

# A Letter to a Friend

By Richard D. Carver

This is a letter I sent to an acquaintance, who after learning that I was a Mason, tried on several occasions to save me from the “Evils of Freemasonry” by sending me anti-Masonic literature and books.

Dear friend,

I don't like for you to have an unfavorable opinion of me, and I don't like it when you have an unfavorable impression of Freemasonry. It is something we have discussed very little, and I often forget that you have no reason to know much about it or what the heck I am talking about most of the time. Obviously, you have tired to get some more information about it, *prima facta* your “secret society” remark in the previous conversation, and you have discovered one or more of the many anti-Masonic web sites. There are a lot of them. Most are well-meaning, but totally uninformed people who print lies, innuendos and half-truths to paint Masonry as evil, manipulative/controlling or even satanic in origin. To its discredit, Masonry makes little effort to defend itself, and technically, Masons are discouraged from doing do and taught:

*“In your outward demeanor be particularly careful to avoid censure or reproach. Let not interest, favor or prejudice bias your integrity or influence you to be guilty of a dishonorable action. Although your frequent appearance at our regular meetings is earnestly solicited, this is not meant that Masonry should interfere with your necessary vocations, for these are on no account to be neglected; neither are you to suffer for zeal for the institution to lead you into argument with those who, through ignorance, may ridicule it. ...”*

Masonry is often accused of being a religion. It is not. In order to become a Mason, and during several places in the ceremony of being made a Mason, the man must profess belief in and trust in Deity. There being many names for Deity in the various cultures and religions, “God” is sometimes used, as is “The Great Architect of the Universe,” which is a metaphor that some Christian fundamentalist have a problem with. Although held sacred in the hearts of many Masons, the name of Jesus is not specifically spoken, nor is Yahweh, Buddha, Istar, Allah, Mohammad, or any other religious icon. (THIS *really*

irritates the fundamentalists) Men of ANY faith can join Freemasonry, the only requirement being he be a man, profess his faith in Deity, be freeborn, of lawful age and well-recommended.

The “freeborn” clause is often misunderstood, and the conspiracy theorists profess it to mean that we exclude blacks. Again, not true. There is a member of our Lodge who is black, and is equally welcomed as our Brother. I think this was a pleasant surprise, especially for him. This does not mean, however, that there have not been prejudices inflicted by Masons in the past. George Washington, perhaps the most eminent Mason in US history, was a slave owner. There are many Lodges who would not all (and quite possibly still would not allow) a black man to join. These are the acts of men who are Masons, and not the stated policy of Freemasonry.

The requirement that a man be freeborn is simply to verify that the man is free to make his own choices. Anyone subservient to another cannot make a choice of his own free will and accord, and it is a requirement that the choice be made in such a manor. This is also the reason that Masons do not recruit members...the candidate must first ask. Once he expresses an interest in joining, we are on him like white on rice, but he must first ask and cannot be coerced or biased by another.

There was also another popular belief that Catholics were not allowed to join, and this is partially true — but not in the way you might think. Catholics are (were?) forbidden by the Pope from joining Freemasonry due to concern over the oaths of initiation and of the notion of there being secrets kept that could not be revealed to a Priest, assumably during confession. Catholics believe in God, so they are very welcome to join our fraternity, if they wish to. So are Jews, Buddhists, Muslims and even Methodists.

The “blood oaths” that Masons take differ slightly from state to state, and I can only vouch for how it is done in Kansas. It is my understanding that nearly every Masonic jurisdiction has the word “symbolic” inserted in the oaths, so they are something like:

“...under no less symbolic penalty that of ...”

The Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason oaths all contain graphic penalties, but they also are preceded by the word “symbolic” in every case. The ceremonies come from an ancient time, and there are Old Testament references for the penalties of each oath ( as is there for nearly every part of Masonic ceremony and lore). The actual penalty for violation or transgression is expulsion from Masonry, and nothing more. We do not have a secret hit-squad out there cutting throats and ripping tongues out.

This brings us to the whole subject of secrecy and of Masonry being a *secret society*. If it is, then it must be the worst-kept secret in history! Every Masonic Lodge I have ever seen is marked with a sign stating what it is, so you know WHERE we meet. On the front window of our Lodge is a sign that says when each Lodge meets and on which day and what time, so you know WHEN we meet. Most Masons, myself included, wear rings, belt buckles, lapel pins, and have emblems on our cars and homes showing the Square and Compass, so it is not hard to tell WHO we are. We march in parades on St. Partick’s Day and Independence Day showing our faces and our membership for everyone to see! How can we be a secret society? Most Lodge meetings are not open to the public, as are those of the Elks, the Moose, the Rotary Club, Knights of Columbus, and the Lions Club. Just like most fraternities and sororities, it is a members-only meeting.

Masonry is a society with secrets, although those secrets are few and actually somewhat of a letdown to know. Unfortunately, we do not have the secret cure for cancer, the missing 18 minutes of the Nixon tapes or the plan for the New World Order like many conspiracies would have you believe. The actual secrets of Masonry are a word, a token and a grip; all of which are used to prove yourself as a Mason to another Mason or to express extreme peril or dire distress in the suffering of righteous or virtue. You have seen and heard them a thousand times, but without the knowledge of their meaning, they meant nothing to a non-Mason. The ceremonies and the specific wording of most of our ritual are kept esoteric, but it is not secret. Near word-for-word transcripts can be found

in nearly any library and several places on the Internet. I will not validate the accuracy of any of these, but I have read some that are VERY close!

There are two subjects that are specifically forbidden to be discussed in a Lodge of Masons: politics and religion. That is pretty self-explanatory because there are the two things most likely to invoke passionate disagreement and cause discord. Masonry is about a common brotherhood in agreement, in harmony and how the work can best be done. All honors are bestowed, but never requested or sought after. To do so brings dishonor to the Brother and shows his own unworthiness. The belief is that that should a Brother's deeds be worthy or recognition, such actions will be duly noted and rewarded by the collective of the Brethren. This is what makes the bestowal of an honor truly meaningful. It becomes more about what you did than who's butt you kissed to get it.

This finally leads us to your assumption that Freemasonry is a cult. It is not, however, *cult* is a difficult word to accurately define. My definition is that *a cult* is a term used by the big church when referring to the little church, and let's just leave it at that.

I didn't really mean to go off on a diatribe, but I thought you might want to know more about this. The purpose of Masonry is to make good men better. That sounds simplistic, but it is really true and it is not something that can be done in moderation. There is no requirement to attend meetings or to be involved in any of the splinter groups like Scottish Rite, York Rite, Shrine and so on. I choose to be involved with them because they are opportunities to advance my studies of the esoteric aspects of Masonry. Many members join and either lose interest or choose not to study anything beyond face value. I think they are the ones that are just "joiners" and you seem to have a great deal of experience with that trait. I follow a different path and seek the light of further knowledge and hopefully, truth. It is not about the destination. The joy and the reward are in the journey.

Sincerely,  
Rick Carver