

Is Masonry A Cult? by Dr. John Ankerberg, Dr. John Weldon

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In order to answer the question of whether Masonry is a cult, one must first determine which type or level of Masonry is being discussed and what definition of a cult is being considered. Not all Masonry is the same; a purely social Mason would be far less influenced by any cultic elements in Masonry than a religiously committed Mason.

Theologically, Masonry may be classified as a cult from the perspective of biblical revelation. If we define a cult as a religious group which claims compatibility with Christian faith but deviates seriously from orthodox Christianity in doctrine and practice, Masonry qualifies. In addition, there are certain historic associations, levels of initiation and levels of interpretation of Masonry that reveal a more broad-based cultic nature.

Consider the more outlandish characteristics of a cult such as: (1) a more or less complete withdrawal from all non-cultic social and family contact; (2) the physical or spiritual mistreating or abuse of cult members; (3) the inhibition of independent thinking and deliberate cultivation of dependency upon an authoritarian leader; (4) indoctrination reinforced through intimidation such as threats of reprisal by physical violence or severe spiritual consequence.

Masonry contains elements of some of these characteristics. It keeps Masonic secrets from family members, its oaths can be spiritually abusive, manipulative and intimidating, and they imply retribution for their violation. The ritual may in certain ways function to suppress independent thinking and dependency on Masonry. Masons must obey Lodge authority and Masonry itself.

Here are eight characteristics of cults that are to varying degrees shared with Masonry.*

1. Masonry has parallels to ancient pagan cultic themes and beliefs. This has been documented in chapters 17-19 of *The Secret Teachings of the Masonic Lodge*,¹ dealing with the occult generally (chapter 17), spiritism specifically (chapter 18) and the Ancient Mystery Religions (chapter 19). Many other researchers have noted the correlations. Martin L. Wagner spent years of diligent study of Masonry.² He was the pastor of Saint John's English Evangelical Lutheran Church in Dayton, Ohio, and he concluded that the peculiar views of Masonry harmonize it "with the religions of the ancient cults."³ "The Masonic ritual has many elements which have come down from antiquity, and connect the modern institution with the cults of the ancients not so much in form as in doctrine."⁴ In speaking of the unity of Freemasonry with such pagan cults, he emphasizes that this is not to be seen in the externals of the Craft, "not in exact identity of ceremony and symbol, but in the religious ideas, in the object of its adoration, in its conception and definition of the deity."⁵

2. The deception of the profane (the unworthy), whether Mason or non-Mason. In *Secret Teachings*, chapter 20, "Masonry and Deception," we have examined and documented this.

3. Spiritual intimidation or secrecy reinforced by penalty. In our discussion on the oaths of Masonry (*Secret Teachings*, chapter 14), we said that the retributions were claimed as merely symbolic but that this was not true and, regardless, they were punitive and intimidating. To violate Masonic secrets is to offend the Deity seriously,⁶ and to risk severe divine penalty, not to mention censure and rejection by the Lodge. The penalties may be physical, psychological or spiritual. To divulge Masonic secrets is to be branded a traitor by fellow Masons, to lose important alliances and friendships, and to suffer whatever consequences arise from Masonic

important alliances and friendships, and to suffer whatever consequences arise from Masonic censorship. Among families of Masons, in business relations and in social bonds, these consequences can be significant.

The oaths and their penalties are intended to instill fear in the initiate, and they are effective. One only needs to talk to a Mason to realize that he fears the consequences of violating Masonic secrets. We cited the bloodthirsty nature of these oaths, and we will document that Masonry shares a characteristic common to cultism: spiritual intimidation and fear.

Manly Hall, a 33rd degree Mason, concedes: "Every Mason knows that a broken vow brings with it a terrible penalty.... When a Mason swears that he will devote his life to [Masonry, and then violates his oath]... he is breaking a vow which imposes not hours but *ages of misery*."7 Elsewhere Hall even declares that spirits will bring retribution to the Mason who violates his vows:

The average Mason, as well as the modern student of Masonic ideals, little realizes the cosmic obligation he takes upon himself when he begins his search for those sacred truths of Nature as they are concealed in the ancient and modern rituals. He *must not lightly regard his vows*, and if he would not bring upon himself years and ages of suffering he must cease to consider Freemasonry solely as a social order only a few centuries old. He must realize that the ancient mystic teachings as perpetuated in the modern rites are sacred, and that powers unseen and unrecognized [the spirit world⁸] mold the destiny of those who consciously and of their own free will take upon themselves the obligations of the Fraternity.⁹

The "presentation volume" of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Virginia observes: "The ancient oral penalties already mentioned are retained in our ritual to impress upon the mind of each brother how serious a violation will be regarded by the members of the Fraternity.... Every means possible is used to impress the new Mason with the solemnity and the necessity for faithful performance of them."¹⁰ Masonic authority Carl H. Claudy states that the Mason who violates his oaths must consider bringing upon himself the divine wrath for such blasphemy:

... there are penalties in all three [Blue Lodge] obligations and a discussion of one will do for all.... The penalty should be read symbolically, each man for himself. "I have taken an obligation. In it is a penalty by which those who framed it *intended to inspire terror*; to be binding upon those who then took it *through fear*. I fear... what? The contempt of my fellows. The loss of my self respect. The self abasement any true man feels who has broken a solemn pledge. The wrath of a God blasphemed. The horror of a sin than which there is *none greater*; breaking faith pledged in honor. These, then, are what the penalties really mean; these are the *real consequences* to me, if I violate my solemn obligation; these are what will be done to me if I fail in living up, so far as I am able, to the covenants I made with my brethren. And may all of this be done unto me, *in full measure* should I fail my brethren."¹¹

Some have responded by saying that Christianity also utilizes fear and threats. But any fear Christianity inspires is merely a proper and respectful fear of God; it is not a fear generated to retain secrets of doubtful value or outright falsehoods. In addition, Christianity inspires fear of God's holiness for a legitimate reason: hell is real. So to do otherwise would be cruel and ludicrous.

4. The justification, whether intended or otherwise, of unethical practices. This cultic

characteristic can be seen in our discussion on Masonry and morality (*Secret Teachings*, chapter 4). Cult groups often claim that they uphold morality, but in fact the situation is usually quite different. This is also the case in Masonry.

5. An element of authoritarianism. Masonry is not authoritarian in the same sense that many cults are; however, there is an element of authoritarianism. For example, L. James Rongstad observes that in the Lodge, "Rule is autocratic. The Worshipful Master of a local lodge, for example, has supreme and total control."¹² In his *Introduction to Freemasonry*, Volume 2, Carl H. Claudy observes,

The incumbent of the Oriental Chair [Worshipful Master] has powers peculiar to his station which are far greater than those of the president of a society or the chairman of a meeting of any kind.... It is the Master's right to control lodge business and work. It is in a very real sense his lodge. He decides all points of order and no appeal from his decision may be taken to the lodge.... The Master has the right to say who may enter and who may leave the lodge room.... Only the Master may order a committee to examine a visiting brother.... If he keeps within the laws, resolutions, and edicts of his Grand Lodge [and the Landmarks]... the power of the Worshipful Master is that of an absolute monarch.¹³

The Masonic scandal in the Italian government in 1981 illustrates how such power may be abused. By 1975, more than 100 Masons were members of the Italian Parliament.¹⁴ The controversy centered around *Propaganda Due* ("P2"), a secret grouping of Masons that constituted an "illegal" Masonic Lodge (it was never officially constituted and never held regular meetings of all members¹⁵). According to investigator Stephen Knight, P2 was formed in 1966 at the request of the then Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy, Giordano Gamberini. His goal was apparently to establish a group of eminent persons who could be useful to the cause of Freemasonry.¹⁶ Gamberini chose Licio Gelli to form this group of respected individuals. But Gelli was a fascist and a supporter of Mussolini.¹⁷ In effect, Gelli became the "Venerable Master" (the Italian equivalent of Master Mason) of an unofficial Lodge. According to Knight:

Many men joined P2 because they believed the Venerable Master's patronage was indispensable to the furtherance of their careers. By this self-perpetuating process, Gelli's purported power became real. Others joined the lodge because Gelli used ruthless blackmail. The "Masonic dues" Gelli extracted from the brethren of Lodge P2 were not primarily financial. What the Venerable Master demanded—and got—were secrets: official secrets which he could use to consolidate and extend his power, and personal secrets he could use to blackmail others into joining his lodge. This most sensitive information from all areas of government was passed to him by his members, who seem to have obeyed him with unquestioning devotion.¹⁸

A secret society can be only as moral and patriotic as those who rule it. If those who have absolute power rule for personal ends, expect miscarriages of justice. Almost a thousand of Italy's most powerful men were secret members of P2, and a prosecutor's report observed: "Lodge Propaganda Due [P2] is a secret sect that has combined business and politics with the intention of destroying the country's constitutional order."¹⁹ Eventually, the "power of Gelli was found to have undermined not only the national security of Italy, but to have struck at the roots of Western strength in Southern Europe and the Middle East. NATO was forced to support the attitude of the corrupt Freemasons in Italy's armed forces."²⁰ "Gelli had his Freemasons in every decision-making center in Italian politics, and was able to exert significant influence over those decisions."²¹

Knight also reveals that "P2 was the very embodiment of the fear that had haunted Italy's undersecretary of state in 1913 when he had called for a law that 'declared the unsuitability of members of the Masonic Lodge to hold certain offices (such as those in the judiciary, in the army, in the education department, etc.), the high moral and social value of which is compromised by any hidden and therefore uncontrollable tie, and by any motive of suspicion, and lack of trust on the part of the public.'"22

A parliamentary committee which investigated the scandal charged that the Lodge was engaged in a conspiracy to set up an authoritarian government in Italy—in effect, attempting to overturn the Italian Republic.²³ Knight concluded, "There can be no doubt that many others have suffered because of Freemasonry entering into areas of life where, according to all its publicly proclaimed principles, it should never intrude. The abuse of Freemasonry causes alarming miscarriages of justice."²⁴ He even cites Scotland Yard, which was "heavily Masonic," as an example.²⁵

6. The attempt at suppression of critical literature. Many cult groups today like Mormonism, Christian Science and Scientology have something to hide. It may be an unsavory past, current abuse of members, leaders' immorality or destructive secret teachings. These groups often attempt to undermine, discredit or suppress works that are critical or too revealing. Stephen Knight observes, "There is evidence of very considerable efforts being made by Masons—including pressures on publishers, distributors and libraries—to suppress works critical of the brotherhood.... This even extends to the brotherhood's own publications."²⁶

According to Knight, Walton Hannah, author of the critical work on Masonry, *Darkness Visible*, was offered a thousand British pounds by "a mysterious gentleman" not to publish his book.²⁷ Knight's own text, *The Brotherhood*, also encountered publishing problems. His first publisher was fearful of Masonic attempts to inhibit its publication.²⁸ This publisher, NEL, was taken over by Hodder and Stoughton. The chairman and managing director were Philip and Michael Attenborough. But their father, John Attenborough, was a devoted Freemason and Christian. The book was killed because the publishers "realized they would cause their father very great pain by publishing *The Brotherhood*."²⁹ The book was eventually published in 1985 in England by Grenada Publishing. It went through numerous printings, causing a furor.³⁰ Knight claims that Freemasons were officially warned about owning, discussing or even reading the book.³¹ The "official" attitude of Masonry toward critical works is to simply ignore them and maintain silence.³² But it appears that some Masons, officially or otherwise, have proceeded to take matters into their own hands.

7. The distortion of Scripture. Cults often cite Scripture, sometimes extensively, but the manner in which Scripture is interpreted involves a deliberate distortion to make them conform to the beliefs of a particular group. Many illustrations are found in our book *Secret Teachings* and in James Sire's *Scripture Twisting*. Masonry engages in similar quoting and misuse of the Scriptures. As one official Presbyterian inquiry noted:

It is significant, however, that in Masonic ritual in use in so called Christian lands, as Great Britain and the United States, quotations from Holy Scripture abound. It cannot be doubted that this fact has blinded the eyes of many to the real character of the Masonic order.... Time and again in Masonic ritual portions of the Word of God are erroneously—and, it must be said, even blasphemously—applied.... Masonry does most serious violence to the inscripturated Word of God and does the gravest despoil to Jesus Christ, the personal Word.³³

8. Theologically, the denial of Christian truth and blaspheming God. In our theological analysis and elsewhere (*Secret Teachings*, chapters 5-16) we have seen that Masonry: (1)

denies the deity of Christ, (2) rejects the nature of God, (3) denies salvation by grace and teaches salvation by works, (4) distorts the Scriptures;³⁴ (reinterprets the Bible to teach the "truths" of Masonry), (5) replaces allegiance to God with allegiance to Masonry, (6) contains contradictory theology, and 7) blasphemes God.

All these are characteristic of allegedly "biblical" cults. What these characteristics represent are (1) a rejection of God's interests and (2) a corruption of the Church. The late Dr. Walter Martin, an acknowledged authority on comparative religion and cultism, observed:

I think there is a motivation in Masonry as there is in the entire cultic structure that we study in *The Kingdom of the Cults*. "Human nature is perfectible by an intensive process of purification and initiation." That is the Masonic initiation. Good works is the pathway to salvation in all pagan religions and the pathway to justification.... What we are dealing with in Masonry is a non-Christian cult with a lot of very nice people in it who are very sincere and very dedicated but very mistaken. In the words of Scripture, "There is a way that seems right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death."³⁵

If the supreme allegiance of the Mason must be to Masonry, then it cannot be to God, particularly if the teachings and goals of the two are at variance. Masonry does not add membership to the Christian Church; rather, it lures members away and corrupts their faith. In a sense, it is parasitic, nurturing itself by draining the life from another living organism.

All of this indicates that Masonry, in various ways and at various levels, contains many of the characteristics of a cult and is therefore properly classified as a cult, or at least cultic.