**Lightning Apologetics**

**CAN CATHOLICS BE FREEMASONS?**

The direct answer to that is: NO. Many times the faithful think that Freemasonry just involves men in the Shriners collecting money for their causes or running around in go-carts during a parade. There is much more to it than that.

Catholics may not be Freemasons because of this group’s “irreconcilable” opposition to Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church. Nor can women belong to the Order of the Eastern Star established for women.

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.

There was a little confusion regarding the new Code of Canon Law (1983). Because it did not explicitly excommunicate Catholics who became Freemasons, the idea 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 principle 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.”

As I mentioned at the beginning of the article, we must understand that Freemasonry is not just a social club. Freemasonry is itself a religion, though many Masons 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 were 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 “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 this with Rom.10:14, 17 and 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 is the Catholic and Apostolic Church” (no.2105). The importance of evangelization is stressed often by Jesus Christ and His Apostles. The religion of Freemasonry acts to impede Christian evangelization and thus acts directly against one of the most basic tenets 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 John 14:6, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.” I could point out many verses regarding this. 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.” A religion that denies that anything has been taught or revealed by God is obviously deficient, not to mention blasphemous.

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 further reading I recommend: “Behind the Lodge Door” by Paul Fisher, “Why Catholics Cannot be Masons” by John Salza and another eye-opening book, “Masonry Unmasked, An Insider Reveals the Secrets of the Lodge” by John Salza. God bless you. Philip Bellini, DRE.