

IN WHOM DO YOU PUT YOUR TRUST?

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Forty-five years ago, which was my eighth year as a young minister in the Methodist Church, and in my fourth year as pastor of the Methodist Church in Frackville, PA, I knelt before the altar of Freemasonry. It was in Frackville Lodge No. 737, I was asked, In whom do you put your trust? Then, in repeating after the Worshipful Master, I took the oath and obligation of an Entered Apprentice Mason. The experiences that November evening, 45 years ago, have been indelibly etched in my mind. Many men were present in Frackville Lodge that evening, and I was amazed to have seen nearly every man who was a leader in the congregation where I was the pastor. Over the years this has been my continuing experience. In 25 years in parish ministry, and nearly 20 years in church administration, most of the leaders I worked with were Masonic men.

Membership in Masonry has always been a universally recognized badge of honor. Its stress has always been on character. The fundamental Masonic teachings are love of God, loyalty to country, a high standard of personal morality, and a belief in the universal brotherhood of man. In the life of a Mason, these fundamental teachings reach out through participation and support in church and community life. Masonic men find an inner peace and contentment when they are contributing to the well-being, growth and support of the church of their choice.

I asked myself again and again, what attracted these men to Masonry? What was its appeal? Why were so many of them ardent and active members throughout their lifetimes? Also, in my parish and church administration responsibilities, I was privileged to work with Masons of varied cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds. I soon realized that the questions just posed also applied to me -as I am sure they must have been of concern to each of us during our early and most impressive Masonic years.

Certainly it was not due to solicitation. No man is ever asked to join. However, today, the literature and public relations of the outstanding Friend To Friend program, used in Pennsylvania, is encouraging a positive response for Masonry from men in many areas of life.

I believe the answer is found in Freemasonry's lofty idealism. Its stress has always been on character. Membership in Masonry is recognized as a standard of honor, of Brotherhood, of uprightness and decency. From the Revolutionary period through the founding of this nation, and through today, fourteen Presidents of the United States of America were Masons. Innumerable Senators and Representatives, Justices of the Supreme Court, National and International military leaders, Governors and elected officials in the many states, leaders in education, industry, medicine, science, and space technology have also been members. Also, many of the persons who led their native lands into democratic forms of government in Europe, South and Central America were Freemasons.

We as today's Masons have been climbing on the shoulders of an endless line of splendor, of men across the centuries who believed in and acknowledged the basic teachings of Freemasonry. Today, I am convinced the teachings of Masonry have not changed. While all dimensions of life are adjusting to a new age, to a changing world, to computer technology, the basic concepts of the Fatherhood of God, of Brotherhood, of honor, of uprightness and decency will never change. We have a rich heritage in Freemasonry. It is ours to grasp and follow during our lifetimes, and is incumbent upon us to pass it on to future generations.

Let us never forget, or lose sight of the truth, that Masonry begins at the Altar in the Lodge Room. Its foundation is a belief in the existence of a Supreme Being. This is the first and fundamental principle in the life of every Mason. Hear again the question, In whom do you put your trust?

King Solomon is credited by most Biblical scholars for the words in Proverbs 3:56, words written a thousand years before Christ, or three thousand years ago, Trust in God with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths. In all aspects of life God is to be taken into account. The thought of God is not to be limited to special seasons or sacred places. God is to be acknowledged in the home, in business, at work, and at play. In other words, God is to be thought of sufficiently to influence conduct and life. To acknowledge God requires true humility. He has made us and not we ourselves are the words from Psalm 100:3. Upon God we are dependent for life and breath and everything. Acknowledging God will help a man not to think of himself more highly than he ought to.

Yet, Masonry is not a religion, nor is it a substitute for Religion. Masonry is not interested, nor is it concerned in how a man may develop his religious faith. However, it stands for, teaches and practices, tolerance toward all faiths that rest upon this first and fundamental principle, belief in the existence of a Supreme Being! Men of various religious faiths come into Masonry, here in our great nation, as well as in nations in the uttermost parts of the world. They retain the religion of their choice and are strengthened in the practice of their particular beliefs by the truths and teachings of Masonry. God is known by many names, and worshipped in many ways. There is no religious bar to anyone who would become a Mason, provided he is not an atheist. So, a Hindu, a Parsee, a Buddhist, a Moslem, a Hebrew, a Christian can all agree on the inscription on our coins, In God We Trust.

Everything in Masonry has reference to God, implies God, speaks of God, and points and leads to God. Every degree, symbol, obligation, lecture, charge, finds its meaning and derives its majesty from God, the Great Architect and Master Builder of the Universe.

While Masonry is religious, it is not, even in the remotest sense, a religion. Masonry has no creed, no confession of faith, no doctrinal statement, no theology. Masonry does not assert and does not teach that one religion is as good as another. It does not say that all religions are equal simply because men of all religions are Masons. It is precisely because we are not a religion, we can come together as men of faith. Masonry asks only if a man believes in God. If he were asked if he believed in Christ, or Buddha, or Allah, that would be a theological test involving a particular interpretation of God. Belief in God is faith. Belief about God is theology.

From its very beginning, Masonry has been consistent that religion and politics--are not suitable subjects for consideration within the Lodge Room. Masonry believes in principles rather than political programs. Principles unite men, political programs divide them. So we are taught to leave our opinions on religion --and politics outside the door of the Lodge Room.

While Masonry is not a religion, it is not anti-religious. We are a completely tolerant body. It is a Brotherhood whose trust is in God. Its stress has always been on character.

We are charged to maintain peace and harmony, and to uphold the chief Masonic virtue, charity or brotherly love. Membership in Masonry is recognized as a standard of honor, of Brotherhood, of uprightness and decency. We are sure that he who is true to the principles he learns in Freemasonry will be a better church member, a better businessman, because of it.

As Grand Chaplain, Brother Charles H. Lacquement of Pennsylvania points out, "Freemasonry gets its amazing vitality because its foundation is laid on the great truths from which come the great moral lessons it inculcates. Behind the two great truths, the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, is the chief Masonic virtue, Charity or Brotherly Love. Masons are taught to practice this virtue at all times and to assimilate it into their very lives. It is this virtue that leads Masons to do their duties, to stretch forth a helping hand to a fallen brother, to hold a brother's reputation equally with his own, to whisper good counsel in his ear, and in the most friendly manner, endeavor to bring about the best person this brother can be. In so doing the Mason is strengthening his own inner self and bringing about the best in himself. Masonry makes in men, strength of character, of thought, and of emotional stability."

And so, following that most impressive and unforgettable night 45 years ago, when I first knelt before the Altar of Freemasonry, and was asked the question, In whom do you put your trust?, I have traveled, as you have, across many peaceful and many troubled waters, and again and again my trust in God strengthened me. No person, more especially a Mason, can live for himself alone. We are guided by the great teachings of Masonry, the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, and the chief Masonic virtue, Charity or Brotherly Love.