

WHY A CATHOLIC CANNOT BE A FREEMASON

During June the National Shriners' Convention was held in Washington, D. C. Masons from all parts of the country participated in this convention and naturally fresh impetus was given to the old questions: "Why cannot a Catholic become a Mason?" "Why does the Catholic Church condemn Masonry?" These perennial queries and others of a similar import are generally associated with the swing of that hackneyed and fan-tailed syllogism: "Mr. Smith is a good man; but Mr. Smith is a Mason; therefore Masonry is good. Why condemn it?" Again, concocters of such logic, to clinch the argument have recourse to that other pungent and persistent phrase: "Freemasonry does not condemn the Church, it is the Church that condemns Freemasonry." These questions often sincerely asked deserve an answer in the same spirit.

The purpose of this article is to meet in a friendly attitude both Mason and Catholic and to show one as well as the other why the Church must condemn Freemasonry. The Church, its authorities and its members do not believe that every Mason who participated in the National Convention is a rabid fanatic, filled with venomous bigotry against the Church. In fact the ordinary American Mason is not a bigot. He has too much good sense. There are countless Masons whose friendship we treasure and for whom we have the highest respect; men of irreproachable lives, learned loyal citizens, good fathers, upright and honest, staunch devotees of the square deal and fair play. Readily does the Church admit all this. But are they good, upright and honest, friends of us and benefactors of our churches because of their enrollment in a Masonic lodge or in spite of it? Is it the Masonic teaching that makes many of them such excellent men? On the response to these queries the Catholic position towards Masonry is founded. For we can no more conclude that Masonry is good because Mr. Smith who is a Mason is good than we can suppose that all Americans are honest because Mr. Smith, an American, is honest. The fallacy of such reasoning is apparent and the Church has not employed this method in condemning Masonry. She has looked into the very heart of Masonry and condemned it because of its fundamental principles and teachings; for Masonry is a religion. Whether or not an individual practices these Masonic teachings

does not alter their essential character. Masonry still remains a religion. It is, therefore, the fact that Masonic teachings in themselves are diametrically opposed to the most sacred principles of the Church that has brought down condemnation on the organization.

Of course, this opposition in fundamental doctrines does not mean that the Catholic Church and Masonry are in open warfare in the United States, as in France, but this is due, perhaps, to the accidental differences between French and American Masonry. When we contrast the two it seems that the American Mason has more individualism than his European brother. When a French Masonic Lodge decides upon any measure the Frenchman readily obeys, questioning not the justice of the means or the truth of the cause. It thus appears that the sacredness of liberty is not his in as great a degree as possessed by his American confrere. Here we have an explanation for the lack of Masonic virulence against the Church in America. But, though it is patent that the Scottish Rite Masons of America and England broke away from their Continental brethren in 1877, because of the latter's open repudiation of belief in God, still American Masons claim unity with all the diverse Rites of Masonry throughout the world.¹ Albert Mackey, the arch-mason, denies that this break meant anything at bottom, for he says: "There has been a multitude of rites (in Masonry). Some of them have lived only with their authors and died when their parental energy in fostering them ceased to exert itself. Others have had a more permanent existence and still continue to divide the Masonic Family, furnishing however only diverse methods of attaining to the same great end, the acquisition of Divine Truth by Masonic Light."² It appears then that American Masonry since it is in fellowship with Continental Masonry cannot completely shirk the responsibility for the hatred and persecution of the Catholic Church in France, since

¹ The number of Masonic Rites actually in use today is given as ten. Of these the English (erroneously called the York) and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish are ranked as universal. The American Rite is next in importance and is practiced in the United States and the Dominion of Canada, where are to be found three-fourths of all the Freemasons in the world. (Cyclopedea of Fraternities. 2nd edition, 1907; page 29.)

² Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, Edition of 1912, p. 626.

the persecution of our Holy Faith in Continental Europe during the last two centuries, and especially in France, has almost always issued from a Masonic Temple.

While we are spared the horrors of open conflict in this country, yet evidence is abundant that officially American Masonry is in sympathy with its European brethren and antagonistic to the Church. The spirit that animates the leaders of Masonry in this country can be learned from the most casual perusal of their official publications. For instance, to cite just one example, the "Fellowship Forum," a Masonic paper published in Washington, D. C., writes thus on Jan. 20, 1923:

"Oregon is not only determined to have compulsory education laws passed, but equally determined to have all the trimmings that go with a law of this kind. The Oregon legislature now in session will have to consider four bills introduced during the past week by Rep. D. C. Lewis of Portland. Mr. Lewis' first bill would repeal that section of the Oregon code, which permits the transportation and importation into the State of wine, for sacramental purposes. This would be a solar plexus blow for Catholics, who cannot function without their wine."

Here we have a paper, self-styled "The Freemason Representative at the Capital," recording with satisfaction the possible expulsion of the Church from Oregon. The first bill says: "There must be no Catholic Schools." The second bill: "There must be no Catholic Church." If these objects are not the aim of Masonry why are they silent? Is Freemasonry the sum-total of religious tolerance and indifference? However, should there remain any doubt or should any one not be fully convinced of the Freemason stand towards the Catholic Church, let us quote from the eminent mason J. D. Buck, the author of many Masonic literary productions. In his "Genius of Freemasonry and the Twentieth Century Crusade" on page 67 we read:

"Popery and the genius of Freemasonry are exact opposites . . . antagonistic to the last degree. Therefore, Masonry everywhere is an enemy of Popery."

Again, on page 250:

"No such complete denial of every claim set up by Clericalism (Catholicism) can anywhere else be found as confronts it in Freemasonry. Masonry stands squarely and well defined for the precise opposite of Clericalism."

Before attempting to lay our finger with exactitude on any doctrinal dissimilarity between the Church and Freemasonry, let us consider the inherent character of this great order. It is

a glaring fact that secrecy constitutes the essence of Masonry. It is, as it were, the cardinal virtue upon which its very existence depends, the foundation of the entire Masonic regime. All its members, from the apprentice to the Supreme Grand Master, profess in solemn attestation to reveal absolutely nothing concerning the lodge to any one not of the order.³ A Mason, then, by vow is forbidden to mention a word of Masonry not only to his neighbor but even to his own family. This oath is taken blindly. The candidate does not know what he is solemnly pledging himself to guard with absolute secrecy. Even if these secrets contained a terrible menace to our country, the Mason would have to choose between silence and the breaking of a most solemn oath. Not only the loyalty to his country, but greater still the loyalty to his God, prohibits any Catholic from taking such an oath, because it is in direct conflict with his religious duties. He cannot place a society before his God or his country. To take an oath of this character would seal his lips not only to his flesh and kin, but even to his God. He could never unburden the innermost workings of his soul, his conscience and doubts about anything Masonic before Christ's representative in the sacred tribunal of penance. Moreover, this is an oath of unconditional obedience. No Catholic can take such an oath, pledging himself to any duty or obligation, the nature of which is unknown to him. To a Catholic an oath is the most sacred of promises and he can not but follow the direction of the Church which teaches that it is wrong for any secret society to place itself above the law by demanding an oath which no man can conscientiously take as a good citizen.

Freemasonry, therefore, is hopelessly incompatible with Catholicism. But more definitely, why? Because it stands for a philosophy, a theology and a religion at variance with the Catholic Faith. This statement may startle not only Catholics but even many Masons, who have imagined that Masonry is only a fraternal, social, charitable or perhaps a gigantic insurance organization. This mistaken belief of the real nature of the order is not to be wondered at, when we consider that by virtue of the Masonic system of instruction, which imparts its knowledge piece-meal, a Mason is never an adept in the order until

³ Cf. Masonic Ritual, p. 250. Cf. Catholic Encycl. IX, p. 780.

he has reached the final degree. Again, a Mason engaged in business, industry or professional pursuits has not the time, opportunity nor even the desire to probe beneath the surface of Masonry. Satisfied with the mere material advantages accruing from enrollment in the lodge he does not trouble himself about what may lie hidden in Masonic doctrine. Thus it is that a Mason might never understand the belief and trust he has vowed to safeguard. Concerning this sort of Mason, Mackey writes:

"Too many of them (Masons) confine their acquirements to a knowledge of the signs and ceremonies of initiation. There they cease their researches. They make no study of the philosophy and antiquities of the Order. . . . Masonry for them is nerveless, senseless, lifeless. It is empty, without meaning—a tree with splendid foliage, but without a single fruit." (Encyl. of Masonry, Edition of 1906, p. 617).

When official Masonry admits such deplorable ignorance of the order among its own members, is it surprising to hear of a Mason being shocked at the idea of Masonry constituting a religion? Yet that it is a cult is borne out by no less authorities than their own acknowledged teachers, Mackey and Pike:

"The tendency of all true Masonry is towards religion. If it makes any progress, its progress is to that holy end. Look at its ancient landmarks, its sublime ceremonies, its profound symbols and allegories—all inculcating religious doctrine, commanding religious observance and teaching religious truth, and who can deny that it is eminently a religious institution." (Encyl. of Freemasonry, Edition of 1912, p. 618).

It all amounts to this. Masonry is a creed fundamentally opposed to Catholic belief, just the same as our Faith is to Protestantism, Mohametanism, Judaism or Paganism. Like these it has been condemned by Popes.⁴

As an illustration of the incompatibility of Masonry with Catholic teaching we will place side by side some of the contradictory and fundamental doctrines of the two organizations, taken from a list prepared by Fr. Peypoch, S. J., after a careful study of the works of Albert Pike, which are, as it were, the Bible of Masonry:

⁴ All the Popes, who have condemned Masonry, say that a Catholic cannot become a Mason. The chief are: Clement XII, 1738; Benedict XIV, 1751; Pius VII, 1821; Leo XII, 1825; Pius VIII, 1829; Gregory XVI, 1839; Pius IX, 1846; and Leo XIII, five different times, but especially in his Encyclical "Humanum Genus" of April 20th, 1884. Pius X also issued a decree in 1914.

Catholic Doctrine

1. God is the Creator of the world out of nothing.
2. Man has the obligation of professing the religion, which His Creator wishes.
3. The Catholic is the only true religion.
4. Man's soul is immortal and consequently will live forever.
5. The Supreme Lord of the world is the God Whom Catholics adore.

Masonic Doctrine

1. God is the Architect of the universe and formed it out of eternal matter.
2. Man is free to profess any religion.
3. All religions are, or may be, true. There is no certainty about the matter.
4. Masonry does not concern itself with what happens after death.
5. The supreme being of this sub-lunar world (since Masonry does not concern itself with any other) is Humanity.

This discordance could be continued indefinitely with propositions relating to morality, education, divorce, etc., and in all we would find Masonry and Catholicism as hopelessly incompatible. They would all go to prove the one fact, viz, that Masonry is a religion and a religion that is contrary to the Catholic religion. This reason alone is sufficient to justify the Catholic Church in condemning Freemasonry. Call the Church right or wrong in point of doctrine, but you cannot call her wrong in point of justice or logic for forbidding her children to give allegiance to another and opposing religion. If the Catholic Church is right, then Masonry is wrong and it becomes the duty of the true and benevolent religion to protect and warn its members against what is false and inimical to the fundamental principles and interests of their religion and faith.

It is this motive that impels the Church to demand of her Masonic convert the abjuration of all adherence, affiliation or any immediate relationship with the Masonic sect. The convert must render to his Bishop all Masonic literature, dress and paraphernalia that he may have in his keeping, or if this is impracticable, the convert must destroy them himself. It is this same motive that makes the Church place conditions which must be fulfilled by Catholics who have joined condemned organizations before she will reinstate them in her ranks. A Catholic who has joined the Masons and afterwards seeks reconciliation with the Church must accept the penance imposed (usually the frequent reception of the sacraments) and make an effort to repair the scandal he has given. Unless these instructions are enforced the ban of excommunication may not be abrogated.

In fact, so strenuously does the Church exact complete severance of her children from Freemasonry that even to remain a passive member necessitates the formal assent of the Congregation of the Holy Office at Rome and not a dispensation from the Papal Delegate as is required for passive membership in the Knights of Pythias, Odd Fellows and Sons of Temperance. Even then if passive membership is permitted it is with certain grave conditions, such as, there must be a reason of serious import for such membership; there must be no danger of a Masonic burial; and the continued membership must not be the cause of any scandal and of course, there must be no attendance at Masonic meetings.

Why the Church is more rigid in her attitude towards membership in the Masons than towards other secret societies that have incurred her condemnation such as the Knights of Pythias, etc., is apparent from the decree of condemnation. Masonry being the greater evil is absolutely forbidden to Catholics under censure; that is, by the very act of joining such an organization the Catholic forfeits his membership in the Church. The other societies are condemned on account of the heretical spirit and un-Catholic feeling which permeates them, but they have not incurred the censure of the Church to quite the same degree as the Masonic organization.

The logic of the Catholic Church's position in this matter is recognized by those who direct the destiny of Masonry. No matter how ignorant the rank and file, the "knife and fork degree" members of American Masonry may be regarding the fundamental differences between the Church and Masonry or how sincere they may be in their belief that there is nothing in Masonry opposed to Catholicity, the fact is evident that this opposition is openly recognized by the higher officials of Masonry in this country. One can find evidence of this in almost any official Masonic publication, of which there are many. Truly Masonry and Catholicism might be compared to two great opposing armies, each fighting for the triumph of its cause. Both claim to teach divine truth, but their doctrines are irreconcilable. Though we may not be able to convince a Mason of the surety and positiveness of Our Holy Faith, yet he must admit that the Church in condemning Freemasonry is logical. As

for the Catholic, he has but to reflect upon the words of Christ to His Apostles: "Behold I am with you all days even to the end of the world."
—Bro. Aloysius Georges, O. P.

Works consulted: Catholic Authorities: Catholic Encyclopedia; "A Study of American Freemasonry," Preuss; "Freemasonry," Rev. Lucian Johnston: Truth, Feb., 1923; The Catholic Mind, Aug., 1920; Ecclesiastical Review, Feb., 1923; Homiletic Monthly, Aug., 1922; Catholic Union and Times, Jan., 1923.

Masonic Authorities: "Masonic Ritualist," Albert G. Mackey, M. D.; Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, Editions of 1906 and 1912; "Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry," A. Pike; "Genius of Freemasonry and the Twentieth Century Crusade," J. D. Buck.

THE RAIN

Like a thief in the night, how the storm clouds come stealing,
The blue sky is hidden, the white clouds retreat.

At first but a rumble and then low long pealing,
A hurry of people, large drops on the street.

'Tis the Rain, God's own Rain that has started a-falling,
To give back to earth what it took by sunbeams,

The flowers rejoice for the Sun was appalling
'Twas drying the life from the plants, so it seems.

Now the Sun is most kind to the flowers in blooming,
He helps baby buds to grow stronger each day.

"But why" asked the flowers "when we've all stopped blooming
Keep sending his beams that will lead to decay?"

"Ah! 'tis true" sighed the Rain "in God's lessons thou'rt lacking
Don't know I'd not come if the Sun did not shine,

Be thankful to Sunshine he gives you your backing
And lift up your proud heads and thank him, he's fine."

So the flowers a truth from the Rain were a-learning
And proudly they lifted their heads to the sky,

The Sun it had gone as if thanks it were spurning.

The Rain poured on down, it would stop bye and bye.

—Bro. Arthur Kelly, O. P.