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Preface

The following text will be controversial! Not because it should be, but because those with strongly held beliefs will make it so. It is a serious attempt to put in perspective how faith without understanding or toleration can only divide people.

Those who feel that they—and they alone—have found the “true way” abuse the rights of others. Freemasonry has always stood for religious toleration and the right of all individuals to express their faith as they see fit.

Extremists groups, trying to force their views on others, will always attack anyone with an opposing point of view.

This Short Talk amply demonstrates how religious beliefs and power can be abused in an attempt to force others to the “true way.”

Editor----

Religions are fiercely competitive. Many claim for themselves the exclusive mandate to speak and act for God. In contrast, Masonry believes and teaches that God, who “maketh the rain to fall on the just and unjust alike,;’ is the Father of all and is continually pouring out his love and his blessings. He loves all his children equally. The religious differences between human beings is how we respond to His love. Unfortunately, every time we mortals discover the richness of God’s self-revelation, we are tempted to organize and tell people that they can “fill up” only at our spiritual service station, and nowhere else, I am not opposed to organized religion. I spent a substantial part of my life at the University of Edinburgh working on answers to the questions of why we have a church, why we have a ministry and what they should be and do. I found substantial answers, but I am not prepared to say that mine are the only explanations or that God depends on my cooperation or permission for anything.

It is difficult for us human beings to understand God, since we are so far removed from Him and so tempted to confuse our interests with his will. The history of religion is a history of conflict; punctuated with wars of words and steel, between factions who insist that they are the sole, or principal, custodian of God’s word and spirit.

In extreme, some seem to believe that they have the authority to compel God, as well as the rest of us, to obey their will. There is no need to remind ourselves of the religious blood shed that grieves God and man in many places of the world today. Because Christianity is the most widely supported religion of our culture, we are more conscious of the intolerance that occasionally comes to the surface in that faith.

Since the 1975 publication of Jack The Ripper:

The Final Solution by Stephen Knoght, some Christians have turned from their traditional enemies, other denominations and other faiths, to vent their anger on Freemasonry.

For example, Chick Publications of Chino, California published in 1991 a 24 page book-let by J. T. Chick, with pages somewhat smaller than a dollar bill, entitled THE CURSE OF BAPHOMET. The thesis of the book is that Masons worship a demonic god named Baphomet, who is diametrically opposed to Christ. If you follow the story line of the book it is also possible to come to the conclusion that if one is a Mason, his son will attempt suicide and not recover. The pretext and pretense of the book are scarcely worthy of reply. However, there are some interesting points raised.

In the story, comic strip style, state troopers arrive at the home of Sally and Alex Scott in the dark of night, to tell them that their son has been shot. At the hospital, they are told that he attempted suicide and that he has no will to live. The distraught and disheveled parents are, three days later, greeted the well dressed and smiling Ed; who could be clipped out and saved for a book on how to be a used car salesman. The parents have just asked the question, "Why has God done this to us?" Ed explains that it is because the father is practicing witchcraft by being a Mason and Shriner. Sally and Alex defend their Eastern Star, Masonic and Shrine memberships. Ed insists that, although he was once a Mason, he now really understands Masonry because he has learned about Baphomet.

Every Mason will know, and those outside the Fraternity must be told, that Baphomet is unknown to Masonry. It is, actually, a Christian term. Among the charges trumped up against the Knights Templar by King Philip IV of France and his sycophants nearly 700 years ago was an accusation that the Templars worshipped "Baphomet" or the "Head of Baphomet." This dovetailed neatly with another charge, that the Templars favored the Mohammedans over Christians. Baphomet is a modification, a corruption, of the name of the prophet Mohammed.

Unaccountably, Ed explains that the Masonic appellation, "Great Architect of the Universe," another term from Medieval Christianity, is not the God of the Bible, but is really Baphomet, "ugly, frightening and completely satanic." Ed produces a picture of Baphomet, with a goat's head, red eyes, and a flaming torch implanted in the top of the skull. The otherwise human figure sits with legs folded underneath. Wings are deployed from the back. The figure has female breasts and symbols adorn the visceral area. The hands mock the traditional blessing of Christ, the right hand raised, the left lowered. The goat-headed figure and the other symbols

are frequently found in witchcraft, but are totally foreign to Freemasonry. The Eastern Star, Ed declares, is designed to hold a Baphomet's head without the torch. Albert Pike is quoted as saying that Masons know that "Lucifer is God." The Sovereign Grand Commander's Patriarchal Cross is described as the symbol of Baphomet.

Ed convinces Alex to burn his Masonic regalia and repent the sin of being a Mason. on bended knees, Sally and alex prayerfully burn their Masonic relics, and their son immediately begins to recover, and the book concludes. In a way, I am sorry Ed is wrong. It would be wonderful if prayer and a righteous life made everything happen the way we wish. Christian experience teaches that God does not work in such a simplistic way. God's People, individually and collectively, have often suffered undeserved pain in spite of their prayers and their holiness. We do not manipulate God in prayer, we cooperate with Him.

Ed, fictitious though he may be, travels in the wake of a onetime popular religious tradition. In the days of the Spanish Inquisition, religious beliefs and practices that did not meet the standards of the religious establishment were punished by death. Such executions were called, strangely, "Acts of Faith." Auto-da-Fe became part of the language of our common experience. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines Auto-da-Fe as, the ceremony accompanying the pronouncement of judgment by the Inquisition and followed by the execution of sentence by the secular [civil] authorities." In a broad sense, the term refers to the burning of a heretic. Perhaps the great irony was that many were converted under duress to what the inquisitors considered orthodox belief, then executed so that they could go to heaven while in a state of grace and before they could sin again. Those being executed were less enthusiastic about the benefits of such immediate transport into eternal life than those making the arrangements.

The ascendancy of the Roman Catholic Inquisition was followed by the heyday of Protestant persecution of witchcraft in the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries. Many pious and responsible persons swore that they saw the devil in one form or another, that they saw accused friends speaking with the devil or acting as his agent. A remarkable occurrence in the late 16th century was a solemn inquiry into a report that the devil had appeared in a Scottish church and had "mooned" those present from the pulpit. The incident was scrupulously believed as fact and included in a book on witchcraft written by King James VI (later James I of England) and required to be taught in schools. It is paradoxical that this same King James twenty years later convened the leading scholars of the day to update the translation of the Bible into English. The re-sult of their labors is the King James Version of the Bible.

Some Protestants did not take kindly to theological debate. As late as 1719, a theological student was hanged at St. Andrews, Scot-land for unorthodox beliefs. Grading in seminaries is less severe these days.

Christianity, great as its efforts are to pro-claim the Gospel and to serve succeeding generations as the incarnate presence of Christ in the world, has been the home base for some in great and trivial offices who enjoy condemning others and executing those whom they can, by death or

disgrace. Members of churches are human and liable to the sins of the flesh, most notably in this case, pride. Those who would try to rekindle the flames of the Inquisition are trying to take us 500 years into the past. The Christian Bible teaches that the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy and peace. Frenzied attacks on other religious bodies or upon Masonry display little love, joy or peace. Instead of love, there seems to be hatred, instead of joy a thirst for blood and instead of peace, violent verbalization.

It is interesting to note that the rise of Masonry coincides with the decline of witch craft, real and imagined, together with the hysteria and paranoia such occult practices generated. Masonic ritual inherited from our ancient operative Brethren was Christian. In time it was opened to all men of good will who share the quest to know and serve God. What ever the intention of God, religion seems to be cursed with the propensity to divide people against each other, as if God wished to be worshipped in a proliferation of Towers of Babel.

In contrast, Masonry teaches respect for God and all his children. If we really devote ourselves to the profound task of serving god, deepen our faith, and truly commit ourselves to the call of God, perhaps we shall not have time to criticize others!

About the author:

The Rev. Thomas E. Weir, director of Hospital visitations for M.S.A. earned a doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Edinburgh. His specialty is development of church and ministry in Scotland in the 16th and 17th centuries. He is a Fellow of the society of Antiquaries of Scotland and a member of the Scottish Church History Society.