

Can Catholics Be Freemasons?

ISSUE: May Catholics be Freemasons?

RESPONSE: No, Catholics may not be Freemasons because of this group's "irreconcilable" opposition to Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church.¹ Nor may they belong to the Order of the Eastern Star (a Masonic association for women), the Order of DeMolay (for boys), or Job's Daughters or the Rainbow Girls (for girls). Popes Clement XII (1738), Benedict XIV (1751), Pius VII (1821), Leo XII (1825), Pius VIII (1829), Gregory XVI (1832), Pius IX (1846, 1849, 1864, 1865, 1869, 1873), and Leo XIII (1882, 1884, 1890, 1894, 1902) have repeated the prohibition against joining Masonic associations. The old Code of Canon Law (1917) imposed excommunication upon Catholics who became masons. Recent Vatican directives under Pope John Paul II have reaffirmed the long-standing ban.

DISCUSSION: Because the new Code of Canon Law (1983) did not explicitly excommunicate Catholics who become Freemasons, some confusion arose concerning whether Catholics may join Masonic groups. To address the confusion, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with the approval of Pope John Paul II, declared that

the Church's negative judgment in regard to Masonic associations remains unchanged since their principles have always been considered irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Church, and therefore membership with them remains forbidden. The faithful who enroll in Masonic associations are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion.²

From the outset, one must understand that Freemasonry is *not* simply a social club. Freemasonry is itself a religion, though many Masons may deny it. The Masons hold a specific set of beliefs, the "truth" of which they claim can be discovered through human reason. In contrast, Christians do not believe that *all* truth can be discovered by mere reason (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 50-100.)

Masons believe in the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of mankind, and the immortality of the soul. Masons may belong to any religion as long as they believe the tenets of Freemasonry. So, even though they treat other religions as if they are equal, Freemasonry has primacy, superseding other religions if there is a conflict regarding doctrine or practice. In addition, it would seem inconceivable to most people that they could claim to be both Catholic *and* Hindu, Presbyterian *and* Muslim, etc. But that is, in essence, what a "Catholic Mason" does, and that is why Freemasonry is so dangerous: It slowly insinuates Masonic beliefs and practices into the lives of Catholics and others.

Freemasonry is not a Christian religion. On the contrary, the Masons espouse beliefs that are incompatible with the teachings of Christ and His apostles. The Masons ask their members to *keep to themselves* all beliefs concerning Jesus Christ, the Bible, and the authority of the Church (contrast with Rom. 10:14, 17; Mk. 16:15). The Catechism states that "the social duty of Christians is to respect and awaken in each man the love of the true and the good. It requires them to *make known* the worship of the one true religion which subsists in the Catholic and apostolic Church" (no., 2105). The importance of evangelization is stressed often by Jesus and His apostles (Mt. 28:18-20; Lk. 8:1; Acts 8:12, 8:35, 10:36-43, 13:32, 14:15). The religion of Freemasonry acts to impede Christian evangelization and thus acts directly against one of the most basic tenants of Catholicism.

The Freemasons do not promote one particular philosophical or religious truth above another, except their own idea that man is *his own* light of truth. This is contrary to Christ's teaching in Jn. 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (see also Ps. 18:28, 27:1, 43:3, 86:11, 118:27, 119:105). Pope Leo XIII wrote the following on the primary purpose of Freemasonry: "For they deny that anything has been taught by God; they allow no dogma of religion or truth which cannot be understood by human intelligence nor any teacher who ought to be believed by reason of his authority."³

A religion that denies that anything has been taught or revealed by God is obviously deficient, not to mention blasphemous (see Mt. 16:18, 28:18-20; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 2:9-13; Ps. 71:17; Is. 54:5, 13; Jn. 6:45, 16:13).

Another conflict between the Church and the Freemasons concerns the amount of secrecy surrounding the group and its actions. Freemasonry has built a solid and tightly sealed front, windows closed and shades drawn. This secrecy places the members in danger, in particular Catholics, since perspective members cannot enter into the organization with their eyes open to all the possible commitments and expectations.

Christ said to His apostles, "No one can serve two masters" (Mt. 6:24). Catholics should heed this warning. It is impossible for a Christian to straddle the worlds of two different religions, especially two which are so obviously at odds with one another in terms of belief and practice.

For those interested in learning more about Freemasonry, we recommend a tape set by Fr. John Hardon, S.J. To order the set of tapes, contact the National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon, 2759 N. Lipkey Rd., North Jackson, OH 44451 (330-538-3351). For an extra \$2, you can receive a packet of information that includes recent ecclesiastical pronouncements on Freemasonry and an article on the Freemasons by Catholic journalist William J. Whalen.

¹ NCCB Pastoral Research and Practices Committee, "Masonry and Naturalistic Religion," 19 April 1985. Cf: *Origins*, 15(1985), pp. 83-84.

² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Masonic Associations* (November 26, 1983). Cf: *Canon Law Digest*, vol. 10, p. 285; *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS), 76-300.

³ Pope Leo XIII, *Humanum Genus* (On Masonry), 1884.

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Behind the Lodge Door: Church, State and Freemasonry; Paul Fisher (**TAN Books: 1-800-437-5876**).

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