

Masonry: The Beautiful Anachronism

by Sir Knight Tom Lewis, Jr.

I have seen Masonic discussions on the internet lately attempting to justify allowing atheists and agnostics to join Masonry by making the argument that even unbelief is in itself a belief of sorts. To me that would seem to be dancing around the letter of Masonic law in order to violate the spirit of it. Masonic traditions demand that a prospective initiate believe in a higher power of some sort. That is what caused the break with the Grand Orient of France years ago; they stopped requiring of the prospective members a belief in a Supreme Being. The reason for the requirement is that without a belief in a Supreme Being of some kind, an oath taken would have no hold on an initiate. Given the behavior of many of our members who profess belief, it is questionable how much hold our obligations currently have on believers, much less unbelievers. From the time of the foundation of Masonic orders up to the last century, a person whose pledged word was worthless had a hard time getting along in the world because word of his infidelity would precede him. Nowadays such people exploit loopholes in the laws of the land and become rich. Unfortunately all that is necessary to make a person a role model these days seems to be superficial things like wealth and power or visibility in the media. Our society places more value on a man's personal power and fortune than on his morality, and I suppose a case could be made that this has always been true to a greater or lesser extent. It just seems to be truer today. It's a sad commentary on our present state of society that ideas like brotherly love, honor, and personal integrity have become anachronisms, outdated concepts, to the majority of present-day society.

Rather than abandoning the differences that makes Masonry what it is, we should be striving with all our strength to preserve them in our order as well as in our daily lives. Masonry IS an anachronism because it espouses virtues and values that have become nearly obsolete in today's society. However, if we attempt to alter Masonry to better conform to modern society, at what point does it cease being Masonry? We see the perceived worth society has placed on Masonry in the proliferation over the years of other fraternal orders and fraternities that superficially attempt to emulate the hallmarks of Masonry in much the same way that a youngster tries to emulate his sports figure role models. These imitators all talk about how old their orders are. They all have secret handshakes, secret passwords, secret signs, and secret initiation rites. Even today's street gangs have these things. These are just the superficial trappings of Masonry. Masonry is much deeper. People join Masonry to ally themselves with something that has centuries of continuity because they sense that it is something better than the majority of the society they live in every day. If we allow the erosion of the bedrock and cornerstones of Masonry, eventually our Masonic edifice will fall. Rather than abandoning Masonic principles that have stood the test of centuries in the vain attempt to broaden our pool of prospective members, we should be re-committing ourselves to the principles we swore to uphold when we took our obligations. We should be holding fast to the trestleboard of our individual faiths as we strive to represent Masonry in our daily lives.

I have been a scientist for over forty years, and the older I get and the more I learn, the more I see the hand of God in all things. The function of Masonry is to bring enlightenment to those in the dark. We cannot do this if we bring darkness itself into the Lodge. Certainly we should be ecumenical and welcome men of goodwill of all faiths, but being a man of faith is essential. God exists. Just because there are unenlightened people who can't grasp that truth doesn't alter the reality of it any more than a child not believing in gravity keeps him from falling. As Masons we should bring light to an unenlightened world by the way we live our lives, not allow the unenlightened world to overwhelm us. If we don't preserve and hold to our Masonic principles, one day Masonry will either cease to exist, or devolve into an overdressed street gang.

Sir Knight Tom Lewis, Jr. is a member of Jackson Commandery No. 13 in Jackson, Tennessee. He resides at 2104 St. Peters Lane, Charleston, SC 29414 and can be contacted at thl@gel.com.

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