

FUNDAMENTALISM AND FREEMASONRY

This short talk bulletin has been extracted from a chapter in Dr. Leazer's new book of the same title (MSA will prepare a notice of availability when it is in print.) the attacks on our freemasonry have not stopped and we must be prepared, as Freemasons, to respond to those vicious and false accusations. We thank Dr. Leazer for allowing us to reprint from the "conclusion" of this book. Editor

Dr. James L. Holly in his new book entitled "Southern Baptist Convention & Freemasonry Vol. III" asks the question of Southern Baptists "Are we now allied with the Masonic Lodge?" The answer is "NO!" Although Holly and some Masons may believe we have, the Southern Baptist Convention has not aligned itself with Freemasonry. That was never the design or intent of the Study. In its conclusion, the original manuscript submitted to Larry Lewis stated, "The Interfaith Witness Department reaffirms its position taken in 1986; Freemasonry is NOT a religion."

The final sentence in the original manuscript was, "We, therefore, with no hesitation, recommend the following: That the Southern Baptist Convention take a position neither for nor against Freemasonry and its related branches, and that membership in Freemasonry be left with the judgment of the individual."

Part of this recommendation came; from the decision by Charleston, South Carolina Baptists in 1798 who recommended that membership in Freemasonry "be left with the judgment of the individual." Nowhere in "A Report on Freemasonry" is found any hint that the Southern Baptist Convention has allied itself with Freemasonry, The vote at the 1993 Southern Baptist Convention did not align the Convention with Freemasonry, rather, messengers voted not to condemn the fraternity.

Holly asks, "Have southern Baptists abandoned the Word of God and made 'individual conscience' the supreme rule of faith?"

The answer is again, "No!" The Preface to "The Baptist Faith and Message," a statement of faith adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963, states: Baptists emphasize the soul's competence before God, freedom in religion, and the priesthood of the believer. However, this emphasis should not be interpreted to mean that there is a absence of certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish and with which they have been and are now closely intensified.

"The Baptist Faith and Message" also states that "God alone is Lord of the conscience." Any freedom carries with it responsibility. Freedom of religion or conscience is no different. Ultimately, each person is responsible to God for what he believes and does, not to his fellow man.

Holly asks, "Can we allow the assertion that Southern Baptists have blessed the Masonic Lodge to go unchallenged?"

The Southern Baptist Convention has not blessed the Masonic Lodge. Anyone who believes the Convention has blessed Freemasonry is wrong and doesn't understand the polity of the Convention.

Holly asks: "Have we instead given Masons loaded gun with which to press their attack against pastors who wish to see their churches unfettered from the shackles of the occult?"

First, I reject Holly's identification of Freemasonry with the occult. That is simply not true. A few Masons may be occultists, but not all or even most, just as a few Southern Baptists may be universalists, but not all or even most. Every church is still free to determine who may be members; they can refuse membership or leadership roles to Masons if they wish. Masons, who are refused membership or leadership roles, should find a church where they can serve God as He leads.

The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention

The Southern Baptist Convention faces an uncertain future. The Freemasonry issue has taken on a life of its own; it will continue to haunt the Southern Baptist Convention for years. Many Southern Baptists are demoralized after fifteen years of "constant infighting. Moderate Southern Baptists have lost the struggle to regain any leadership role in the convention. Moderate Southern Baptists cannot expect to be named to positions of influence within the convention for many years.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the Southern Baptist Convention is financial. Offerings to the convention through the Cooperative Program have plateaued or declined. There are a number of reasons. Certainly, many moderate Southern Baptists have begun sending their missions offerings, normally sent through the Cooperative Program, to the moderate-supported Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. Moderate churches have traditionally been the strongest supporters of the Cooperative Program and other mission offerings. Some Southern Baptists, disgusted with the feud of the past fifteen years, have reduced or stopped contributing to the Cooperative Program. Fundamentalist churches, often megachurches with huge, expensive programs of their own, have failed to make up the loss of revenue from other churches.

The Cooperative Missions Giving Study Committee of the Baptist General Convention of Texas announced in April 1994 it is considering a recommendation to focus on Texas Baptist causes and to allow individual churches to decide how their mission funds would be distributed beyond Texas. The new agreement, which would require approval at the annual meeting of Texas Baptists, is seen as an effort to allow churches to express their will and wishes concerning changes in the direction of the Southern Baptist Convention.

If the Southern Baptist Convention takes an anti-Masonic stance, as a number of leaders are committed to doing, individual Southern Baptist Masons will have to make a tough decision.

Some will resign from the Masonic lodge to retain membership in their local churches. Some will remain quiet and not draw attention to their fraternal membership. Others will move their church memberships to Southern Baptist churches which ignore the position of the Southern Baptist Convention. Some will designate their mission offerings around the Cooperative Program to the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Some will join non-Southern Baptist churches.

If the Southern Baptist Convention takes an anti-Masonic stance, several possibilities are seen. Some churches will refuse to allow Masons to hold leadership in the church, whether as Sunday School teacher, deacon or pastor. Southern Baptist seminaries will be pressured to include Freemasonry in their courses on heretical religious groups. The Southern Baptist Convention mission boards will be pressured to reject for missionary appointment any person who is a Mason. A motion to study whether to appoint Masons as missionaries failed after the outgoing Home Mission Board chairman broke the tie vote and voted against the motion in April 1994. Convention literature will reflect an anti Masonic stance.

In the third volume, Holly says the "right choice is" to "urge all Southern Baptists to refrain from participation or membership in "the Masonic Lodge" That is the goal of his personal vendetta against the fraternity.

Southern Baptist New Testament theologian, Jack McGorman, in a discussion of Galatians 5:15, illustrated the danger of "Christians fighting one another with this ditty:

There was once two cats from Kilkenny. Each thought there was one cat too many, So they fought and they fit, They scratched and they bit. Until except for the nails And the tips of their tails, Instead of two cats There weren't any."

Southern Baptists, whether Masons or not, can be certain that the Freemasonry issue will continue to haunt the denomination for many years. If the Southern Baptist Convention adopts an anti-Masonic position, the issue will begin to tear apart local churches as they debate how to respond to the decision of the Convention. The end result would be devastating to churches, families, individuals and the Kingdom of God. There are not enough Christians on the face of God's earth for us to keep on "killing" each other.