

Freemasonry and Religion

United Grand Lodge of England

Periodically we must refresh ourselves and gather facts to refute those detractors who accuse us of practicing cultism. This statement from the United Grand Lodge of England needs to be recirculated on occasion.

In the light of recent comments on Freemasonry and religion and inquiries to be held by various churches into the compatibility of Freemasonry and Christianity, the Board has decided to issue the following statement in amplification of that originally approved by Grand Lodge in September 1962 and confirmed by Grand Lodge in December 1981.

BASIC STATEMENT—Freemasonry is not a religion, nor is it a substitute for religion. It demands of its members belief in a Supreme Being, but provides no system of faith of its own. Its rituals include prayers, but these relate only to the matter instantly in hand and do not amount to the practice of religion. Freemasonry is open to men of any faith, but religion may not be discussed at its meetings,

THE SUPREME BEING—The names used for the Supreme Being enable men of different faiths to join in prayer (to God as they see Him) without the terms of the prayer causing dissension among them. There is no Masonic God: a Freemason remains committed to the God of the religion he professes. Freemasons meet in common respect for the Supreme Being, but He remains Supreme in their individual religions, and it is no part of Freemasonry to attempt to join religions together. There is therefore no composite Masonic God.

VOLUME OF THE SACRED LAW—An open Volume of the Sacred Law is an essential part of every Masonic meeting. The Volume of the Sacred Law to a Christian is the Bible; to Freemasons of other faiths it is the book held holy by them.

THE OATHS OF FREEMASONRY—The obligations taken by Freemasons are sworn on or involve the Volume of the Sacred Law. They are undertakings to keep secret a Freemason's means of recognition and to follow the principles of Freemasonry. The physical penalties are simply symbolic. The commitment to follow the principles of Freemasonry is deep, and entirely appropriate to this form of obligation.

FREEMASONRY COMPARED WITH RELIGION—Freemasonry lacks the basic elements of religion:

- (a) It has no dogma or theology (and by forbidding religious discussion at its meetings will not allow a Masonic dogma to develop).
- (b) It offers no sacraments.
- (c) It does not claim to lead to salvation, by works, secret knowledge or any other means (the secrets of Freemasonry are concerned with modes of recognition, not with salvation).

FREEMASONRY SUPPORTS RELIGION—Freemasonry is far from indifferent to religion.

Without interfering in religious practice, it expects each member to follow his own faith, and to place his duty to God (by whatever name He is known) above all other duties. Its moral teachings are acceptable to all religions.

Why is a Master addressed as "Worshipful"?

Few Masonic matters are less understood by the non-Masonic public than this. The word "worchyppe" or "worchyp" is Old English, and means "greatly respected." In the Wycliffe Bible "Honor thy father and thy mother" appears as "Worchyp thy fadir and thy modir." English and Canadian mayors are still addressed, "Your Worship." In some of the Old Constitutions of Masonry is the phrase, "Every Mason shall prefer his elder and put him to worship."

"Worshipful," therefore, in modern Masonry continues an ancient word meaning "greatly respected." A Grand Master is "Most Worshipful," that is, "Most greatly respected" (except in Pennsylvania, where the Grand Master is "Right Worshipful," as are Pennsylvania's and Texas' Past Grand Masters).

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