

FUNDAMENTALIST FURY

Bro. John J. Robinson's last book was A Pilgrim's Path. In this book Bro. Robinson responds to numerous religious criticisms of Freemasonry as well as writing about the "Evangelist Mentality." We are printing this STB to help our readers have a response to some of the misleading, inaccurate, and oftentimes untrue statements made by the religious extremists against Freemasonry! (The title Fundamentalist Fury is from a chapter title in the book.)

A Pilgrims Path, by John J. Robinson, was published in 1993 by M. Evans & Co., Inc. in New York City. The book is available in many bookstores or can be ordered through your local bookstore using ISBN 0-87131 -732-X. --Editor

Some evangelistic leaders have discovered an avenue to wealth and power that has been employed by many leaders for centuries: Implant in a group of people a blend of fear and anger, then assure them that you have both the message and the answers; define the enemy and point to the path of success and security. It is effective in leadership by nationality, by race, and by religious denomination. To Hitler, the enemy was the Jews; to the Serbian Eastern Orthodox leaders it is the Muslim Bosnians; to conservatives it is liberals (and vice versa). And so it goes, as races are stirred up against each other, as nations split apart along ethnic lines, and as competition gets fierce among men who claim to be leading their followers to the one true pathway to the throne of God. That competition grew fierce in recent years as Jimmy Swaggart brought down a competitive evangelist, whose son got his revenge by producing photographs that proved the sexual aberrations of Brother Swaggart, who by then had blown the whistle on Jim Bakker, They all forgave themselves and attributed their actions to the influence of Satan, who hates the godly.

That to many fundamentalists the great enemy is Satan is totally understandable in concept, but what gets weird are the satanic manifestations that professional evangelists sometimes assert in order to stay ahead of their competition. In the city where I live, a giant consumer-products company has for generations used as its trademark a stylized drawing of the man in the moon. Then one day a radical fundamentalist decided that three of the curly hairs in the man's beard were really sixes. He triumphantly announced that hidden in the trademark was 666, the Mark of the Beast, as revealed in the Book of Revelation. And it was hidden in the moon, itself a symbol with satanic overtones, since it rules over darkness. The campaign began with the condemnation of the trademark and went so far as to call for a boycott of the company's products. The insanity was stopped only in the courts.

In Britain, the government stopped using 666 on license plates, since it was credited with so much evil. One fundamentalist defended himself from a charge of murder on the basis that he had been controlled by the satanic demon in his license plate.

There have been many other fundamentalist revelations of satanic influence--for example, the allegation that the popular music style known as "heavy metal" is satanic in origin, and the

ridiculous assertion that when recordings of rock-and-roll music are played backward, they reveal direct messages from Satan to the young people listening to those records. In such an atmosphere, with fanatics looking for satanic influences everywhere, it is not at all surprising that Freemasonry has been included in the witch hunt. Unfortunately, in their fierce determination to "discover" satanic influences and worship and report them to their followers, the hunters don't mind at all if they must avoid the truth, twist the truth, and even yield to blatant lies in order to support their claims. Freemasonry offers a fertile ground for their malicious teachings, because Masons traditionally do not reply to critics. That absence of response is sometimes cited as "proof" that the Masons are guilty as charged.

I have had occasion to debate antiMasonic fundamentalists and have taken part in call-in shows on self-styled "Christian" radio stations, operated by and for fundamentalists. I have tried to answer the anti-Masonic allegations of fundamentalist ministries and have borne abuse for defending Masonry, which callers have identified as "pagan," "anti-Christian," and "an instrument of the devil." One caller demanded that I be taken off the air, asking the show host, "Don't you know that anyone who speaks favorably of Freemasonry is an agent of Satan?"

The anti-Masonic material generated by these leaders provides, not surprisingly, a steady source of income for them. Pamphlets, books, audiotapes, and even videotapes (in one case a reenactment of the Masonic ceremony of the third degree) are all available at a price. Such publications drive anti-Masonic propaganda into the minds of devout followers, who believe that what they are told by ordained evangelists must be so--to the extent that they become upset, and even angry, when they hear the truth.

These are the condemnations most frequently heard or read:

ALLEGATION:

"You can't have one God for all religions."

Freemasonry isn't trying to have one God for everyone, but rather is seeking a means by which all men who believe in a monotheistic God can join together. "God" in the Masonic sense refers to God as perceived and worshipped by the individual Mason. No man is asked to alter his beliefs to meet some Masonic standard, and that is entirely appropriate for a fraternal body that has no desire to be a separate religion.

The Masonic approach is much the same as the approach of the U.S. government and the Founding Fathers. The Declaration of Independence justifies the actions of the revolutionaries, who want "the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them." A century and a half after the new country was established, the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag called for a belief in "one nation under God." This was clearly a reference to God as perceived by each individual citizen, since there was no state religion and no legal definition of one perception of God to the exclusion of all others.

Perhaps "clearly" is too strong a term. In a debate with a fundamentalist, I proposed a hypothetical federal courtroom in which the plaintiff is Christian, the defendant is Muslim, and

the presiding judge is Jewish. Every federal court is opened with the words "May God bless the United States of America and this honorable court." Each of the parties in the room is satisfied that his God has been asked to bless the proceedings and the attempt to discover the truth. My question to the evangelist was, "Tell me, which God is the court official asking to bless the court?" His reply was, "The God of Jesus Christ, of course. No other God has a right to be in the United States." So much for freedom of religion.

ALLEGATION: Freemasons call all members "brother," but Scripture teaches us that there is no brotherhood except in Christ. That's why Masonry is anti-Christian.

There is no winning (or losing) this argument, because it depends solely upon the interpretations of the speaker. My own reactions to Jesus Christ speaking of "m brethren" is that he was speaking of al mankind. It had never occurred to me that there were strong restrictions on the message "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto on of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," especially considering that when the words were said, there were just handful of men who might be called Christians. Men have argued, written, and pontificated for almost two thousand years on the meanings of each sentence in the New Testament, and it is clear that the argument still goes on. I can only hope that most people will agree that we must find a way for al men around the world to live in brotherhood or we can never have peace and security Masonry has made a strong contribution to that goal, but in doing so has had to bear the brunt of fiery-eyed attacks that say, "A true Christian cannot ever be in brotherhood with a Muslim, a Jew, a Mormon, a Unitarian,, Christian Scientist, or a Roman Catholic Jesus forbids it!"

ALLEGATION: Freemasonry promises that good works will earn salvation, which is a lie. Salvation is available only to the man who accepts Jesus Christ as his personal savior, and good works have nothing to do with it.

This strongest and most frequent assertion is wrong on two counts. First, Freemasonry does not offer salvation on any basis. Each man must find that within his own faith, to salvation is the highest personal goal of all religion, and Freemasonry is certainly no religion. What Freemasonry does convey in lodge lectures is that Masonry offers a man the opportunity to engage in the good works which are required from every believer in every moral religion.

"But good works play absolutely no role in salvation," cries the radical fundamentalist. To which I answer that most of the Masons I have met, almost all of whom are Christians, accept a moral code repeatedly defined in the Scripture, a code that requires sympathy, kindness, and charitable good works. They believe that faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is all-consuming and that it lives in the mind and heart, not just in the mouth, and so in the deeds as well as words. To live otherwise is to make mockeries of the Sermon on the Mount and the parable of the Good Samaritan and renders the teachings of the Ten Commandments meaningless and unnecessary.

All that is not going to convince a radical fundamentalist of anything, but rather will cause him to search his Bible for quotations, usually taken out of context, to support his position. Since any argument seems to require scriptural citation, I offer these from the Epistle of James (*italics mine*):

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?" (2:14)

"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead." (2:17)

"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (2:30)

"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." (2:24)

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (2:26) And finally, from The First Epistle of John:

"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (3:17-18)

"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (2:4)

In essence, what Freemasonry tells a new member is that he should attend and support his own house of worship. When the time comes that his faith and his compassionate humanity prompt him to seek the most effective ways to help those in need, he can join in charitable work with his Masonic brothers who are similarly dedicated.