

Prayer-Your Sect or Mine-Neither

June 23, 2013

PRAYER-YOUR SECT OR MINE-NEITHER

Thanks to M.W. Bro. Budkofsky, PGM and Grand Historian of the Grand Lodge of Connecticut for his very insightful look at Prayer in our Masonic Lodges. Frequently we tend to forget that Freemasonry is non-sectarian and represents men of all faiths who believe in GOD.

To most Masons, especially those who have made no special study of the Craft and its philosophy—the universality of Masonry, of which they hear so much, means only its wide distribution throughout the civilized world.

If we were to ask a hundred average Master Masons, whether or not Freemasonry is a Christian organization, without a moment's thought, many will agree that it is. There was a time when Freemasonry was Christian in character, and some of its early enthusiasts did all they could to keep it so. Some Christian influences still survive in our ritual and practice—the Holy St's John are characters taken from the New Testament, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah is difficult to explain except as a Christian symbol, the New as well as the Old Testament is the Book of Law on Masonic Altars in all English-speaking countries. But Masonry is not Christian: nor is it Mohammedan nor Jewish nor to be classified by the name of any other sect. The power which has held it together, the nourishment which has caused its growth, the central theme which makes it unique, is the opportunity it affords men of every faith, happily to kneel together at the same Altar, each in worship of the GOD he reveres, under the universal name of Great Architect of the Universe.

Here, and here alone, is the real universality of Freemasonry.

It is the drawing power which brings men together to follow a common ideal of charity and brotherhood. It is the cement which holds men to their obligations and makes for common understanding. It is the tie which binds one generation to another, and which says to all initiates "you are brothers because of mutual manhood, not because of your beliefs."

The universality of Freemasonry is in its toleration of every man's faith, so it is monotheistic.

Freemasonry must constantly be aware of those within our fraternity who would attempt to convert us into an organization we were never intended to be. It is of paramount importance in today's Masonic circles of leadership that there be a continuing emphasis on the universality of Freemasonry. As relates to the First Book of Constitution ("it is the religion in which all good men agree") it is based on a foundation which supports all religions, creeds and sects. Once Masons unite under its banner, they may afterwards proceed to build for themselves temples of worship for all the great religions of the world. While Freemasonry does not interfere with these extra curricular activities, we must insist that whatever be their private opinions, Masons shall stand on that foundation.

One of the most important of all our regulations is that which forbids us to participate, as Masons, in any form of religious or political sectarianism. The fraternity's attitude towards all such sectarianism is more than merely one of a negative position. It goes further than just a hands off policy. It is rather an affirmative position, for it definitely prohibits all Masons from sectarian controversies in any form. Such controversies are un-Masonic, that is, they are outright violations of written Masonic law.

It is not difficult for one to understand the reason for this regulation. Freemasonry exists for the sake of, is dedicated and devoted to, the philosophy of Brotherhood. Brotherhood means that many of us, men drawn from all walks of life, with a great

variety of racial characteristics, religious and political opinions, are brought together, and kept together, in a relationship of friendship, harmony and good-will.

To maintain that harmony, it is necessary that whatever passions and prejudices might divide us into opposing groups, feuds, schisms or conflicting cliques, must be kept out at all cost. Nothing is more likely to destroy the peace and harmony of the craft than religious and political sectarianism. For this reason, sectarianism is prohibited in Freemasonry because the welfare of the fraternity and the brotherhood it teaches demand that that be so.

All of which adds up to the fact that Freemasonry seeks to unite men into one guild or union and thus becomes the means of conciliating true friendship among the persons that might have remained at a perpetual distance. And the principle of universality as to religious beliefs has been and continues to be our greatest heritage and our greatest challenge.

Innovations in the body of Masonry over the years have had a way of becoming fact instead of fiction. When innovations in the body of Masonry either esoteric, exoteric or physical are introduced and virtually go unchallenged, they have a way of becoming the accepted practice and their elimination becomes the innovation.

In the "Charge" of the Master Mason degree, we were admonished to carefully preserve the Ancient Landmarks of the Order entrusted to our care. The Landmarks of Masonry are those ancient principles and practices which mark out and distinguish Freemasonry as such, and constitute our source of Masonic Jurisprudence.

Freemasonry is defined in its **"Statement of Principles"** as a charitable, benevolent, educational, and religious society. Religious in that it teaches monotheism, which is the sole dogma of Freemasonry. Belief in one God is required of every initiate, but his conception of the Supreme Being is left to his own

interpretation. This is the basis of our universality. The Holy Bible is open upon its altar whenever a lodge is in session, reverence for God is ever present in its ceremonials. The Great Light of Freemasonry is the Volume of the Sacred Law which is an indispensable part of the furniture of a Masonic Lodge. The Grand Lodges of the United States use the Holy Bible as the volume of Sacred Law on their altars, however the candidate who is not a Christian or of the Jewish faith is entitled to have his own sacred book substituted for the Bible.

In some Lodges in other countries, the altars of Masonry have more than one volume of the Sacred Law on them and the candidate may choose the one on which he is obligated.

No lodge may stand open and remain so unless the Holy Bible is open upon its altar, its pages displaying the proper passage appropriate to the degree in which the lodge is working. The open Bible signifies that by the light of its teachings, we must regulate our conduct, for it is the rule and guide of our faith. Past Grand Master, The Rev. Thomas S. Roy, D.D., Grand Master of Masons in Mass. in 1951, had good counsel for Lodge Chaplains and others who insist on the use of Christian phraseology in prayer offered at Masonic gatherings when he points to the crux of the problem as it pertains to the universality of Freemasonry.

“No man is barred from using that name of God which comes nearest to him. However, there is always the matter of good taste, of courtesy. Therefore, we are well advised if in our prayer we use terminology that is common to all of our religions. In my duties as Chaplain in a lodge I have found the prayers suggested in our Masonic ritual to have such spiritual meaning and such dignity of expression as to make them completely satisfying to me.”

“I am quite sure that as Brethren we shall strengthen the bonds that unite us as we find common expression in prayer rather than

assert our right to use, each his own, distinctive phraseology. Writing on belief in God, as the first of the Ancient Landmarks in his classic book, *"Dare We Be Masons?"* The Rev. and Most Worshipful Brother Roy says: *"It is when we formulate our beliefs about God that we create divisions."*

"Faith in God unites us, but belief about God, which is theology, divides us."

"Freemasonry has no theology. It does not go from faith to speculation, which is theology, but from faith to demonstration, which is life."

"Freemasonry makes no attempt to put a label on God that would place him at the front of a Masonic procession."

In 1953, Most Worshipful Brother Robert A. Nisbet, addressing the Grand Lodge of Connecticut said in part:

"Masonry is the common ground where men of every race and nation, where men of every sect and creed, where men of every shade of religious belief and of every political opinion can meet and be united in one Brotherhood, under one God, and in a natural religion in which they can all agree and yet still retain their... individual religious and political beliefs."

"If men wish to foregather and work for their ideas and convictions with men whose religious and political beliefs coincide closely with their own, there is a wide field for their activities and they conceivably may do much good in the world for proselyting and even fighting for their convictions, either political, or religious, or both."

"But a Masonic Lodge is not their sphere for such activity. The strength of Masonry is its non-political and non-sectarian character, and anyone who tries to Christianize Masonry, as did Dermott early in the Eighteenth Century, or as many still try to do, no matter what their good intentions, do Masonry a disservice."

The Universality of Freemasonry can only be accomplished when we

accept and understand what we read in the Old Charge; i.e. we recognize non-sectarianism as an important lesson in the teachings of Freemasonry; when we subscribe to the 1939 Declaration of Principles, as adopted by the Conference of Grand Masters in North America; when we take seriously that which we teach and speak a great deal of and on occasion seemingly practice very little. Then and only then will one's religious denomination or persuasions become secondary, thus Freemasonry becomes the center of union, and the means of conciliating true Friendship among persons that might have remained at a perpetual distance.

In summation, Masons meet on the level and seek to conciliate true friendship among those of every sect and opinion ..Any prayer in the lodges should be such that any Mason could freely respond, "So mote it be," an old phrase which may be interpreted to mean, "This is my prayer, too"....

Then let us pray and lecture in those universal terms which can unite all Masons in agreement. Let each Mason hold to his own faith firmly while he accords the same precious right to every other Mason.

It may be in some lodges, particularly in smaller communities, that all of the local Brethren are professing Christians. Still, visiting Masons may come to the meetings of such a lodge. All of us would want any visitor to feel at home, and welcome. The visit of a Mason who is a Jew or a Hindu, should not require a change in the usual practices of any lodge. All Masons should be received in the spirit of brotherhood and hospitality.

Let it be a precept of the Craft that everything done in the lodge should be such that any Mason could join in without offense to his faith or discomfort to his conscience.

Comment

It has long been my view, and demonstrated by the Forget-me-Nots in the Header of "The Educator" Home Page, that Freemasonry

is Universal and celebrates the "Universality of Man" which makes the message related by . Budkofsky music to my ears.

Far too often I find our Organists, certainly without malice, provide renditions of popular Christian Hymns, in the course of our ceremonies and I do wonder what our Jewish; Hindu & Sikh Brethren may be thinking when that occurs.

In my home Lodge, Victoria Columbia No 1 Grand Lodge of British Columbia & Yukon (Canada) I am proud to inform you we have Four Volumes of the Sacred Law on our altar at all times and are there to provide respect to the faith of all those Brethren whom we know are Members or could be visiting with us.

Surely, as the writer points out very clearly, this is a High Light of Freemasonry and makes us Uniquely who we are.

Have a Wonderful Day & God Bless Norm