steps, by seven, the first as if stepping over a grave (cf. Lk 11.44). At the pedestal he says 'hele'/'hail'.

An MM must obey all lodge summonses. The betrayal penalty is being severed in two, having the bowels burned to ashes and scattered.

The object of worship in the ceremony is the "unshaken fidelity and noble death of our Master Hiram Abiff".

Hiram knew the third degree secrets but fell victim to fifteen Fellow Crafts. Three of the band waited for him after worshipping in the temple, and after each refusal to divulge they struck him in turn with a plumb-rule, level, then a heavy maul.

The candidate acts out this scene and falls in the grave after the third blow. EA and FC grips fail to raise him, but the WM succeeds with the 'five points of fellowship' grip. The candidate then learns the signs of horror, sympathy, and penal, also the password Machaben/Machbinna.

Freemasonry clearly identifies with Solomon's Temple.

There is a minimum four-week period between degrees.

VIII) The Holy Royal Arch and the Higher Degrees (pp. 94-108)

There are over a hundred additional non-craft degrees and only 40% of Masons go beyond Master Mason. Progressors usually choose the Holy Royal Arch of Jerusalem ('going into the chapter').

There are about 2,700 English and Welsh lodges with 6,500 new members p.a. 16,000 Master's graduate each year.

Only a Master with four weeks experience can enter the Arch.

Masons refer to an AM (or 'Anno Lucis') dating system.

The mark of Ez 9.4 was said to be a triple tau.

On an altar is a circle circumscribed with JEHOVAH, and within a triangle with JAH-BUL-ON.

Mark Masonry is a popular unofficial order. Its 1,200 lodges are administered from London. It has two degrees: Mark Man and Mark Master both conferred in the same ceremony.

Royal Ark Mariners are attached to Mark Lodges and focus on Noah and the Flood.

Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite goes back to 1740 in Scotland but was not officially recognised with a Supreme Council till 1845 in America. It has over 700 chapters and the best known degree is the Rose Croix ('Knight of the Pelican and Eagle and Sovereign Prince Rose Croix of Heredom').

Degrees four to Rose Croix (the 18th) are conferred all at once, with accompanying titles such as Perfect Master, Sublime Elect, Scotch

Knight of Perfection, and Prince of Jerusalem. The minimum requirement is one year at the Master Mason level.

The candidate is taken into the 'Chamber of Death', then led out by 'Raphael' through skulls, bones, and corpses into the 'Red Room'. The level password is Emmanuel and response *pax vobiscum* [with you].

IX) Can Freemasonry be Regarded as a Religion (pp. 109-122)

The Board of General Purposes says 'Masonry is neither a religion nor a substitute' but its basic requirement is 'every member of the Order shall believe in a Supreme Being'. It also admits to being religious.

The Salvation Army doesn't perform baptism or have communion.

Masonry does do foot-washing, and assures members they will be certain of immortality and a place in the Grand Lodge above if they adhere to tenets.

Lodges face east.

Some join for position accolades, others the thrill of esoteric ritual and collection of titles. Many wives become 'masonic widows' as freemasonry monopolises their husband's time. Women cannot become members.

A lodge meeting is said to be perfect when seven are present.

Jewish parallels to masonry:

- The halter: sign of submission (I Kn 20.31-33).
- Shoe loosening: confirm a contract (Rt 4.7).
- Plumb-rule: Israel was built correctly but is now out of alignment (Am 7.7-8).

-Working tools: These are wood (Dt 27.5-6; Js 8.31). Talmudic tradition states iron tools were only for war purposes.

Sir John Cockburn, “Freemasonry may be a Federation of Religion”.

X) Do Christians and Masons Worship the Same God? (pp. 123-127)

Each initiate receives the Constitutions.

XI) The Lure of Freemasonry (pp. 128-134)

Membership has always grown post-war due to comradery.

The maxim ‘once a mason, always a mason’.

The real secret of the lodge is fellowship.

It also offers a sense of eternal security (albeit false).

Leaving is perceived as a trust betrayal and he will come under a great deal of pressure. As a result most prolong the process so as not to make a ‘clear break’. Membership lapses after three years of inactivity.

XII) Testimony of a Former Mason (pp. 136-146)

Appendix I) The Death of Hiram Abiff (pp. 147-152)

The ‘traditional history’:

-The twelve co-conspirators made confession to King Solomon who sends fifteen trusted Fellow Crafts after Hiram.

-The shallow grave was found and they marked it with a sprig of acacia at the head.

-The Master Mason's secret had been lost.

-Solomon ordered the body re-interred to a grand sepulchre (as close to the *Sactum Sanctorum* as possible).

The Grief and Distress sign is a passing of the right hand across the face and dropping it over the left eyebrow in the form of a square.

In Europe this is an elevated hand clasp with backs to the forehead while exclaiming, "Come to my assistance you children of the widow [all Masters are thought of as Hiram's brothers]." In Scotland, Ireland, and America hands are thrown up with palms heaven-ward, then dropped by three movements to the side while exclaiming, "O Lord my God [X3], is there no help for the widow's son?"

The Master's tools are the skirret [acts on a centre pin], pencil, and compasses.

Appendix II) The Holy Royal Arch (pp. 153-183)

The opening ceremony has three Principals Zerubbabel, Haggai, and Joshua.

Passwords are 'ammi ruhamah' ['my people have found mercy'].

The penalty oath [for pronouncing the Sacred Name [Jahbulon, written on a plate of gold] is decapitation.

Moses was claimed to be a Grand Master Mason!

Anno Lucis 2515 [two years after the Exodus, at the foot of Mt Sinai] was the opening of the first lodge!