

A REPORT ON FREEMASONRY

HMB

HOME MISSION BOARD, SBC
March 17, 1993

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In annual session of the Southern Baptist Convention, June 9-11, 1992, the following motion was approved:

The Southern Baptist Convention in annual session June 9-11, 1992, at Indianapolis, Indiana, directs the Interfaith Witness Department of the Home Mission Board to study the compatibility with Christianity and Southern Baptist doctrine of the organization known variously as the Masonic Lodge, Masonry, Freemasonry, and or Ancient and Accepted Right [sic] of Freemasonry. The study is to encompass any and all branches and or lodges thereof. Furthermore, the convention charges the Home Mission Board with the responsibility of bringing a report with recommendation to the Convention which is to meet in Houston, Texas, June 1993.¹

We report

That the Interfaith Witness Department of the Home Mission Board (HMB) has completed a study of Freemasonry and its various branches, as directed by the Convention, with special attention given to the compatibility of Freemasonry with Christianity and Southern Baptist doctrine. The study has been reviewed by the HMB Executive Council (president and vice presidents), by the Board of Directors' Administrative Committee (officers and committee chairmen), and by the Board of Directors of the HMB. The study has now been published as a 75-page document and is available for purchase on a cost-recovery basis from the Home Mission Board and/or Baptist Book Stores.

We further report

That the Administrative Committee of the Board of Directors has prepared this printed report to the Convention and that it has been reviewed and approved by action of the Board of Directors, meeting March 17, 1993, in Atlanta, Ga.

We commend

The Masonic Order for its many charitable endeavors such as the operation of 22 Shriners hospitals, 19 orthopedic hospitals, and 3 burns institutes with noteworthy success in treatment, research, and education, often providing free treatment to children under 18 years of age. Also, we commend support of the Foundation for the Prevention of Drug and Alcohol

¹"Proceedings," *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1992*, (Nashville: Executive Committee, 1992) p. 86.

Abuse Among Children and the Eastern Star sponsorship of Masonic Homes for the Aged. These, with many other charitable and benevolent endeavors, are commendable.

We acknowledge

That many outstanding Christians and Southern Baptists now are, and in the past have been Masons, including such notable past Southern Baptist leaders as B.H. Carroll, George W. Truett, L.R. Scarborough, W.T. Connor, Louie D. Newton, and J.B. Lawrence.

We recognize

That many of the tenets and teachings of some Grand Lodges could be considered compatible with, and even supportive of, Christian faith and practice, such as the strong emphasis on honesty, integrity, industry, and character and the insistence that every member believe in God. Some Grand Lodges have written into their monitors, guidelines, and rituals explicit references to Christian faith, including exact quotes from the Bible, such as in the ritual constituting a new lodge in the *Monitor of the Lodge* of the Grand Lodge of Texas:

"I now solemnly consecrate this lodge to the honor and glory of Jehovah, the Grand Architect of the Universe."²

Or the explicit reference to Jesus in the *Masonic Code* of the Grand Lodge of Alabama:

"It is therefore proper and in accordance with Masonic law and tenets for a Mason who believes in the Christ Jesus to offer prayers in the Lodge in His Name."³

Or the ceremony for laying a cornerstone found in *The Murrow Masonic Monitor* of the Grand Lodge of Oklahoma:

"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."⁴

Or the ceremony of the extinguishing of the lights, a Scottish Rite ceremony held on Maundy Thursday:

²*Monitor of the Lodge* (Waco: Grand Lodge of Texas, 1982), p. 148.

³*Masonic Code* (Grand Lodge of Alabama, 1963), p. 141.

⁴*The Murrow Masonic Monitor* (Guthrie: Grand Lodge of Oklahoma, revised 1988), p. 190.

"My Brethren, this is the anniversary of that Last Supper of which Jesus of Nazareth partook with His humble disciples, after which He was betrayed and crucified.

"Who, of any creed, can picture to himself, unmoved, that noble and sweet countenance, which never looked on anything in anger, pale with agony, and streaming with tears? His back was torn by the lash, His brow pierced by the thorns. He suffered, willingly, until it seemed, even to Him, that His God and Father had forsaken Him.

"And yet, even then, bruised, hanged upon a cross, betrayed by one He loved, suffering and, for a moment, questioning, He still calls down not curses but blessings and a prayer for forgiveness upon those who had so treated Him."⁵

Or that found in the Scottish Rite 18th degree:

"Wherein they [older forms of religion] were deficient [Masonry] found in the New Law of Love, preached by Jesus of Nazareth, and which He sealed with His blood."⁶

Or the strong affirmation of the Bible found in the *North Carolina Lodge Manual*:

"The Holy Bible is given us as the rule and guide of faith . . . the Bible is the light which enlightens the path of our duty to God."⁷

Or that found in the *Louisiana Masonic Monitor*:

"However they may differ in creed or theology, all good men are agreed that within the covers of the Holy Bible are found those principles of morality which lay the foundation upon which to build a righteous life. . . . It is the one volume which has lived in the hearts of the people, molding and shaping their destinies; and it leads the way to Him who is the Light of the world."⁸

Or the words of the chaplain in the funeral service found in the *Masonic Manual of the Grand Lodge of Georgia*:

⁵*Ritual of the 15° to the 18° of the Scottish Rite* (no publisher information, 1957), p. 251.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁷Charles F. Bahnson, *North Carolina Lodge Manual* (Raleigh: Edwards & Boughton Co., 1929), p. 14.

⁸*Louisiana Masonic Monitor* (Walker, La.: Lavergne's River Parish Press, 1988), pp. 24-26.

"I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."⁹

To be sure, not all Grand Lodges affirm Christian doctrine, and many do not declare Jesus as the unique Son of God; but many do, and for this we commend them. There is not complete uniformity in tenets or practice among lodges.

We conclude

That many tenets and teachings of Freemasonry are not compatible with Christianity or Southern Baptist doctrine, including:

1. The prevalent use of offensive concepts, titles, and terms such as "Worshipful Master" for the leader of a lodge; references to their buildings as "mosques," "shrines," or "temples"; and the use of words such as "Abaddon" and "Jah-Bul-On," the so-called secret name of God. To many, these terms are not only offensive but sacrilegious.
2. The use of archaic, offensive rituals and so-called "bloody oaths" or "obligations," among these being that promised by the Entered Apprentice:

"All this I most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear, . . . binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my throat cut from ear to ear, my tongue torn out by its roots, and buried in the sands of the sea, at low water mark, where the tide ebbs and flows twice in twenty-five hours, should I, in the least, knowingly or wittingly violate or transgress this my Entered Apprentice obligation."¹⁰

Or that of the Fellow Craft degree:

"All this I most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear, . . . binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my left breast torn open, my heart plucked from thence, and given to the beast of the field and the birds of the air as prey, should I, in the least, knowingly or wittingly, violate or transgress this my Fellow Craft obligations."¹¹

⁹*Masonic Manual of the Grand Lodge of Georgia* (Macon: Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Georgia, 1973), pp. 145-146.

¹⁰Ralph P. Lester, ed. *Look to the East: A Ritual of the First Three Degrees of Masonry* (Chicago: Ezra A. Cook Publishing, Inc., 1975), p. 96.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 31.

Or that of the Master Mason:

"All this I most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear, . . . binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my body severed in two, my bowels torn from thence and burned to ashes, and these scattered before the four winds of heaven, that no more remembrance might be had among men or Masons of so vile a wretch as I should be, should I, in the least, knowingly or wittingly violate or transgress this my Master Mason obligation. So help me God and keep me steadfast."¹²

Or that of other advanced degrees with required rituals considered by many to be pagan and incompatible with Christian faith and practice.

Even though these oaths, obligations, and rituals may or may not be taken seriously by the initiate, it is inappropriate for a Christian to "sincerely promise and swear," with a hand on the Holy Bible, any such promises or oaths, or to participate in any such pagan rituals.

3. The recommended readings, in pursuance of advanced degrees, of religions and philosophies, which are undeniably pagan and/or occultic, such as much of the writings of Albert Pike, Albert Mackey, Manly Hall, Rex Hutchins, W.L. Wilmshurst, and other such authors; along with their works, such as *Morals and Dogma*, *A Bridge to Light*, *An Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, and *The Meaning of Masonry*.
4. The reference to the Bible placed on the altar of the lodge as the "furniture of the lodge," comparing it to the square and compass rather than giving it the supreme place in the lodge.¹³
5. The prevalent use of the term "light," which some may understand as a reference to salvation rather than knowledge or truth.
6. The implication that salvation may be attained by one's good works, implicit in the statement found in some Masonic writings that "Masonry is continually reminded of that purity of life and conduct which is necessary to obtain admittance into the Celestial Lodge above where the Supreme Architect of the Universe presides."¹⁴ Even though many Masons understand that the "purity of life and conduct" can only be achieved

¹²Ibid., pp. 154-155.

¹³*Monitor of the Lodge* (Waco: Grand Lodge of Texas, 1982), pp. 30-31. Also see *Louisiana Masonic Monitor*, pp. 24-26.

¹⁴*Louisiana Masonic Monitor*, p. 79.

through faith in Jesus Christ, others may be led to believe they can earn salvation by living a pure life with good conduct.

7. The heresy of universalism (the belief all people will eventually be saved), which permeates the writings of many Masonic authors, which is a doctrine inconsistent with New Testament teaching.¹⁵
8. The refusal of most lodges (although not all) to admit for membership African-Americans.

IN SUMMARY

In light of the fact that many tenets and teachings of Freemasonry are not compatible with Christianity and Southern Baptist doctrine, while others are compatible with Christianity and Southern Baptist doctrine, we therefore recommend that consistent with our denomination's deep convictions regarding the priesthood of the believer and the autonomy of the local church, membership in a Masonic Order be a matter of personal conscience. Therefore, we exhort Southern Baptists to prayerfully and carefully evaluate Freemasonry in light of the Lordship of Christ, the teachings of the Scripture, and the findings of this report, as led by the Holy Spirit of God.

¹⁵*Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (Washington, D.C.: Prepared for the Supreme Council of the Thirty-third Degree for the Southern Jurisdiction, A.A.S.R., U.S.A., 1964), p. 847.