

# Freemasonry Examined

(A report from the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Sydney.)

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## Introduction

1. In 1986 the Synod passed the following resolution (8/86):  
"Synod requests Standing Committee to prepare a report on Freemasonry for clergy, church officers and Christians generally."
2. In 1987 the Synod passed a further related resolution (38/87):  
"This Synod notes that the committee investigating Freemasonry has not yet completed its enquiry and encourages it to continue its investigations."
3. In 1986 the Standing Committee appointed a committee which furnished a report to the Standing Committee in June 1988. The members of the committee included:

The Rev H.A. Birch	The late Mr R. Haddrill
The Rev H.E. Ctercteko	The Rev E.G. Hanson
The Rev S.L. Gabbott	Mr G. Pritchard
Mr R.G. Connon	Mr D.P. Thompson

4. The members of the committee represented diverse attitudes to Freemasonry. This report is based on that submitted by the committee and seeks to reflect the different views. The Standing Committee would like to record its thanks and appreciation to the members of the committee.

## The Origins of Freemasonry

5. Freemasonry is "a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols". It originated in the medieval guilds (lodges) of operative Masons. These contained regulations for the carrying on of the highly skilled business of Masonry and, eventually, came to contain rules of moral conduct and legendary history of the craft. While other mechanics' guilds in the later Middle Ages contained some of those elements, those of the stonemasons (the most esteemed of all trades) were the most complex. They contained admission ceremonies, special pass words and several grades of skill. Since Masons were itinerant, these characteristics were especially significant.

6. In the seventeenth century, members of the aristocracy and gentry began to seek admission to these lodges as non-operative members. The Masons' lodges were declining rapidly as craft guilds, but their speculative component attracted well educated men at a time of major intellectual change. Onto the existing symbols, ancient lore and common morality was engrafted by the newcomers a developing system which encompassed the emphasis of the time upon rationality of thought, natural law and its relation to human law and the reasonableness of human conduct. In 1717 several non-operative lodges formed the Grand Lodge of England; Ireland and Scotland followed in 1725 and 1736.

7. British Freemasonry owed something to the Rosicrucian movement in seventeenth century Continental Europe. When it came to Europe early in the eighteenth century, it acquired further continental influences. The notion of "higher orders" was introduced, there was greater emphasis upon esoteric knowledge and, in countries dominated by absolute monarchies and an autocratic church, on human

brotherhood and political reform. Masonic influences had some impact on the benevolent autocrats and, much more, on the basic tenets of the French Revolution; there are Masonic overtones in the American Declaration of Independence. Pope Clement XII condemned Freemasonry in the bull "In eminenti" in 1738. The prohibition was reinforced by later prohibitions.

8. Freemasonry in eighteenth century Britain was neither political nor revolutionary. It gradually became a part of the order of things, with royal patronage and aristocratic leadership. In 1799 it was exempted from a legislative ban on secret societies. As the Empire grew, it spread to the North American and other colonies. The army and navy, with travelling lodges, did much to promote it. There was tension in British Freemasonry; specific Christian references began to be deleted in 1723. Higher degree Masonry, which entered Scotland from Europe in Royal Arch form, met opposition. After prolonged disputes from 1751, unity was achieved in England (and repeated elsewhere) in 1813 with the adoption of a basis of accord which did not contain a Christian context.

9. The nineteenth century saw the gradual separation of British and Continental Freemasonry. The latter abandoned its deist basis in 1877, while retaining a strong element of social criticism. It came to be banned in some Roman Catholic countries and more recently in most Communist states. In Britain and the Empire and in the United States (despite the existence of an Anti-Masonic party at the 1832 election), there was a proliferation of degrees and orders. The original orders maintained a steady state in ritual and formularies, while greatly expanding their membership. Despite the 1913 agreement between "Ancients" and "Moderns", it was generally held by Masons that Freemasonry conformed to a generalised "moral Christianity" while avoiding the multiplicity of sectarian doctrines that characterized nineteenth century Christianity. In doing so, British Freemasonry was able to become a stabilizing force in society, with a significant outreach in a laissez faire economy. It held a powerful appeal to the rapidly growing middle classes - it was moral, respectable, undivisive and egalitarian, with a touch of the numinous and the exotic. At the same time, it enjoyed the patronage of those in high places and its leaders were generally members of the peerage. It had a great many ecclesiastics in its membership. This was the Freemasonry which achieved coherence and order in Australia in the last third of the nineteenth century.

### Freemasonry in Australia

10. The history of Freemasonry in Australia is too complex for summary here. There are accounts of the institutional development of the various branches of Freemasonry in Australia in successive editions of *The Australian Encyclopaedia* (1927, 1958, 1977). This brief summary will refer principally to the three Craft Degrees in New South Wales, commonly known as the Blue Lodge.

11. Freemasonry began in the colony with military and naval Masons holding more or less impromptu meetings; the Craft was popular with members of the armed forces. In 1820 a regular lodge was formed and a second in 1824 under the Grand Lodge of Ireland. An English lodge was established in 1828 and a Scottish in 1851. As lodges of the three traditions proliferated, provincial grand lodges were formed. In 1888, under the direction of the Governor, Lord Carrington, an amalgamation took place and the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales, after long negotiation and several false starts, came into existence. Similar developments occurred in most other colonies late in the nineteenth century.

12. Royal Arch chapters from the three home countries appeared in New South Wales between 1831 and 1863. Those of English origin combined as a Supreme Grand Chapter in 1889; the larger numbers of Scottish origin remained in a District Grand Chapter in subject to overseas jurisdiction.

13. Mark Masonry began in 1858 and acquired Grand Lodge status in 1889, with English and Scottish participants.

14. Other elements in Freemasonry reached Australia in the late nineteenth century - Rose Croix, Knight Templary and others - and most have achieved local autonomy.

15. Freemasonry, notably of the basic "Blue Lodge" kind, advanced rapidly in New South Wales from the 1880s. It secured substantial support from the official and wealthy classes - seven Governors and two Governors-General were Grand Masters, 1888-1955 - and it gained a solid middle class base. While its roots lay in the male citizenry of the metropolitan suburbs and country towns, it also promoted specialist lodges. The great majority were Protestant, though the small Jewish community contributed its share. There were undoubtedly Roman Catholic Masons (despite that church's long-standing ban) but, in times of sectarian stress, Freemasonry acted as a quasi-Protestant co-ordinator. Many Protestant clergymen were prominent in the craft. Freemasonry was a significant component of lower middle and middle class New South Wales.

16. After World War 1, the "benevolent" aspect of Freemasonry became prominent. Orphanages, hospitals, retirement homes, social welfare agencies and others of that ilk were established. There is little doubt that this area of labour aroused the interest of many Masons who were less immediately concerned with the working of the lodge. At the same time, the field was actively cultivated by the Masonic hierarchy.

17. Freemasonry in New South Wales peaked, in terms of subscribing membership, in the late 1950s. At that time there were about 5,000 Masons - approximately 1:7.5 of the adult male Protestant population. Of these about 30,000 were also Royal Arch or Mark Masons. Within twenty years, there was a substantial decline in active membership, absolutely as well as relative to the total eligible population. The present overall figure would be about 60,000. At the same time, Masonry has become associated far less with the holding of high office in Church and State, as a means of community action or as an expression of common Protestantism. These developments do not result from any perceptible change in the character of the movement.

### **Becoming a Mason**

18. Freemasonry desires that men be moved to join it by gaining a favourable opinion of the institution. It is permissible for a Mason to make a suggestion that a man might think of joining the Lodge and then leave it for him to decide.

19. An approach to join is made by two nominators who know the candidate well. He is given an authorised statement advising some of the basic things of Freemasonry. The need for loyalty and not to hope for personal gain is stressed. The godly basis of the institution is set out as follows:

"The great permanent unchanging basic principle, to which you must unreservedly subscribe and maintain, is in the existence of God. Freemasonry has for its foundation the great basic principles of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, therefore no atheist can be a Freemason. It strives to teach a man the duty he owes to God, to his neighbour and to himself. It inculcates the practice of every virtue, and makes an extensive use of symbolism in its teaching. It interferes neither with religion nor politics, and there is an absolute elimination of any arguments or contention in connection with either."

20. The applicant is required to sign an assent to this statement.

### **Areas of Agreement and Disagreement on the Committee**

21. The members of the committee appointed by the Standing Committee were in fundamental agreement as to what the Bible says about God and the nature of the relationships he has with men and women. Whilst there have been some disagreements in the committee over some issues, these were about the way Biblical principles apply to Freemasonry rather than about the principles themselves. The members of the Committee were unanimous in accepting the following:

- (a) There is only one God and he is the God who reveals himself in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible which is the inspired Word of God.
- (b) God created the world.
- (c) Jesus Christ is the only Son of God and he has all of the qualities and characteristics of God.
- (d) God is a person with whom men and women may have a close personal relationship.
- (e) By nature, mankind turns its back on God. Any good that people do or any behaviour morally acceptable to God that they exhibit is no more than God expects of them and does not in itself earn his acceptance or forgiveness.
- (f) Close personal relationships between God and people are only made possible because of the initiative that God took to restore fellowship between himself and humanity. That initiative was taken when God sent his Son to take away the punishment mankind deserves by willingly submitting to death by crucifixion.
- (g) People can do nothing to earn forgiveness from God. The creation of a close personal relationship with God depends on the acceptance by men and women of God's offer of forgiveness and friendship based on the death of his Son.
- (h) Christians ought to do good to all men and women. Such behaviour does not earn for them God's favour and forgiveness. It is an appropriate response to the love and compassion that they have experienced from God in their relationship with Him.

22. The foregoing of course, is not a comprehensive statement of the Christian faith.

23. Whilst being in fundamental agreement about these matters, the members of the committee were not in agreement about the acceptability of the removal of all clear references to Jesus Christ from the rituals of the first three Degrees. This took place in 1813 and was part of the price paid to achieve unity in the Masonic movement in the British Isles. Australian Freemasonry has inherited this tradition of Freemasonry - at least in the first three Degrees - which makes no mention of the part played by the Son of God in all aspects of his Father's work.

### Aspects of the Three Craft Degrees

#### *The Volume of the Sacred Law*

24. In NSW "The Volume of the Sacred Law" is the "King James" version of the Holy Bible which, together with "The Charges of a Freemason" contained in the Book of Constitutions, forms the basis of Masonic teaching. It is on an altar at the front centre of the Lodge room and is opened when the Lodge is opened and remains open until the Lodge is closed. However, provision is made for a candidate who belongs to a religion that has a book other than the Holy Bible as its Scripture or Holy Book to make his oath of allegiance on his Holy Book. The use of any additional book does not supersede the requirement that the King James Version should be in its normal position on the altar.

#### *God*

25. Prior to acceptance a candidate for admission to Freemasonry must sign a declaration that he is not an atheist but believes in God.

#### *Man*

26. Freemasonry teaches that man needs God's help in all aspects of life.

#### *Life After Death*

27. Freemasonry teaches that God has provided eternal life for man in heaven. Moreover, it demonstrates four ways in which that heavenly life can be attained:

- (a) *By Jacob's Ladder*: "It has many staves or rounds, but there are three principal ones, namely, Faith, Hope and Charity: Faith in the Great Architect of the Universe, Hope in salvation and to be in Charity with all men. This ladder rests on the Volume of the Sacred Law, and reaches to the Heavens . . ." (1st Degree).
- (b) *By Ordering One's Life*: "Thus by square conduct, level steps and upright intentions we hope to ascend to those eternal mansions whence all goodness emanates". (2nd Degree).
- (c) *By Knowing and Obeying God's Laws*: "Thus the Working Tools of a Master Mason teach us to bear in mind and act according to the laws of our Divine Creator, so that, when summoned from this sublunary and probationary abode, we may ascend to that Grand Lodge above, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, where the world's great Architect lives and reigns forever" (3rd Degree).
- (d) *By the Five Points of Fellowship*: In the Third Degree a Mason is instructed how to die. In the context of a dramatic enactment the Mason is "killed" by a villain. He is laid in a position of death on the floor of the Lodgeroom. He is raised on the Five Points of Fellowship: The Worshipful Master says "it is thus my brother that all Master Masons are raised from a figurative death to a reunion with the companions of their former toil ... the Lord of Life will enable us to trample the King of Terrors beneath our feet, and to lift our eyes to that bright Morning Star whose rising brings peace and salvation to the faithful and obedient among men."

#### *Morality*

28. Freemasonry describes itself as "A peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols" (2nd Degree examination of candidate). Moral teachings and exhortations are, consequently, a main theme and require Masons to "believe in the glorious Architect of heaven and earth, and practise the sacred duties of morality" (Book of Constitutions - The Charges of a Freemason, No 1).

"As an individual, let me recommend you to practise every domestic as well as social virtue. Let Prudence direct you, Temperance chasten you, Fortitude support you and Justice be the guide of all your actions. Be especially careful to preserve in their fullest splendour those truly Masonic ornaments, Benevolence and Charity" (from the 1st Degree)."

### Majority View

**(The Revs. H. A. Birch, S. L. Gabbott and F. G. Hanson, Messrs G. Pritchard and D. P. Thompson)**

#### *The Volume of the Sacred Law*

29. Freemasonry teaches that the Bible is God's unerring statement of truth, that it contains God's plan for man's life here and hereafter and that Masons should regulate their lives by it. Freemasonry seems therefore to have a very high view of the Bible and one would expect that Masonic religious teaching and practice would be based on it and that its teachings would be comprehensively taught in the Lodge. However, this expectation is not realised for three reasons:

- (a) The Masonic ritual refers to only a few short passages from the Old Testament (Ruth 2:19, 1 Kings 7:21, Psalm 133:1-2, Genesis 1:1-3, Ruth 4.7 and Ecclesiastes 12:1-7).
- (b) No reference is made to the New Testament. Freemasonry in the first three Degrees makes no use or mention of the New Testament and is quite specifically devoid of Christian content or bias.
- (c) Much Masonic teaching is based on the building of the Temple in Jerusalem during the reign of King Solomon. However, in its reference to that undertaking, Masonic ritual adds material not found in the Biblical narrative. This material is used to explain certain aspects of Masonic ritual, symbolism and lore.

### *God*

30. Freemasonry does not set out to teach a whole theology of God. God is characterised throughout the ritual as creator, controller, watcher, the source of all men's needs, the sustainer of men's lives and the final valuator of their worth. Two questions can be asked.

#### (a) *Sustainable Expectations*

31. Conceding the fact that Freemasonry does not set out to give a full theology of God, can the expectation Freemasonry has of him be sustained by what is said of him?

32. The picture that emerges is of a God devoid of relational characteristics. Emotional terms such as love, hatred, jealousy and joy are absent. He may demand submission and call for an account of a man's life, but there is no indication of his likely responses of what he might do as a result of insubordination or unsatisfactory accounting beyond the mention of dispassionate punishment.

#### (b) *The Place of Christ*

33. What is to be made of the silence about Christ?

34. Jesus Christ is not named in Masonic ritual. It seems reasonable to assume therefore that Masonic understanding of God is bound to be deficient.

### *Man*

35. Freemasonry declares that no matter what religion a man belongs to, purity of conduct will be seen as demonstrating its superior excellence. This pure and undefiled conduct is said to ascend to the Throne of Grace.

36. Freemasonry claims not to be a religion but in giving instruction how man may lead a life approved **by** God without reference to Christ, it is presenting false religious reaching.

37. Masons are urged to trust in God, to pray to him, to give thanks for favours received and to rely on him in all aspects of life. This would be good advice if it was in the context of a saving relationship with God in Christ. But man is not talked about as being in need of a saviour. Neither is prayer allowed to be spoken in Jesus' name.

38. The Bible shows that man needs spiritual renewal. He needs to be regenerate or "born again". This is a work of the Holy Spirit and is related to faith in Jesus Christ (John 3).

### *Life After Death*

39. The committee was in agreement that Masonic ritual is concerned about the way to get to heaven. The majority were of the view that Freemasonry teaches a doctrine of salvation by works. The minority did not agree that Freemasonry teaches a doctrine of salvation by works.

### *Morality*

40. The writings of Freemasonry constantly emphasise the importance of right conduct and moral behaviour. Insofar as the teachings of Freemasonry might be interpreted as encouraging Masons to think that their conduct can get them to heaven they are, in the light of what the Bible teaches, mistaken. Whilst moral conduct is of benefit to the recipient it is, of itself, nothing more than should be expected of a normal human being and is still not enough to earn acceptance in God's eyes. The only means by which a person can find acceptance is through the death of Jesus Christ.

### *General*

41. Although Freemasons go to great pains to explain that Freemasonry is not a religion (just as others make similar efforts to prove that it is), there is no doubt that Freemasonry has an overwhelmingly religious flavour to it:

- (a) A Mason is required to put his trust in God.
- (b) The aim of Freemasonry is to make good men better.
- (c) Prayers are offered as part of the ritual.

- (d) Some prayers are taken directly from the Book of Common Prayer (but with reference to Christ deleted).
- (e) The ritual claims to teach Masons mysteries which have been secrets revealed to Masons and which will enable them to, for example,
  - display the beauties of true Godliness
  - receive Masonic Light which will reveal truth and knowledge.

42. The impression which obtained of Freemasonry was of a society of men with a highly religious and ritualistic structure in which the Mason is made to feel a welcome member of a warm sympathetic group with high moral ideals. He is taught to believe in his own value and dignity and in his ability to improve himself. He undergoes role plays which vividly demonstrate and reinforce Masonic teaching (eg a candidate is stripped of most of his clothes and possessions and in this state of helplessness is reminded of his obligation to be charitable). The gradual unveiling of secrets commits him to the group until he passes through the three Craft Degrees. At all times he is bound by oaths not to reveal the secrets to outsiders.

43. The ritual is expressed in convoluted, archaic language and is full of symbolism. To the outsider the ritual does not appear to have internal consistency or logic, and what is said in one place often appears to be contradicted in another.

44. It is hard to criticise an organisation which requires its members to adopt a moral lifestyle generally consistent with what Christianity teaches and which performs many charitable works. If this was all there was to Freemasonry it would be no different to any other service club. However, Freemasonry purports to provide answers to man's deepest spiritual needs. It does so in a religious framework which contains Bible stories which are intermingled with fiction and folklore. All references to Christ have been deleted.

45. The majority had difficulty in seeing how a person who loves Jesus Christ as his Lord could take part in a ritual where the secrets of godliness and eternal life are offered without any mention of Jesus' love and death. They ask Christian Freemasons to reconsider whether their involvement in the Lodge might encourage their Masonic brethren to put their trust in a false hope of salvation without Christ. They are not asking them to abandon long held friendships but to show the greatest friendship of all by telling their friends that the qualities which Freemasons work for are freely offered by Christ apart from the Lodge and that any hope of attaining the Grand Lodge above which ignores Christ is a false hope.

#### **Minority View**

##### ***(Mr R. G. Connon and the Rev H. E. Ctercteko)***

46. It is the opinion of the Masonic Representatives that nothing new was introduced during the life of the Committee.

47. The strongest and most persistent argument brought against Freemasonry was the omission of the name of Jesus Christ from the ritual. This is admitted to be a great difficulty and is perhaps the strongest argument put forward by those resigning their membership. The Committee accepted the assurance that the name of Jesus Christ could be used by an Initiate, when declaring his faith on entering the Lodge Room. The question was then posed, "Could the name of our Lord be substituted for the name of God wherever the latter is used in the ritual?" Surely, this is inconsistent with the normal usage of names within the Book of Common Prayer or The Australian Prayer Book or, indeed, the usage in other churches. It is not denigrating the Lord Jesus Christ. It is strongly acknowledged that the Christian faith is Christocentric but not Christo-exclusive - The Father and the Holy Spirit are co-equal and co-eternal with Him. The Christian Mason, when using the name of God within the ritual, indicates his Trinitarian faith.

48. Freemasonry does not ask a candidate to define his concept of God when seeking admission to the Fraternity. Since Masonry defines itself as "a peculiar (distinct, or deserving special consideration and attention) system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols," it would not require a specific definition of the deity acknowledged by the individual as his God. With such a diversity of religious beliefs within the boundaries of the movement, this permits the acceptance of each other as persons, though not necessarily accepting the creed of that man. This is a problem for some sincere adherents of various groups. Within the movement itself it greatly assists in the brotherly regard each has for the other.

49. If Freemasonry is a religion, specific names would be obligatory. Since it is not a religion, the comprehensive name, God, is used. On occasions, special titles are accorded to Him, eg "The Great Architect of the Universe", "The Grand Geometrician of the Universe", "the Most High", are the most common. These designate the obvious characteristics and attributes of the deity. They also allow for the sensitivity of a member to be taken into consideration. As in a number of other organisations the topic of religion is not permitted in discussions within the Lodge. Taking into consideration the subject matter of the ritual, the name God is perfectly in keeping with the contents and is sufficient.

50. Freemasons are taught to regard the Holy Bible, The Volume of the Sacred Law, ("VSL"), with reverence and to acknowledge it as the inspired revelation of the mind and will of God. They are urged to read it and to regulate their lives by its teachings. It is true that the Old Testament only is quoted within the ritual. This is understandable, since the background of the "workings" of the Lodge is exclusively of that section. Opponents of the Craft criticise the non use of the New Testament. Perusal of the ritual will show that the quotations used are for a specific, and sometimes illustrative, purpose. There is no attempt to exegete a verse, passage or chapter. Interpretation is avoided.

51. Candidates take their obligation on the VSL. Should a candidate be of a faith which has another type of book as its sacred volume, then he is encouraged to bring a copy to the ceremony. This is placed alongside the VSL, but never replaces it from the central position. The wording of the ceremony is unaltered. That candidate uses his book for one purpose only.

52. The raising of Hiram Abiff is an area which can be interpreted according to the position, or the prejudice, of the individual observing the situation. Masonry is emphasising the importance of courage and fidelity in the recital of the death of Hiram Abiff in the Third Degree. In this dramatic role play, it is also teaching the candidate how to face the certainty of death and the necessity to prepare for it. The five points of fellowship are not the means of raising from death to life, and never can be. They are the basis of brotherly love, the guarantee of care and concern. If the committee members, who had a copy of the ritual, had turned to what are known as "Extended Lectures" at the back of the book, these points would be clear. In effect they are a cordial greeting assuring assistance is readily available in time of need. Secondly, indolence, wrath, selfishness should not prevent help being extended. It also reminds him that man was not born for his own enjoyment alone, but for the support of his generation. Thus, swiftness to help should be a characteristic of a Mason. Thirdly, assures of mutual prayer support. Fourthly, trustworthiness and confidentiality are promised and fifthly, reverence for the Brother's character. Let us quote the final sentence of that Extended Lecture: "Thus, Brethren, on the five points of fellowship should we Freemasons be linked together by one indissoluble bond of fraternal affection and brotherly love, which cannot fail to distinguish us from those who are strangers to our Masonic art, and sufficiently demonstrate to the world that the term 'Brother', made use of among Masons, is something more than an empty name." That doesn't sound like a passport to Heaven. Rather it is very practical instruction for a very present life and experience.

53. Opponents of Freemasonry either forget or deliberately overlook the fact that Freemasonry is a progressive science. On entering the Lodge for the first time, the candidate declares his faith in his God. That belief may be deep and sincere, it may not. It is not easy to judge, just as it is to assess the depth of reality of the person holding out their hands to receive the sacrament week by week, or lustily singing hymns and waving hands and arms at the same time. The declaration is the beginning of a pilgrimage. No attempt is made to probe the reality of the statement. This, according to the attitude of critics, is a serious problem, and they go on to say that the ritual states that man can earn his salvation and eternal life through good works. The favourite quotation to support this is the final sentence in the Lecture of the Working Tools of the Second Degree. "Thus by square conduct, level steps and upright intentions we hope to ascend . . ." It is important to recall the sequence of the progress of the candidate. Profession of faith, instruction in the importance of the VSL whose teachings strengthen our belief and firm our faith, increase our hope and encourage charity (love). That is the First Degree. In the next step, he is instructed to put these precepts into practice and after further tutelage he is brought face to face with the Second Working Tools, the square, the level and the plumb rule; instruments used in the building trades. They represent morality and justice and encourage the regulation of life by the unerring and unalterable law of God's word . . . to discipline our conduct so as to be acceptable to the Grand Geometrician of the Universe. The Level teaches equality and urges each one to see the other as he sees himself, while the plumb rule indicates Integrity and uprightness and urges us to walk justly and uprightly before God and man. Then comes the summary as quoted. But it all began with the initial declaration, followed by instruction in putting that faith into practical value. The favourite cliché of the Bible Teacher, "a text, out of its context, becomes a pretext" is amply illustrated. Freemasonry has an affinity with the Epistle of James.

54. No one denies that man's best acts of charity cannot gain eternal life. The Isaiah 64:6 passage is acknowledged as are other verses. But when Masonry states that charity has the approbation of Heaven and Earth, it is only following recommendations made in Matthew 25, together with the approval given to works of charity of various characters in the Acts of the Apostles. Good in themselves, but far outdistanced by the dazzling beauty and purity of the Eternal God.

55. Freemasonry, in its public pronouncements, and internal declarations constantly states it is not a religion, and strongly counsels its members against thinking of it as such. It admits to its religious character and endeavours to persuade men to live by these precepts. The religious ethos, bound up as it must be with morality, loyalty, and discreet influence within society, ought to be something acceptable to others with similar objectives. It is not beside the point to question the motives of the opposition to this aspect of Freemasonry. We do our utmost to send men back to their Church where the power to fulfil

these responsibilities can be received. Ought not the salutary effect of Mark 9:38-41 be felt? Masonry wants to work alongside other organisations with similar objectives. Constant criticisms and denunciatory statements do not make it easy, or attractive, for those targeted to see the way clear to join other groups or to comply with their demands.

56. The Grand Lodge will not permit a Masonic Funeral Service to be conducted on its own. The Service must be carried out in conjunction with the Funeral Rites of the faith in which the deceased Brother is being buried or cremated. Freemasons are urged to contact the Clergyman prior to Funeral Services to ascertain his wishes and expectations. Co-operation is emphasised from the Lodge's viewpoint.

57. It is not unknown for abruptness to be experienced and each side is no less guilty than the other in this regard. Clergymen have been known to walk out of the Service while the Masonic portion is being read and to return on its completion. This appears to be a rude gesture and an embarrassment to the congregation, even if explained before to the mourners. It is not done while the R.S.L. conduct their tribute, nor when a layman, often unconnected with the Church, delivers the eulogy. This latter is becoming more frequent than in previous years. Often there is no spiritual content whatever in the speech.

58. Critics are very fond of using the word "incompatible" when comparing Christianity and Freemasonry. If it is so, it is one sided. The word itself, as defined In Collins English Dictionary means:

"(a) incapable of living together in peace or harmony, conflicting or antagonistic."

This means that the present debate is entirely one sided. Freemasonry is not being allowed to live in peace and harmony with the Church. Conflict and antagonism comes from one direction only. Freemasonry proves that it is possible for differing views to accept each other and be at peace. It does not mean that agreement has been reached. There is a spirit of tolerance within the movement and each man can sit down beside the other in peace, love and harmony. Christians do somewhat similarly in their every day working life while at the office or besides the lathe, driving the bus. There is, in some instances, obvious incompatibility. Is any objection raised comparable with that against Masonry? The text, "Be not unequally yoked together with an unbeliever" is not relevant for these moments. It was specifically referring to marriage. In to-day's complex world, it would be nigh impossible to observe in normal living.

"(b) opposed in nature or quality; inconsistent."

It is remarkable that, with similar emphases on moral values, necessity of spiritualities, charity and love, and fellowship, Freemasons are branded as opposed in nature etc. One side is very anxious to walk alongside the other, but is being pushed aside and hurt to the extent of some disassociating themselves completely from the Church.

59. Much of the criticism levelled at Freemasonry comes from somewhat superior religious attitudes and some from disappointment or disillusionment. Some is from book knowledge, gained from unreliable sources. In reality there may be grounds for the questioning of practice and purpose. Even the Church cannot escape similar treatment. But to ostracise and maintain unrelenting pressure, hardly commends those who do it. Similar objectives ought to enable consultation and, where possible, working together to achieve worthwhile goals. Surely this is in line with our Saviour's words to the disciples in Mark 9:38-41 as previously quoted.

### **Legal Position**

60. The Standing Committee would like to remind readers of the law in this Diocese regarding use of church buildings.

61. If a Masonic Lodge requests that a service for the Lodge be held in a church building of the Diocese of Sydney and if the rector of the parish in which that church building is located accedes to the request, then:

- (a) The service must be one of public worship in accordance with either the Book of Common Prayer or An Australian Prayer Book. Only such deviations as have been approved by a vestry meeting and the Archbishop may be permitted. It is not lawful for any clergyman to assent to or be a party to deviations not duly authorised.
- (b) The service must be conducted by the rector of the parish or a person holding an appropriate licence or authority of the Archbishop.
- (c) No other person may perform any of those functions allocated in the Book of Common Prayer or in An Australian Prayer Book to the clergyman unless he or she has been invited so to do under the Deaconesses, Readers and Lay Persons Ordinance 1981.



62. Masonic involvement in a funeral service is the same. It is obviously desirable that the matter be handled with sensitivity, within the law, and in consultation with the family and the Worshipful Master of the Lodge concerned.

27 July 1988

### Select Bibliography

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"Freemasonry and Christianity - are they Compatible?" (a report prepared for the General Synod of the Church of England in 1987).

Several pamphlets of a public relations kind published under the auspices of the United Grand Lodge of N.S.W.

"Freemasonry in New South Wales"

"About Freemasonry"

"What Can I Tell My Friends About Freemasonry?"

"Freemasonry and Its Relationship with Religion"

"Masonic Charities"

"Some Facts Concerning Freemasonry."

The report of the Committee appointed by the Standing Committee will be tabled at the Synod session.