

Christianity
and
Freemasonry

What is the conflict?

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A resource of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria

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**Christianity
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Foreword

Rev. G.I. Fraser

The 1997 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria instructed its Church and Nation Committee to compile a booklet on the incompatibility of Freemasonry and Christianity. This booklet seeks to foster mutual understanding in an area which has already been much traversed and about which there has been much written. Our concern is for people and so we desire to bring some clarity to the situation. In our critique of Freemasonry we are not saying that there are no Christians within Freemasonry. The church seeks honesty and clarity in these important matters that all may understand the issues and decide the matter for themselves.

Naturally, our booklet conforms with the position of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria and the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The Appendix to this booklet is the current position of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

It seems that some of the confusion between Christianity and Freemasonry comes from different levels of understanding of both the Church and the Lodge. Amongst people who call themselves 'Christians' there can be a great variety of views about Christianity. Some believe in a carefully defined, limited, and precise Christianity. Others believe in a broad, embracing, easy going, Christianity. One version of faith rejects the Lodge 'as

incompatible with Christianity’, the other, as compatible. Therefore, in the current debate we begin with the challenge to understand Biblical Christianity.

The Presbyterian Church of Australia, including of course the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, stands squarely and unashamedly for the historic, orthodox Christian faith of the Bible. God has shown mankind what Christianity is and what it is not. The Bible is self explanatory of a God who, in justice and love, gave himself to us to do for us what we could not do for ourselves - find forgiveness and enter into a relationship with Himself.

Acts 4:12 speaks of the necessity of Jesus Christ for this salvation; ‘Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.’ Or one may choose, though it is a perilous choice, a more ‘liberal’ Christianity with its belief in man’s goodness and universal salvation.

This liberal Christianity which defines itself as broad and embracing is not the Christianity of the Bible, and it is not the Christianity of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, or of its creed (The Westminster Confession of Faith), or of the orthodox, historic and protestant church. The self-styled Christianity of liberalism has the effect of undermining the truth of the Bible and the unique personhood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some Churches have held and some still do hold to a broad ‘liberal’ Christianity. Little wonder that there has been confusion about the Lodge when the Church has been so characterised.

Freemasonry, on the other hand, may be defined as an organisation or fraternal which promotes a system of morality, humanitarian concern and action. It seeks and teaches divine truth using symbols,

allegories and the gradual understanding of certain secrets or mysteries. The only belief requirement for membership is belief in a Supreme, Creative Being. It is tolerant of all religions and opposes the suppression of any religion. While it does not claim to promise salvation to its members, it does offer the hope that good masons will partake of the joys which have been prepared for the righteous. Upon initiation apprentice masons can progress to different levels of attainment, called 'degrees'. It seems that most attain the third degree of Master Mason. Freemasonry is open about having secrets which are revealed to masons as they progress to higher degrees.

Freemasonry is careful not to define itself as a religion and says that it does not have a theology, or worship or sing hymns or sacraments or even a funeral service. However, it is an organisation which requires a belief in God, sings Odes of the Craft (some of which the Church sings as hymns to God), has elaborate ritual, has a funeral ceremonial and does express a connectedness to God. If the Lodge is not a religious organisation, as it appears to many to be, then it is most confusing to the outside observer and we would hazard to suggest to many inside participants too.

Therefore, we welcome the opportunity to speak openly, lovingly and honestly to clear up confusion and lay the matter bare before all parties. The first matter to understand is the Gospel.

Greg Fraser
Church and Nation Committee
Presbyterian Church of Victoria

Summary of the moral law

The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5) with explanation or illustration from the New Testament

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. You shall have no other gods before me. ... *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. (Matthew 22:37)*

2. Do not make for yourselves images or idols of anything in heaven or on earth ... *They worshipped and served created things rather than the creator. (Romans 1:25)*

3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God ... *I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. (Matthew 12:36)*

4. Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy ... six days you shall labour ...but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God ... *You should not stay away from Church meetings, as some are doing. (Hebrews 10:25)*

5. Honour your father and your mother ... *Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. (Ephesians 6:1)*

6. You shall not murder ... *You have heard it said “Anyone who*

murders will be subject to judgment but I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. (Matthew 5:21-22)

7. You shall not commit adultery ... *but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28)*

8. You shall not steal ... *thieves ... will not inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor.6:10)*

9. You shall not give false testimony [lie] ... *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Col. 3:9 -10)*

10. You shall not covet ... *anything that belongs to your neighbour ... you kill and covet and cannot have what you want. (James 4:2)*

An illustration by Jesus to ensure that we all assess our lives by God's moral law and not by comparison to others:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God I thank you that I am not like other men - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.” (Luke 18:10-14) (New International Version)

Understanding the Gospel

Bill Medley

Some argue that Freemasonry is not compatible with Christianity. Others say that it is. Masons often have one definition of their craft while their critics have another. There are differing opinions on what Freemasonry means to the Mason, to the Christian, and especially to the Mason who is a Christian. Unfortunately in this entire debate, the Gospel is often put aside. There should be no disagreement amongst Christians over the Gospel. So let's first define that on which all Christians must agree, Mason or otherwise.

The Gospel, or the "Good news", comes out of some "bad news", resulting from the Law. God originally gave man a world that was perfect. Man rebelled against God. As a consequence, sin, which leads to death and suffering, entered the world. God gave man the moral law which is summarised by the Ten Commandments. This is God's perspective of right and wrong. For God to be holy and just He must administer justice for every transgression of His laws. These laws are not some "suggested way of living". They are the standard with which God will punish wrongdoing. We understand what sin is because of the Ten Commandments and God judges men by them.

So the question is not whether you are a Freemason, the question is: when God brings *every deed into judgment* how will you fare? As we look at the commandments the caution for all of us is to avoid taking a "Pharisee" approach. (Remember the Pharisee that

Jesus spoke of in Luke 18:10-14?) Jesus implied that this good Pharisee ended up in hell because he examined his life by comparing it to other “evildoers” rather than to God’s righteousness. The thing that insulted God the most was that this Pharisee spoke of his own good deeds as if God would overlook the times when he did break the commandments. Men may overlook their own law-breaking, but God doesn’t overlook anything! *“For God will bring every deed into judgment including every hidden thing” (Ecclesiastes 12:14).*

Here is where the Freemasonry debate becomes the secondary issue. Surely all agree that justice is fair? Whether we are Masons or not, we all deserve to meet justice. It is only fair and just that we pay the penalty for our law breaking “according to the things we have done” (Rev. 20:12). Hell is simply where God’s rights of justice against all law breaking are finally vindicated. There is no forgiveness without justice being met against every single time you have broken God’s laws. The wages of sin is death and after death comes judgment (Romans 6:23, Hebrews 9:27). The dilemma of a Holy God and our law breaking is real indeed.

But ... *“God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life!” (John 3:16)*

Jesus kept the law perfectly and paid the full price of our penalty on the cross so that God’s justice is still met (the wages of sin are paid) and we can be pardoned and forgiven without any compromise of God’s justice. The offer of this pardon is a free and undeserved gift, given to all those who will believe in Him. The Gospel is indeed “good news”.

Even the demons believe and shudder

So all you have to do is believe? And are not all Freemasons believers anyway? After all one of the requirements for membership is that one must believe in the Great Architect of the Universe. But then again, most people also claim to believe in God. Statistics from a recent census showed that over 70% of Australians claimed to believe in God. Are they all Christians?

The New Testament warns us that simply believing in God's existence or even believing that Jesus is the Son of God is nothing more than what demons already do. *"You believe that there is one God? Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder."* (James 2:19)

Clearly then, believing in Jesus' existence does not get us into heaven, otherwise most people (as well as demons), would be going to heaven. And yet Jesus said *"narrow is the way that leads to life and only a few find it"* (Matthew 7:14).

To really believe in Jesus as Lord (the Lord of your life), is to follow Him in obedience wherever He commands (John 14:15) and he commands us to repent from sin. Jesus' first words in His ministry were *"repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near"* (Matthew 4:17).

Freemasonry and believing the Gospel

The age-old debate as to whether Freemasonry is a religion is well worn and is really irrelevant. What is relevant to the Christian, is whether or not there is anything in the philosophy or tenets of the craft that is not honouring to Christ and His Gospel. Christians

need to bring all institutions and activities under the scrutiny of the Bible for it is God's objective standard.

The real question is, does true repentance and belief in Jesus conflict with Masonry? Does Masonry contradict the Gospel? Let us hope not! "*If anyone preaches another gospel let him be eternally condemned*" (Galatians 1:8).

The command of the gospel is to repent and believe in Jesus for salvation. So what does it really mean to believe in Jesus?

If you really believe in Jesus, you *believe* in His death on the cross to pay for your sins and His resurrection to secure your rising to eternal life.

If you really believe in Jesus, you *believe* that He literally went through hell for you.

If you really believe in Jesus, you *believe* that you really deserve that hell yourself.

If you really believe in Jesus, you *believe* that you cannot erase your own sins no matter how many "good things" you have done. Only Jesus' sacrifice can do that.

If you really *believe* that you *can* get to heaven because you have lived a good life and have done the best you can, then you do *not* believe in Jesus.

You may believe Jesus existed. You may believe He is the Son of God. You may even believe He died for sins. But you don't believe in Him *fully* for your salvation. If you don't believe you need Jesus 100% to get you into heaven, you are an *unbeliever!*

At least a *part* of your belief is in yourself. This was the problem of the Pharisee (Luke 18). He refused to humble himself to acknowledge that he had *no purity* in himself or his actions and that he was totally at the mercy of God.

The following is a Masonic quotation on this subject. It is taken from the initiation ritual of the Entered Apprentice.

“You will be thereby reminded of the purity of life and actions which should always distinguish a Freemason and which is most essential to your gaining admission to that Grand Lodge above, where the blessed ever rest in eternal peace ...”. (Underlining added) ¹.

Far from being an obscure doctrine or taken “out-of-context”, the above quotation lays down a foundational principle that is found in most Masonic Rituals worldwide. It would also be fair to say that it is under this philosophy that most Masons today worldwide have taken their vows of initiation. The wording may differ from country to country and even from state to state but the Masonic philosophy remains the same. The United Grand Lodge of Victoria, Australia 1998 Ritual instructs those “PASSING TO THE SECOND DEGREE”:

“The square teaches us to regulate our lives and actions according to masonic line and rule, and to harmonise our conduct in this life so as to render us acceptable to that Divine Being from whom all goodness springs, and to whom we must give an account of all our actions.” ...

“Thus, by square conduct, level steps, and upright intentions, we hope to ascend to those heavenly mansions whence all goodness emanates.” p.68-69 (Underline added).

We need to make a distinction between organisations that promote good deeds and those that add a philosophy of what those deeds mean in relation to what makes us “acceptable” to God. Unlike a Rotary, or a Lions Club, an organisation that speaks of these kinds of “spiritual truths” has crossed that line.

Masonry speaks of requirements that are “*most essential*” to get to heaven. Or it tells how we need to “*harmonise our conduct*” to “*render us acceptable*” to God. How does this “*most essential*” requirement for gaining entrance to heaven compare with the gospel? Well we have a choice. We can either believe that we can gain admission to the Grand Lodge above through our “*own conduct*” (plus or minus Jesus) or we can believe in the actions and conduct of Jesus alone to get us there. You can’t have it both ways.

Both ways may result in the doing of good deeds but the motives behind those deeds are as different as chalk and cheese. Jesus is concerned about motives! In one way the good deeds are done with the self-pride of the Pharisee: “being a good person (my actions) will help get me into heaven”. In the other way, good deeds are also done, but from a motive of repentance and love for the great mercy God has shown to “me a sinner”. Both ways have similar outward actions but inner motives as far apart as Heaven and Hell.

God is not against good deeds. He was not against the good deeds of the Pharisee. He is not against the good deeds of welfare organisations or the many good deeds done by Freemasonry. God is for good deeds and commands them. But good deeds become an insult to God when (like the Pharisee) we hold them up as a reason to say we ourselves are capable of becoming “*acceptable to the Divine Being*” — that we can get there because of *our own conduct*. We are effectively saying that our actions are good enough for our law breaking to be overlooked. Is it any wonder that God declares, “*All your righteous acts are as filthy rags*” (Isaiah 64:6)? It is not that the good deeds are a problem in themselves, rather our motives are the problem.

Law Breaking and the Gospel

Imagine being pulled over for speeding and protesting to the policeman, “I have been a good driver all my life. I’m not like some people who drive fast all the time!” Indeed you may have truly been a good driver all your life and never had a fine before. But by appealing to your good deeds you have insulted the law enforcer, suggesting he should ignore the very law he has just caught you breaking! You have self righteously looked down on others as if they are the standard of what is right, instead of the law. And worst of all you have made light of your own law-breaking. You are not repentant. You are suggesting that justice should not be done and law breaking should be overlooked. You don’t talk a policeman out of a speeding fine because you’ve “been a good driver.” Nor could you talk him out of it by telling him, “I’ve been a good person and lived a good life.” How much less could we expect an incorruptible Holy God and Judge to allow the breaking of His laws to go unpunished because you have been a good person (or a good Mason)?

Good conduct does not erase your law breaking because being good is the least you should do. There’s no point in boasting about things that you should have been doing anyway. Good conduct is what’s right, but it is not *better* than what is right. It doesn’t cancel out wrong actions or make them disappear. There is a God of justice and all law breaking must be punished, including ours! We must surely be going to hell! What hope is there?

Beg the mercy of Jesus! “Lord have mercy on me a sinner.”
Believe in the cross of Jesus as the only way to heaven.

Then those good deeds will be done out of love for the one you nailed to the cross by your sin. If you had not sinned then Jesus would not have had to die for you. True repentance is a turning away from your

sin with a remorseful heart. When you recognise that you have offended someone and are repentant, you will feel more than sorrow and regret, you will try to cease from causing offence! You certainly won't add insult to injury by telling them of the times you were good to them. Repentance is a turning - from sin - to God, the God whom we have offended by breaking His laws; begging His forgiveness and asking Jesus to take our place in judgment and punishment.

Love your brother?

Do we need Jesus to get to heaven or not? If we do, then Masonry is guiding multitudes of non-Christian Masons into a false sense of security. We need to be clear on this. It is one thing if Masonry (as a non-religious organisation) was simply showing non-discrimination in allowing membership to people of all faiths. However Masonry has crossed way over the line of simple non-discrimination or "tolerance" of different faiths. Rather, in its Rituals, Masonry is actually promoting a spiritual ideal. It is telling Masons what they need to enter heaven, to be "*acceptable*" to God. In fact this is not only promoting a spiritual concept, it is promoting one that is a lie, and a false hope especially for the non-Christian.

Surely Christian Masons would not be so callous as to dismiss the Ritual teachings by saying that they would simply "interpret" these kinds of teachings to include Christ for themselves. What about the non-Christian Mason? Muslims in Lodges right here in Australia are being told a lie. They are being told what can get them to heaven and make them "*acceptable*" to God. They are being told that, (rather than needing Jesus), they need their own "*purity*", "*actions*" and "*conduct*". And who is telling this lie? Freemasonry! What is the Christian Mason to say to that? "I'm all

right because I'm a Christian, but too bad for my non-Christian Masonic brother - according to Lodge polity I'm not supposed to point him to Christ." This is the equivalent of belonging to a life saving club that allows you to find your way to swim to safety (through Christ) but falsely directs your fellow members to swim the wrong way into shark infested waters - into a certain and gruesome death.

Do you believe in the Ten Commandments?

Freemasonry does more than simply accept people of all religious faiths into membership. It acknowledges all religions and spiritual leaders as being equally valid for the individual. To prove this point, Freemasonry researchers often refer to the deeper Masonic teachings that speak of the validity of all religions and gods. (Such as the Masonic hidden name of God, revealed in the Royal Arch degree as Jahbulon which is a composite name that abbreviates the God of the Bible, Jehovah, but also includes the pagan god Baal!)². However, for our purposes, we need go no further than the current booklet released by the United Grand Lodge of Victoria entitled *Freemasonry and Christianity*. There we are told that, "Members of differing belief are encouraged to be faithful to their own religious commitments" (underline added). This may mean little to the non-Christian. In fact it may even sound very "politically correct" in this day and age. But for the Christian there is a grave problem. Here we have a pivotal principle that has always distinguished Freemasonry from secular organisations. Rather than simply encouraging membership without discrimination, members are "*encouraged*" to be "*faithful*" to their own gods. This must include the Hindu Mason worshipping his wooden idol and the Muslim (who worships a god that says to believe in Jesus as the Son of God is "perverse" Koran 9:30). Freemasonry goes beyond respecting another man's right of choice

but actually “*encourages*” him “*to be faithful*” to these non-Christian or anti-Christian gods.

The Masonic debate often gets tied up with issues such as “Masonry is not a religion” or “We are not a secret society” and misses the big picture? Have Christian Masons been so caught up defending the trees so as to miss the whole forest? “*Encouraging*” members to be “*faithful*” to non-Christian gods, means Freemasonry itself directly contravenes the first of the Ten Commandments which *does* discriminate:

1. “*You shall have no other gods before me.*”

The God of the Bible speaks so strongly on this subject of “other gods”. The first commandment does not mention any “tolerance”, or “rights” of other gods. In fact you would think that this first commandment was about as straightforward as you could get. How could you miss it? NO OTHER GODS! While Christian Masons do not aim to break the first of God’s Ten Commandments, the point we need to test is; do Masons *belong to an organisation* that breaks the first Commandment?

Do Masons *belong to an organisation* that is *intolerant* of the view of Jesus who declared: “*I am the way and the truth and the life and **no one** comes to the Father but by me.*” (John 14:6). By this Jesus has taught us how to understand and apply the first Commandment.

Test all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

Generally the Christian Mason is involved for the positive social aspects of Freemasonry and the good works they do. The average Christian Mason is not concerned about what the tenets of the organisation mean to someone else but what it means to him

personally. But here is the test:

The question is not what Freemasonry means to the Christian Mason but *what does Freemasonry mean to God? What does God think of Freemasonry?* The true Christian will assess Freemasonry according to what God thinks of it. How do we know what God thinks is right or wrong? He has already told us — the Ten Commandments. And what is the first of those Commandments? ***NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME!***

Freemasons belong to an organisation that acknowledges other gods. An organisation that openly breaks the first Commandment! Remember it was the Pharisees with whom Jesus argued the most. They too belonged to an *organisation* that was a major proponent of *good deeds* in their day. However one of their tenets also allowed for the breaking of the fifth Commandment (Matthew 15:6). This was the sort of discrepancy that insulted Jesus enough to consider the good deeds of their organisation worthless and to pronounce the Pharisees as “hypocrites” and “sons of hell”. And yet the good deeds of the Pharisees put most of us (including most Masons) to shame.

True repentance and the narrow road is turning from law breaking at all levels. The point of putting something to the test is not so much to determine what “I think” of it, but what does God think of it? If you were to learn one small thing that showed that you were offending God, even if only in principle, even if you were not an active participant but merely condoned it, what would you do? What would a true Christian do?

“He who knows his master’s will and does not get ready will be beaten with many blows.” (Luke 12:47)

Of course many great men who have professed Christianity have been

Freemasons, including Christian ministers and Presidents of the United States from George Washington through to Jimmy Carter. Surely then Freemasonry can't be that bad?

However, the question is not whether we know Christians who have been Masons. It is not whether one can be a Christian and a Mason. The question is that if we find ourselves involved in something that contravenes God's laws should we repent? God's hands are not tied in His judgments. He has it all worked out how to search our hearts. One of the most significant factors He uses in our final Judgment is *knowledge!* "*It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.*" (2 Peter 2:21)

If you are a Mason and discover something that shows that Masonry goes against God's commandments in any way then the problem is *not with other Christian Masons* who may not have really understood (or thought through) the foundations of the organisation. They are not under judgment - you are! Judgment according to *knowledge!* "*If I had not come and spoken to them they would not be guilty of sin. Now however they have no excuse for their sin.*" (John 15:22)

God will judge us according to what we know. God has commanded us to "test all things" not to put our heads in the sand. One of the saddest things in this debate is that the average Mason rests in his certainty that those who oppose Masonry are simply "ignorant" of its true teachings. And yet either through fear or apathy these same Masons never really put to the "test" the thorough research done by others (see suggested resources at the end of this booklet). They remain "in the dark" of much Masonic teaching.

To approve Masonry because other Christians approve of it is both dangerous and inconsistent. Dangerous because the other Christians may not have had the opportunity or knowledge to test it (and would not be under the same judgment). Inconsistent because we would then have to ask why so many fine Masons who are Christians have left the organisation? What are they on about? Are they *all* misled? Are you willing to test their side of things?

We must all stand before the Judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10) to give an account. At that judgment there will be those who trust in themselves “I’ve been a good person”. These people will be judged by the law. And then there will be those who have trusted in Christ alone, His death on the cross to pay the price of the law. These will receive pardon. On that day when we stand before God there will be no human organisation or Worshipful Master to plead our case. Only those who have trusted in Christ *alone* will have Jesus plead their case before the Father.

“Whoever serves me must follow me” (John 12:25)

Notes

1. *Oxford Ritual for Craft Masonry*, London: Lewis Masonic p. 47 1988 as quoted by Steven Tsoukalas, *Masonic Rites and Wrongs*, Presbyterian & Reformed. p.49
2. For further reading see *Ibid* Chapters 6—8

The fortitude of Hiram Abiff

Dr. David Moen - a personal testimony

In 1968 my wife Sandra and I, along with our two children, moved to Armidale NSW. I set up a veterinary practice in that city. A number of my friends from the local Apex Club and elsewhere were Freemasons. My father and father-in-law were also Freemasons. Both my grand fathers had been Freemasons. My respect for all these men was strong.

I occasionally inquired from my Masonic friends as to the nature of Freemasonry. The answer was usually very vague although one of my friends in Apex always replied, “Freemasonry is a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.” This is the definition of masonry given in the ‘first degree’ during the ritual. I did ask my minister in the Presbyterian Church at the time if he knew any thing about masonry but because he wasn’t a mason he said he couldn’t help me. He did not advise me against joining the Lodge.

In July 1974 I was initiated into Freemasonry in Lodge Armidale. My wife did not support my going into the Lodge because her memories of her father being in Freemasonry were not happy ones. She believed it affected family harmony.

I remember being a little apprehensive before my initiation. But the mason who put the blindfold over my eyes before I went into the Lodge room, said to me, “David, forget any of the nonsense you

may have been told about this ceremony - riding billy goats etc. What you're about to go through is a deep religious ceremony and the first question you'll be asked on entering the room will be, 'In whom do you put your faith?' You give the answer, 'In God.'" And so I was duly initiated with signs, symbols and pass words, swearing an oath on the Bible (called in Freemasonry, the Volume of the Sacred Law). God was called the 'Great Architect of the Universe' in this degree, the 'Grand Geometrician of the Universe' in the second degree and the 'Most High' in the third degree.

A few months later I was duly passed (second degree) and raised (third degree). I looked forward in those days to our monthly Lodge meetings because of the strong fellowship it provided. Yet I was somewhat disturbed that even though there was much talk of God in the Lodge, the name of His Son could not be mentioned. Nevertheless, I was made junior deacon and then senior deacon of the Lodge.

In June of 1976 I realised the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and gave my life to the LORD. It was a turning point in my life. Before this date I had been a nominal, professing Christian. Now I knew I had 'been delivered from the dominion of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.' (Colossians 1:13f). In 1977 I was elected chaplain of the Lodge.

I now began to ponder more deeply the teachings of Freemasonry in the light of Biblical doctrine. There were a number of Masonic teachings that disturbed me, but the teaching regarding our death portrayed in the third degree was of most concern. As part of the ritual in the third degree the candidate is figuratively lowered into the grave in a shroud. He is then raised from the 'grave' and the lights in the previously darkened Lodge are all turned on again. The master of the Lodge continues with the ritual whereupon he speaks

of the last great obstacle we must face in life, that is, death. The mason is advised to ‘emulate the fortitude of Hiram Abiff’ (the widow’s son of Tyre who helped King Solomon build his magnificent temple in Jerusalem). Masons believe Hiram Abiff was killed by two evil men at that time, but despite his distress before dying, he did not reveal the higher secrets of Freemasonry to these men. This strength of character, this fortitude, we are to copy when we face the last foe, death.

As a Christian, and even before my conversion in 1976, I sensed something was wrong. I knew Jesus had conquered death by His resurrection from the dead after His death on the cross at Calvary. He was alive - alive for evermore. After June 1976, my convictions in this area of Christian belief were even stronger. Because Jesus was now my own personal saviour the failure even to mention His name and His sacrifice at this moment in the Masonic ritual was particularly poignant. For if ever there was a time to speak of Jesus and His work for mankind it had to be then. How can ‘emulating the fortitude of Hiram Abiff’ possibly give a man the strength to face death? Only Jesus by His own supernatural mighty power, can help a man at this crucial stage of his life.

The Christian man knows, that is, he has the absolute assurance, that even though the process of dying may be very distressing and in many ways painful, yet death need not be feared, because Jesus has conquered death (1 Corinthians 15:51-57). Satan, the evil one, has put the fear of death into our hearts (Hebrews 2:14f). But Jesus by His death and resurrection and ascension to God’s right hand has, in one fell swoop, beaten Satan, sin and death. We no longer need be afraid of facing death, not because of something we have done, but because of something God has done for us.

Thus the wrongness of the Masonic teaching stood out now in stark reality. As I watched the ritual of the third degree and saw candidates being told the Masonic myth of Hiram Abiff and read Bible

verses that did not expose this myth, yet could not read verses from the Bible that spoke of our Christian assurance in Christ, I felt compelled to leave the Lodge.

The catalyst for my departure came in 1979 when I was asked by the local leader of the Presbyterian Youth Fellowship to speak on the subject; ‘Is Freemasonry compatible with Christianity?’ To give this address to the young people I had to crystallise my thoughts on this very subject. I came to the conclusion that Masonic teaching is incompatible with Christianity and announced at that meeting my intention to leave the Lodge. I did so at the next meeting of the Lodge. I miss the fellowship I had there but not the false doctrine.

What are we to say then? Where does the Christian man stand who regularly attends his Masonic Lodge? I can only advise him to examine Freemasonry in the light of the truth of Holy Scripture. After all, the Bible does tell us that we should not have anything to do with cleverly devised myths (2 Peter 1:16; 1 Timothy 1:4). Masonic ritual consists of myths wound around stories in Scripture which can lead the unlearned to believe the whole lot is actually true.

I have chosen only one portion of the Masonic ritual to examine in the light of scripture, yet it is a most crucial portion. How can any system of morality that fails to mention from the outset Jesus of Nazareth, who committed no sin during His stay here on earth (1 Peter 2:22), yet took the blame for our sin in His body on the cross, be of any use to a Christian man in his pilgrimage to heaven? And, more importantly, when he approaches death should he trust in the King of Kings and Lord of Lords for eternal life, or emulate the fortitude of the widow’s son of Tyre?

‘A fellow Freemason invited me to a Billy Graham Crusade’

Jac Louws - a personal testimony

In 1957 a friend and neighbour of ours asked me if I would like to join Freemasonry. We had known one another a number of years and he thought that I was a good man and suitable to join. He told me that the Freemasons helped many charities and hospitals and that they needed people like me. With my agreement he recommended me to the Lodge community. I was interviewed and asked many questions about my life style and as a result they accepted me as a candidate.

I found that they did many good things and I was happy to go through the rituals and become a brother in the Freemason Lodge. I did my part and went to the lodge of instruction. I was now a member of Lodge number 494 called ‘Cornucopia’ which means ‘horn of plenty’.

I enjoyed their company and found them to be very good citizens who would help anybody and do what is right. This appealed to me as my upbringing was in Holland where the Bible had a part in the school and I was educated in the Calvinist Dutch Reformed tradition. I understood that there was a God, a heaven, a hell and that Christians were good people.

I practised Freemasonry for two years but had no peace at heart. I

often wondered if there was life after death. Freemasonry did not satisfy my need - I didn't even know what my real need was. Then a fellow Freemason asked me to come with him to the Melbourne Billy Graham Crusade on the last Thursday of March 1959.

A few days before the Crusade Billy Graham was interviewed on television. What he said in the interview impressed me deeply, he said, 'A Christian home is your answer.' I jumped up and said; 'Yes! this is my answer.' I was looking for something authentically Christian. I went to the Crusade. When the invitation came to go forward and commit my life to Jesus Christ, I did not want to go. I thought there was no need so I just sat there and looked at the whole spectacle as many, many people made their way to the front.

But right then God spoke to me - it was unmistakable. He said; 'If you are ashamed of me I shall be ashamed of you'. It seemed as if an invisible hand was directing and carrying me to the front and there I made a public profession of my need of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I now had a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Some weeks later I came to the conclusion that Freemasonry was veiled in secrecy and was not in accord with what the Bible teaches or its openness. I felt I could not remain in Freemasonry anymore as Christianity has got to be lived in the fashion which God has put in His Word - for God is light and in Him is no darkness at all - my eyes were now open and I could see that I had become a 'new creation' in Christ Jesus the Lord (1 John 1:5, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Now I could see the hand of God in the beauty of nature and how he has provided for all mankind in this wonderful world - His creation. Indeed, He is gracious to all. And especially did I see that He had been particularly gracious to me because I came to see that the price of my salvation was God's only begotten Son. He

was God and became man when He came down to earth to make a full payment for me - a sinner. I was saved by the grace of God alone. A few verses in Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8-10 have become very special to me: "For by grace are you saved through faith, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do."

I resigned from Freemasonry stating my case that as I had become a new creation in Christ and that my understanding was opened as I read the Bible in John chapter 10 verse 10, "Jesus said, 'I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.'" I had learned from the Bible that a man must be born again, in other words, to become spiritually alive in another (Christ) which can only happen in God's timing through the Gospel of God's free grace. From the Bible I have learned that the true Christian never dies, for being absent from the body is to be present with the Lord which is far better! (Philippians 1:23). Everybody is commanded in Romans 12 verse 1, "to present your body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (or, spiritual act of worship).

I have had many friends in the Lodge who were living good lives by the golden rule. But our works can never be acceptable to God. Christ alone, and us in Him, is acceptable to God. In Freemasonry you cannot have access to the triune God, let alone receive salvation, for it denies the finished work of the Lord Jesus - completed on the cross at Calvary - whereby we can approach the living God.

My desire is that the people in Freemasonry will read God's Word the Bible for it is the living Word of the living, triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Afterword

Rev. G.I. Fraser

This booklet has not sought to repeat what is already available in many publications regarding Freemasonry and Christianity and if you have further questions of detail we recommend use of the resource list below.

The question of merit for good deeds has to be faced by all people, church members, masons and others. Any of us who rely upon membership of a group or fellowship, inside or outside the church, for salvation and are not relying on Christ alone for salvation are in an exceedingly precarious position. We each need to consider deeply the substitutionary death and the Lordship of Jesus Christ in His exclusive claims to rule and guide a person's life. Therefore His word to us - the Bible - is indispensable for living the Christian faith. We would humbly ask each one, mason or otherwise, to read the Bible (Old and New Testaments) for his or her self for it is the universal objective measure of how God is to be approached.

An open letter published in *Freemasonry Victoria* (May 1998) raised various matters relating to the Presbyterian Church and the Lodge. Two of these matters are reflected upon in the following paragraphs.

It is a genuine puzzlement and concern to us when Freemasonry presents itself as, '...a fraternal organisation that encourages morality and charity and studies philosophy.' We ask: how can it study morality but leave aside the world's greatest moral figure? Or, how can it encourage charity and leave aside the greatest

philanthropist? Or, how can it study philosophy and leave aside the greatest teacher and source of truth and knowledge?

Nevertheless *Freemasonry Victoria* asserts that in Freemasonry there is ‘... no transforming God or guarantee of salvation’. We agree. There is no transformation or salvation except through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Further, Freemasonry claims that it has no conflict with religions who share a core belief in a Supreme Creative Being. This puts Freemasonry into immediate conflict with Christianity because the Supreme Creative Being of Freemasonry CANNOT be equated with the Christian God. The God of the Bible is the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is the God who can only be approached through the mediation of Jesus Christ, the Son and Saviour. He is totally different to the Supreme Creative Being who can be approached by any and all.

The Church cannot change the Gospel truth. The Lodge and individual members of the Lodge can change — we invite them to consider the claims of Jesus Christ and to respond to his offer of salvation.

Recently a Freemason gave me an interesting illustration to show how the Lodge incorporates people of different faiths, for example, Muslims or non-Christians. He likened the situation to a Vintage Sports Car Club. All people who drive these sports cars can join. Some of the members think that the Morris is the best sports car to drive, others prefer the Rolls Royce. But at the club level these differences don’t matter because the members are simply interested in vintage sports cars.

So too with Freemasonry. People who have a common belief in a Supreme Creative Being can join. Some members believe that the Supreme Creative Being is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit while others believe this to be Allah or an undefined ‘God’. But

at the Lodge level these differences don't matter because the members are simply interested in a common belief in the Supreme Creative Being.

What is the conflict? God has revealed himself as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and is to be approached via Christ alone. This means that there is no common ground with the Muslim's Supreme Creative Being or any Supreme Creative Being which is not on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Imagine in the Vintage Sports Car Club that the Christians all drove Rolls Royce cars because they knew that all other vintage cars had been built with a 'car bomb' in them which can blow up at any time. So to belong to this car club which says it doesn't matter which car you drive is a very dangerous thing indeed. It is an act of love to warn our fellow travellers and to make the Gospel clear to all.

Rev. Greg Fraser
Church and Nation Committee
Presbyterian Church of Victoria

Additional Resources:

Christ or the Lodge? A Report on Masonry, Ed. R.B. Kuiper, Great Commission Publications, Philadelphia.

Freemasonry Friend or foe? D.A. Prout, Essential Christian Books, 1977.

Masonry in the Light of the Bible, H.P. Boehne & D.E. Ressel, Concordia Publishing, Saint Louis, 1954.

The Masonic Lodge - Does Masonry Conflict with the Christian Faith, J.Ankerberg & J. Weldon, Harvest House, 1989.

Video : *Freemasonry - From Darkness to Light*, Jeremiah Films
(Available through Word Bookstore)

Appendix

Masonry and the Christian Faith

Current position statement of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

1. Introduction

The GAA (General Assembly of Australia) in 1988 appointed a committee to investigate whether or not Freemasonry and other Fraternal Sects and societies are compatible with Christianity. While the reference to Freemasonry is clear, it is not easy to define ‘other Fraternal Sects and societies’. There are many such groups with varying reasons of association, some of which share with Freemasonry aspects such as secrecy, elaborate ritual and dress, and conformity to codified belief. This could include certain temperance lodges and a distinctly Protestant / anti-Roman Catholic organisation such as the Orange Lodge.

The secret nature of lodges in general stands in marked contrast to the Christian Church. By its very nature it openly sets forth its teaching because the teaching is the revelation of God to men. Just as the ministry of Jesus was open and public, so the Church

seeks to proclaim publicly its message to the world. Christians walk in the light and desire all to come to share in the blessing which they proclaim.

In this report attention will focus on Freemasonry, though even this focus is not without its difficulties. The Masonic movement involves many different orders and degrees and there is no single authority which is able to speak for all. Freemasonry also differs from country to country. The most common form of Freemasonry is the craft lodge with the three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason, and it is this aspect of Freemasonry which is largely to the fore in this report.

The relationship between Masonry and the Christian Faith has often been discussed in the past. A number of churches have long-standing objections to their members being involved with any secret societies including the Masons. In more recent times there have been various reports prepared. The Church of England received a report at its General Synod in 1987. This report, "Freemasonry and Christianity - are they Compatible?", was prepared to facilitate discussion about the subject.¹ A report was prepared on Freemasonry for the Methodist Church of England by its Faith and Order Committee in 1985. The Church of Scotland had the matter before it in 1965, with a report by the Panel of Doctrine entitled "Freemasonry and the Taking of Oaths", and more recently in 1988.

Here in Australia the matter has been discussed in various churches. A report on "Syncretism in the Church" was prepared for the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulbourn in 1987. However, the fullest report is that by the Anglican Church, Diocese of Sydney. A request was made in 1986 for "a report on Freemasonry for clergy, church officers and Christians generally". The Standing Committee of the Synod appointed a committee

(chaired by Rev. Stephen Gabbott), which presented its report to the Standing Committee in 1988. This report was presented in an abbreviated form to the Synod and the Synod came to findings on it which included:

- * the Synod's commendation of the report to clergy, church officers and Christians generally;

- * its belief that the religious teaching of Freemasonry is basically incompatible with Christianity, and encourages all people to consider the issues involved and have peace with God through Jesus Christ; and

- * its recognition that no clergyman has any obligation to participate in any Masonic service.

Within our own communion there have been two reports to state assemblies on Freemasonry. The Presbyterian Church of Victoria, in response to a petition in 1957, appointed a small committee chaired by Principal Hector Maclean to investigate the issues raised by the petition. The committee reported in 1958 and the Assembly received the report and requested "the Moderator to prepare and send down to be read in all churches a pastoral letter on Freemasonry in the light of the Committee's report and with special reference to the closing paragraphs of the report" (minute 219). The closing paragraphs of the report read as follows:

Because of the danger, freely acknowledged by both sides in the debate between Church and Lodge, that members of the Church may come to regard Freemasonry as a legitimate competitor with the Church of Christ for their loyalty and service, the Committee concludes its report by affirming strongly the following three points:

1. Christian masons are urged to remember that the supreme revelation of God is in Jesus Christ, and that such titles as the Great Architect of the Universe do not make this plain. There can, therefore, be no idea of a super-religion above Christianity.

2. Salvation is in and through Jesus Christ alone; not in some mystic understanding or by our own merits.

3. Freemasonry is sub-Christian, and must never be accepted by members of the Church as a substitute for Christian belief, worship and service. It asks the General Assembly to lay it on the hearts of all church members to recommit themselves to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, so that there can be no rival with Him for their devotion and service.

The Presbyterian Church of Queensland appointed an ad hoc Committee on Freemasonry in 1986, which reported to the Assembly in 1987 (the report is in the Queensland Assembly White Book, pp.153-168). The Assembly noted the Committee's findings, which were summarised as follows:

Queensland Masonry is a religious organisation; practises unacceptable worship; is eclectic and syncretistic; teaches a salvation by one's own efforts and works; in denying the Lord Jesus Christ, it implicitly obscures even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; hampers Christian testimony; obscures Christ's mediatorial office; has

autosoteric prayers outside the revealed will of God; transgresses the first three Commandments of the Decalogue according to our Westminster Standards; has unacceptable practices and teachings and uses illicit oaths. In all these, Freemasonry is at variance with the Christian Gospel.

The Assembly finding (Minute 293) continued:

Urge Church members who are Masons to remember

(i) That the supreme revelation is in Jesus Christ, and that such titles as the Great Architect of the Universe do not make this plain. There can, therefore, be no idea of a super religion above Christianity.

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

(ii) Salvation is in and through Jesus Christ alone; not in some mystic understanding or by our own merits.

Ephesians 2:8, 9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.

(iii) Freemasonry must never be accepted by members of the Church as a substitute for Christian belief, worship and service.

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name (Jesus) under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

(iv) Call all church members to recommit themselves to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, so that there can be no rival with Him for their devotion and service.

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.

In view of the considerable amount of material available from church reports and books on the subject (see end for a select bibliography) the Committee seeks now to give a short historical survey and then to set out in summary fashion the major objections which can be presented against accepting the compatibility of Freemasonry and our understanding of the Christian faith expressed in our doctrinal standards.

In doing so it does not feel it necessary to come to a finding on certain debated issues. These involve questions such as whether Freemasonry is a religion or whether it is a secret society. The definition which Freemasonry gives of itself is that it is "a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols" (2nd degree examination of candidate). It requires candidates to believe in God, the Bible (King James Version) is often referred to as the Volume of Sacred Law, prayer is offered, and the ritual directs attention to spiritual realities and the expectation of a reward after death. In non-Christian countries Masonry often substitutes another religious book for the Holy Bible, e.g. the Koran in Moslem countries. There can be no doubt that Freemasonry is religious and admits this, though its members assert that it is not a religion. Presumably by that they mean that for many of them it operates alongside of other religious activities or church connection. Likewise the distinction between a secret society and

a society with secrets is a semantic one and attempts to distinguish between these two does not lead to fruitful results.

2. Origins and Development of Freemasonry

The origins of Freemasonry are shrouded in mystery and speculation, and so competent an authority as John Hamill regards the possibility of their discovery as *open to question*.² A number of Masonic writers have made the claim that Freemasonry can be traced back to the ancient mystery religions, especially those of Egypt. Links or parallels are then usually drawn to the Druids, Culdees, Rosicrucians, Essenes, the Roman Colledgeia and the Templars. Vindex, the pseudonym adopted by an Anglican clergyman who was upset at Walton Hannah's attacks on the Lodge in Britain in the early 1950s, revelled in the assertion that Freemasonry was *the heir and legitimate successor of the ancient mysteries*.³ Vindex sought to portray something of *the breadth, the antiquity, the variety and almost universality of the sources of moral and spiritual wisdom from which Freemasonry derives*.⁴ Even William Hutchinson, an eighteenth century author who was concerned to portray Freemasonry as Christian in a full Trinitarian sense, claimed that Masonic ceremonies and mysteries went back to the ancients, especially to Egypt, while its morality came from the Greek philosophers and the Christian revelation.⁵

Such a stimulating and respected scholar as Frances Yates writes that *the European phenomenon of Freemasonry almost certainly was connected with the Rosicrucian movement*.⁶ The connections, however, are by no means clear and unambiguous. At the same time, many - perhaps most - Freemasons hold that Masons were involved in the building of King Solomon's Temple, and that secrets were lost when the legendary Hiram Abiff was murdered.

Masonic scholars tend now to be more guarded about the origins of Freemasonry, and are reluctant to trace any direct Masonic lineage back very far beyond the seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries.⁷

The word *Freemason* is found in references as far back as the fourteenth century.⁸ Nevertheless, this may only have referred to a mason who worked in freestone, usually limestone, rather than in rougher material.⁹ This would then mean that the medieval *Freemason* was only a kind of operative mason who worked in a guild along with his fellows. Medieval Freemasonry thus could not be identified with modern speculative Freemasonry, despite the failure of Rev. Dr. James Anderson, the compiler of the *Constitutions* of 1723, to distinguish between operative and speculative Masonry.¹⁰

Masonic historians Fred Pick and G.N. Knight claim that Freemasonry is derived from the operative masons of Britain.¹¹ John Hamill refers to modern works which point out that this descent may have been more indirect than direct,¹² but he is convinced that Freemasonry emerged in England and spread from there to Scotland and abroad.¹³ One can only guess as to how this came about. In John Hamill's words, *No evidence has yet come to light of any operative organisation capable of going through a transitional stage, leading to speculative Masonry, having existed in England.*¹⁴ Pick and Knight point to the Swalwell lodge as the only instance of an English operative lodge surviving in speculative form.¹⁵ If operative Masonry did develop - or degenerate - into speculative Freemasonry, it may have come about as the Masonic fraternity declined in status and sought to widen its appeal. The old craft guilds already had some admission ceremonies, secret words and perhaps handshakes, and several grades of skill. These may have provided the starting point for the incoming aristocracy and gentry to work out *a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.*

The year 1717 saw four Lodges join together to form the first Grand Lodge of England. Pick and Knight rather soberly comment that this is *the most important date in the history of Freemasonry*.¹⁶ Masonic literature often portrays this event as *the Revival*, but Vindex loses all perspective and refers to it as *indeed a momentous occasion in the history of the world, charged with Pentecostal significance*.¹⁷ The formation of the first Grand Lodge apparently is an event to rival the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the calling in of the Gentiles, the salvation of three thousand souls, and the formation of the Christian Church!

Under Rev. Dr. James Anderson's *Constitutions*, Freemasons were obligated to uphold *that Religion to which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves*.¹⁸ Up until that time the content may have been more Christian. By 1730 a number of Lodges were working the third degree (initially there were only two degrees, often taken on the same night). There are now some 112 degrees in England,¹⁹ but usually only 33 are worked. The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite (the Rose Croix in England) is the only one that is obviously Trinitarian, although some others have Christian references. A split came in 1751 when the Antients formed a rival Grand Lodge because of the easy going nature of the government of the original body. However, in 1813 this split was healed, and the Antients and Moderns joined together.

From England, Freemasonry was exported to Scotland, Ireland, and the Continent. Ireland managed to produce a woman Freemason; she was initiated after she was caught eavesdropping a Lodge ceremony about 1710.²⁰ But Continental Freemasonry took on a more critical and anti-clerical spirit, with the French coming to discard the Volume of Sacred Law. British Freemasonry, on the other hand, continued to uphold its creed of stability, respectability and Christless moralism. This moralism is somewhat selective: in Ireland no maimed or lame or defective person can be admitted except by dispensation²¹ while in the U.S.A. white Freemasons

are officially forbidden to visit the Negro Prince Hall lodges.²²

2.1 Freemasonry in Australia with Special Reference to Australian Presbyterians

Freemasonry in Australia had a less than auspicious beginning. There may have been Freemasons on the First Fleet, and as early as 1797 three members of the New South Wales Corps petitioned the Grand Lodge of Ireland for a charter which would have led to the formation of a Lodge. In 1803 Sir Henry Browne Hayes held a Masonic Lodge meeting, and thus 1903 was celebrated as the Centenary of Australian Freemasonry. However, Hayes' meeting is usually disowned by Freemasons today on the grounds that Hayes was a felon, and Freemasonry has not come to call sinners but the righteous.²³ In any case, Governor King was alarmed; he thought that the whole exercise was an excuse to hold treasonable meetings and so had Hayes arrested with the threat of hard labour in Van Diemen's Land. King declared that Hayes *would very soon have made every soldier and every other person Freemasons, had not the most decided means been adopted.*²⁴ King may not have known that Freemasons had been exempted from the Act of 1799 which forbade secret societies. Freemasonry soon recovered its respectability, and within a decade the Governor of New South Wales, Lachlan Macquarie, was himself a Freemason.

The first regular Lodge was set up in 1820 under the Grand Lodge of Ireland. From then on, the history of Freemasonry in Australia is a chequered one. The year 1888 saw the formation of the United Grand Lodge of N.S.W. with the Governor Lord Carrington installed as Grand Master. The Craft lodges were thus unified, but not so the Royal Arch. Royal Arch chapters formed themselves into a Grand Chapter in 1889. However, it was not until 1980 that the Royal

Arch chapters as a whole managed to achieve unity.

Freemasonry in N.S.W. and the other Australian states was well-supported by officialdom and the middle classes. Many Protestant clergymen also joined its ranks, as it sought to inculcate morality and practised acts of benevolence. Freemasonry probably reached the peak of its influence in the 1950's.

It is difficult to gauge the impact of Freemasonry on the Presbyterian Church, except to say it has obviously been highly significant. The foundation stone of the Grenfell Street church in Adelaide was laid in February, 1844 with Masonic ritual. After a march through the streets, the Adelaide Lodge assembled itself in a V formation at the church site. The Provincial Grand Master of the Lodge laid the foundation stone, and the minister Rev. Robert Haining of the Church of Scotland led the singing of the Hymn *To Heaven's High Architect, All Praise*.²⁵

In general, the more liberal ministers of the Church were the more susceptible to the attractions of Freemasonry. This was not always true, and Rev. W.M. Dill Macky (1849-1913) of Scots Church, Sydney managed to combine strict and very vocal evangelical convictions with membership in the Craft. In Scots Church Melbourne, on the other hand, Charles Strong was forced out of the ministry in 1883 after coming to reject the verbal inspiration of Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Strong went on to form the Australian Church which was founded with solemn Masonic ritual, and no historic Christianity, in 1887 before passing gradually into oblivion. The influence of Freemasonry was felt within the Presbyterian Church of Australia right throughout the twentieth century, but in the 1980s the situation began to change. First, Freemasonry had declined to the point where it had ceased to wield the power it once did, and secondly, the Presbyterian Church of Australia began to recover something of

its Reformed heritage and conviction. Debate, clarification and action have thus become inevitable.

3. The Relationship between Masonic and Christian Beliefs

Attention will now be drawn to the major elements in Freemasonry which appear to bring it into conflict with the doctrinal position of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

3.1 The Bible

The Volume of Sacred Law, along with “The Charges of a Freemason” contained in the Book of Constitutions, are the basis of most Australian Masonic teaching. The Bible is regarded as “the Spiritual Tracing Board of the Great Architect of the Universe”. In it more has been revealed of the Almighty than by any other means. The version of the Bible in use in Masonic lodges appears to be the Authorised or King James Version.

When a candidate is admitted who professes a religion with another holy book, that book can be used in initiation ceremonies. It does not supplant the Bible, which remains on the altar. Thus Muslim or Hindu Scriptures can be used in this way.

Very little use of the Bible is made in the first three Degrees, and none at all of the New Testament. The Old Testament portions are only brief selections totalling fifteen verses. In addition there is considerable material added which does not feature in the biblical text. This is so in relation to the account of the death and resurrection of Hiram Abiff, which purports to tell how Solomon’s master mason suffered death rather than reveal the secrets of his craft.

The justification given in Masonic circles for the infrequent use of the Bible is that the few Old Testament passages are employed as they are the background for the “workings” of the lodge. As the Masons on the Sydney Anglican Committee said: “There is no attempt to exegete a verse, passage or chapter. Interpretation is avoided”.²⁶

3.2 God

The origins of Masonry have determined to a large extent the view of God presented and presumably held by Masons. As David Stevenson has pointed out²⁷ modern Masonry contains elements deriving from late Renaissance belief which merged with the view that Freemasonry represented morality without specific or denominational belief. This enabled the lodges to operate in Scotland without inference from the Church of Scotland, because they were seen as being strongly committed to Christian morality without religious practices. Stevenson says that “at a later date the morality without religious worship of the lodges made Freemasonry attractive to those developing tolerant or deistic attitudes”.²⁸ Freemasonry’s God seems to be basically the God of deism rather than the God of the Bible. That is to say, there is emphasis on God as the creator and sustainer of the universe rather than on God the father of the Lord Jesus and the Saviour of sinners. Hence God’s emotional characteristics are not emphasised, nor is there stress on the need for a personal relationship with him as Lord.

The lack of Christian definition of God in Masonic ritual appears also to stem from a desire to require candidates to believe in God but not necessarily the same God. The following explanation is given of this by Masons: “With such a diversity of religious beliefs with the boundaries of the movement, this permits the acceptance of each other as persons, though not necessarily accepting the creed of that man”.²⁹

3.3 Christ

The position of Christ within Masonic teaching brings us the heart of the problem of compatibility from a Christian viewpoint. As the Masonic Minority Report to the Diocese of Sydney acknowledged, this is “the strongest and most persistent argument brought against Freemasonry”, and it was “admitted to be a great difficulty and is perhaps the strongest argument put forward by those resigning their membership”.³⁰ There seems to be some variation between lodges in how far the name of Christ can be substituted for the name of God in the various rituals (or at least in the first degree), but in the main the name of Jesus Christ is excluded from Masonic ritual.

This certainly brings Masonry and Christianity to a dividing point. The biblical teaching is that there is no way to God other than by Christ (Jn. 14:6). If that teaching is excluded from Masonic ritual it lacks the teaching which we as a church believe presents us with the only way of salvation and provides in God’s grace the way of entry into God’s presence. Absence of this distinctive Christian teaching from Masonic ritual is unacceptable to orthodox Christianity.

3.4 The Way of Salvation

Masonic teaching implies that by our own actions we can be pure in God’s sight and ascend to heaven. By acting in accordance in the laws of the Divine creator, Masons believe that we can gain entrance at death into the Grand Lodge above “where the Great Architect lives and reigns forever”. It sets out four ways in which heavenly life can be attained:

- (a) By Jacob’s Ladder³¹
- (b) By ordering one’s life
- (c) By knowing and obeying God’s laws

(d) By the Five points of Fellowship³²

Freemasonry claims to meet the deepest spiritual needs of man, yet it does so having deleted the name and work of Christ from its ritual. When Masonry is surveyed it is hard to avoid the conclusion that (as the Church of England report stated) “salvation by works is both implicit and explicit in the rituals”. In contrast the biblical message is that peace with God can only come through the work of Christ as sin-bearer and through the experience of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

4. Conclusions

Masonic beliefs have been assessed by various church bodies and the present committee acknowledges that its study has confirmed the widespread assessment that there is a basic incompatibility between the beliefs of Freemasonry and those of the Christian faith.

The Christian faith claims to be based on divine revelation, the Bible, and to present a divinely ordained way of obtaining peace with God and assurance of eternal life. The Bible does not stand alongside other books as one among many, but rather it claims an exclusive place as the only divinely inspired revelation from God.

The claims of the Christian faith must not be compromised by beliefs which undermine confidence in the exclusiveness of that faith or which substitute a salvation by works. Church members must be jealous to safeguard the integrity of their faith in the face of any attempt to dilute it or to draw them away from their exclusive devotion to Jesus Christ. Care must be taken lest membership in any society puts them in a position of compromise in relation to their faith and undermines their witness to Jesus Christ as the redeemer of his people.

Notes

¹ The background to the debate in the Church of England is given by G. G. Moate, *Christianity and the Craft*, pp.24-34. Appendix II, pp.53-54 gives the motions and amendments presented to the General Synod in 1987 when the report came before it.

² J. Hamill, *The Craft: A History of English Freemasonry*, Crucible, Britain, 1986, p. 24.

³ Vindex, *Light Invisible*, Regency Press, London, 1952, p. 24.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 31.

⁵ W. Hutchinson, *The Spirit of Masonry*, Aquarian Press, Britain, 1775, reprinted 1987, p.23.

⁶ F. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, Paladin, Herts, 1972, p. 262.

⁷ E.g. J Hamill, *op. cit.* pp. 15-25; F. Pick and G. N. Knight, *The Pocket History of Freemasonry*, Frederick Muller Ltd. London, 1983, pp. 13-18; R.F. Gould, *History of Freemasonry*, Vol 1, rev. by H. Poole, Caxton, London, 1954, pp. 1-22.

⁸ R.F. Gould, *op. cit.* p. 271.

⁹ R.F. Gould, *op. cit.* p. 150; J. Hamill, *op.cit.* pp. 27-28.

¹⁰ J. Hamill, *op. cit.* pp. 16ff.

¹¹ Pick and Knight, *op. cit.* p. 18. There is no adjective *Freemasonic* so *Masonic* can refer to a Mason or a Freemason.

¹² J. Hamill, *op. cit.* p. 20

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Pick and Knight, *op. cit.* p. 51.

¹⁶ Pick and Knight, *op. cit.* p. 68.

¹⁷ Vindex, *op. cit.* p- 33

¹⁸ Pick and Knight, *op. cit.* p. 77.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 224. Most Freemasons only ever complete the first three degrees.

²⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 148-9.

²¹ Pick and Knight, *op. cit.* p. 175.

²² *Ibid.* pp. 291-2.

²³ K.R. Cramp and G. Mackaness, *A History of the United Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of New South Wales*, Vol 1, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1938, p. 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 9.

²⁵ See R.J. Scrimgeour, *Some Scots were Here: A History of the Presbyterian Church in South Australia*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1986, p. 24.

²⁶ *Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney: Freemasonry Examined* (A report to the Standing Committee), p.46.

²⁷ D. Stevenson, *The First Freemasons: Scotland's Early Lodges and Their Members* (Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp.5ff.

²⁸ *op. cit.*, p.10.

²⁹ Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, *op. cit.* p. 46.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.45.

³¹ See the explanation in W. Hannah, *Darkness Visible*, p.112.

³² For a Masonic explanation see G. G. Moate, *Christianity and the Craft*, Appendix IV, p.59.

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