



**WHAT CAN A MASON
TELL A NON-MASON
ABOUT
FREEMASONRY?**

ALABAMA

In the Old Charges of 1722 we find some admonitions concerning "Behavior in presence of Strangers not Masons."

"You shall be cautious in your words and carriage, that the most penetrating stranger shall not be able to discover or find out what is not proper to be intimated, and sometimes to divert a discourse and manage it prudently for the honor of the worshipful Fraternity."

"You are to act as becomes a moral and wise man, particularly not to let your family, friends and neighbors, know the concerns of the Lodge, etc., but wisely to consult your own honor and that of the brotherhood for reasons not to be mentioned here."

(Ritual, p. 70, 71)

One of the strictest of the unwritten laws of Freemasonry is the rule that prohibits the solicitation of a candidate by any Mason. Every man who enters the portals of a Masonic Lodge must come of his own free will and accord.

So far ingrained in our Masonic Law is this rule against solicitation that it has unquestionably caused most Masons to refrain completely from discussing Freemasonry with friends and acquaintances who are not Masons.

The failure of the Masonic institution to make known to the public, that is to non-Masons, its principles and its purposes has, in the past, resulted in both suspicion and antagonism toward Masonry. People are naturally inclined to be suspicious or fearful of those things of which they are ignorant.

In the true sense of the word, Freemasonry is not a secret society, but is rather a society which possesses certain secrets. A really secret society is one in which the membership is not known. In that sense, Freemasonry is quite well known to the uninitiated. We do not attempt to hide our membership. A large percentage of our membership wears pins or rings bearing well known emblems of the Craft. We do not meet in secret places. We meet in Temples which are well marked as Masonic—oftentimes with neon signs bearing the square and compass—and we meet at meetings which are quite well advertised.

What is actually supposed to be secret about the Institution of Freemasonry is its ritual. Dr. Mackey's 23rd Landmark, "The Secrecy of the Institution," embraces nothing more than its ritual, which we must conceal and never reveal. The fundamental principles of Masonry which are taught by that ritual, however, are, or could be, well known, and most of them are not even principles peculiar to the Masonic institution.

Anything written here should not be construed as in any way indicating or even as intimating that the rule against solicitation should be relaxed to any extent whatsoever. The candidate for the Mysteries of Masonry must always come to us of his own free will and accord, unbiased by friends and uninfluenced by mercenary motives, and he must so formally declare before he enters a lodgeroom. It must be his own personal desire which has brought him to the point of petitioning for the degrees of Masonry.

But all of this is entirely compatible with the true answer to the question: What can a Mason discuss with his non-Masonic friends concerning Freemasonry?

Of course, it must be assumed that every candidate for Masonry knows something about it, because each one is required to declare upon his honor that he is prompted to solicit the privileges of Masonry by a favorable opinion conceived of the Institution, a desire for knowledge, and a sincere wish to be serviceable for his fellow creatures.

Probably the first question that would come to the mind of the uninitiated would be, "What IS Freemasonry?" We define it in our written monitorial work as "a progressive moral science divided into different degrees." This definition probably would not satisfy and would mean practically nothing to the non-Mason. Freemasonry might be defined to such a person as a fraternal society which is based on certain moral and religious doctrines: the moral doctrines including Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth; Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice; and the religious doctrines comprising a belief in God and a future existence; sometimes shortened to the statement of a belief in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

There is no reason at all why this subject should not be discussed quite freely with a non-Mason. The fact of the matter is that the philosophy of Masonry is freely discussed in thousands of printed volumes available to Masons and non-Masons alike.

Some Grand Lodges have attempted to phrase the Masonic principles or Masonic creed in various forms. For instance, the Grand Lodge of Maryland has stated a Masonic Creed in the following language:

"I—as a Master Mason—believe in the fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. I will do unto others as I would have them do unto me. I pledge my loyalty to the government of the United States of America, a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, and will not countenance disloyalty on the part of others. Freemasonry is founded upon these principles and I will use my utmost effort to preserve them for posterity."

That statement goes further than most Grand Lodges would go, in view of the universality of Masonry and membership in our lodges of some who are not even citizens of the United States. But it is at least an attempt to state a Creed.

One question which often comes from non-Masons is this: How does one become a member? Why have I not been asked to join? In any such discussion, of course, the non-Mason should be told that, unlike the members of other fraternal organizations, Masons are forbidden to solicit any one to become a member, and that any prospective member must apply of his own free will and accord; and further, that he must pass a unanimous ballot for admission. It must be free will and accord on both sides.

One question which any non-Mason might ask, and which can be freely discussed with him, is the relationship of Masonry to religion and to the churches of any denomination. Masonry has, as I have said, certain fundamental religious tenets—just two, a belief in God and a belief in a future existence, or, as it is phrased in Mackey's Landmarks, "a belief in the resurrection to a future life."

The inquirer should be told that Masonry is not a religion in any sense of the word; but it is religious; and that no atheist can ever be made a Mason. As the Old Charges approved in 1722 put it, "if he rightly understands the art, he will never be a stupid atheist nor an irreligious libertine." In those charges, under the heading of "Concerning God and Religion," it was said:

"But though in ancient times Masons were charged in every country to be of the religion of that country or nation, whatever it was, yet it is now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves; that is, to be good men and true, or men of honor and honesty, by whatever denominations or persuasions they may be distinguished; whereby Masonry becomes the centre of union, and the means of conciliating true friendship among persons that must else have remained at a perpetual distance." (Ritual, p. 66)

Masonry does not require membership in any church as a condition of membership in a lodge. On the other hand, membership in any church is no bar to admission to Masonry. There is nothing in the requirements of Masonry to prevent a Roman Catholic, a Mohammedan, a Buddhist, a Mormon, a Protestant, or a member of any religious sect from becoming a Mason. Any bar is one prescribed by the church to which he may belong. For instance, while Masonry is not anti-Catholic, nevertheless the Roman church has itself set up the ban of excommunication on any of its members becoming Ma-

sons, which edict has been repeated by the Popes since the year 1738. There is nothing wrong in telling a non-Mason that, or telling him that the discussion of sectarian religion is prohibited in every Masonic lodge.

One might also ask whether Masonry is a political organization. He can be told that apart from statewide public school questions, no political discussion would be permitted in any Masonic lodge.

Here again I might refer to the Old Charges where we are told:

“A Mason is to be a peaceful subject to the civil powers, wherever he resides or works, and is never to be concerned in plots and conspiracies against the peace and welfare of the nation, nor to behave himself undutifully to inferior magistrates; for as Masonry hath been always injured by war, bloodshed and confusion, so ancient kings and princes have been much disposed to encourage the craftsmen because of their peaceableness and loyalty, whereby they practically answered the cavils of their adversaries and promoted the honor of the Fraternity, which ever flourished in times of peace.”

(Ritual, p. 66)

In at least one jurisdiction, the rule that the discussion of politics and religion in lodges is to be avoided, has been considered to have the force of an Ancient Landmark.

Another question a non-Mason might ask is whether Masonry is a benefit society, like the many fraternal societies offering insurance and death benefits. This is something which can and certainly ought to be discussed, to avoid any misunderstanding by a prospective candidate. The idea that the Masonic fraternity takes care of all of its members and their widows is a myth, which has distressed many a widow of a deceased Mason. The inquirer should be told that we have no insurance benefits, and that while Masons are second to none in their charitable endeavors, as is evidenced by our Homes for the Aged and for Orphans, nevertheless it would be financially impossible for the Fraternity to care for all of its members. The dues provide little surplus for any Lodge, and it would be a mathematical and financial impossibility for any Lodge to render aid except to those in dire distress.

Another subject which could certainly be discussed with a non-Mason is the history of the Masonic society and its evolution from the Operatives, the builders of the Middle Ages, who created the great Gothic cathedrals, churches and other structures in the British Isles and on the continent of Europe. There are many interesting topics of Masonic history which are perfectly proper to be discussed and might possibly excite the interest of serious-minded listeners who are not Masons. The history of our Craft in America and the part which Masons played in the early history of our country is something of which we should all be justly proud. It is no secret and no Mason is prohibited from discussing it. . .

You could not, of course, discuss with a non-Mason anything concerning the ritual, or the nature of the ritual, nor the internal affairs of your Lodge, other than to say that

the ceremonies of Masonry are of a serious and dignified nature, without levity or horse-play. Certainly every candidate should be told this, and should not be permitted to listen to the remarks of unthinking brethren about "riding the goat" and similar intimations that the candidate is entering into something like a high-school fraternity. Such intimations are unworthy of the serious institution which Masonry is.

To sum up the answer to the question, there are but few subjects concerning Freemasonry and the principles for which it stands, which cannot be freely discussed with any non-Mason, as the ancients phrased it, "for the honor of the worshipful Fraternity."

