

A Foundation Stone

Unknown

This Short Talk Bulletin has been adapted from a pamphlet published by the Grand Lodge A.F.& A.M. of Illinois, entitled, "What Can a Mason tell a Non-Mason About Freemasonry."

The ancient traditions of Freemasonry permit you to influence your qualified sons, friends and co-workers to petition for the degrees. There is absolutely no objection to a neutrally worded approach being made to a man who is considered a suitable candidate for Freemasonry. After the procedure for obtaining membership in a Masonic Lodge is explained, there can be no objection to his being reminded once that the approach was made. The potential candidate should then be left to make his own decision and come of his own free will.

One of the most misunderstood of the laws of Freemasonry is the rule that prohibits the solicitation of a candidate by any Mason. Every man who enters the portals of a Masonic Lodge must come of his own free will and accord but he can only come if he knows of the opportunity.

So far ingrained in our Masonic law is the rule against solicitation that it has unquestionably caused most Masons to refrain completely from discussing Freemasonry with friends and acquaintances who are not Masons. Don't let that happen to you.

The failure of the Masonic institution to make known to the public, that is to non-Masons, its principles and its purposes has, in the past, resulted in both suspicion and antagonism toward Masonry. People are naturally inclined to be suspicious or fearful of those things of which they are ignorant.

Freemasonry is not a secret society, but is rather a society which possesses certain secrets. A really secret society is one in which the membership is not known. Freemasonry is quite well known to the uninitiated. We do not attempt to hide our membership. A large percentage of our membership wears pins or rings bearing well-known emblems of the Craft. We do not meet in secret places. We meet in Temples which are well marked as Masonic – often times with neon signs bearing the square and compasses – and we meet at meetings which are quite well advertised.

What is actually supposed to be secret about the institution of Freemasonry is its ritual. Dr. Mackey's 23rd Landmark, "The secrecy of the Institution," embraces nothing more than its ritual, which we must conceal and never reveal. The fundamental principles of Masonry which are taught by that ritual, however, are, or could be, well known, and most of them are not even principles peculiar to the Masonic institution.

The candidate for the mysteries of Masonry must always come to us of his own free will and accord, unbiased by friends and uninfluenced by mercenary motives, and he must so formally declare before he enters a Lodge room. It must be his own personal desire which has brought him to the point of petitioning for the degrees of Masonry. An explanation of the charitable and character building attributes of Freemasonry to a worthy and well-qualified person is not solicitation.

Probably the first question that would come to the mind of the uninitiated would be "What is Freemasonry? We define it as a "progressive moral science divided into different degrees". This definition probably would not satisfy and would mean practically nothing to the Non-Mason. Freemasonry might be defined to such a person as a fraternal society which is based on certain moral and religious doctrines; the moral doctrines including Brotherly Love, Relief, Truth; Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice; and the religious doctrines comprising a belief in god and a future existence; sometimes shortened to the statement of a belief in the fatherhood of god and the brotherhood of man.

There is no reason at all why this subject should not be discussed quite freely with a non-Mason. The fact of the matter is that the philosophy of Masonry is freely discussed in thousands of printed volumes available to Masons and non-Masons alike.

One question which often comes from non-Masons is this: "How does one become a member?" "Why have I not been asked to join?" In any such discussion, of course, the non-Mason should be told that, unlike the members of other fraternal organizations, Masons are forbidden to solicit any one to become a member, and that any prospective member must apply of his own free will and accord; and further, that he must pass a unanimous ballot for admission. It must be free will and accord on both sides.

One question which any non-Mason might ask, and which can be freely discussed with him, is the relationship of Masonry to religion and to the churches of any denomination. Masonry has two fundamental religious tenets – a belief in God and a belief in a future existence, or, as it is phrased in Mackey's Landmarks, "a belief in the resurrection to a future life."

The inquirer should be told that Masonry is not a religion in any sense of the word; but it is religious, and that no atheist can ever be made a Mason. As the Old Charges approved in 1723 put it, "If he rightly understands the art, he will never be a stupid atheist nor an irreligious libertine." In those charges, under the heading of "Concerning God and Religion" it was said:

"But though in ancient times Masons were charged in every country to be of the religion of that country or nation, whatever it was, yet it is now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves; that is, to be good men and true. or men of honor and honesty, by whatever denominations or persuasions they may be distinguished; whereby Masonry becomes the centre of union, and the means of conciliating true friendship among persons that must else have remained at a perpetual distance."

Masonry does not require membership in any church as a condition of membership in a Lodge. On the other hand, membership in any church is no bar to admission to Masonry. There is nothing in the requirements of Masonry to prevent a Roman Catholic, a Mohammedan, a Buddhist, a Mormon, a Protestant, or a member of any religious sect from becoming a Mason. Any bar is one prescribed by the church to which he may belong. For instance, while Masonry is not anti-Catholic, nevertheless until recently the Roman church had itself set up the ban of excommunication of any of its members becoming Masons, which edict had been repeated by the Popes since the year 1738. There is nothing wrong in telling a non-Mason that, or telling him that the discussion of sectarian religion is prohibited in every Masonic Lodge.

One might also ask whether Masonry is a political organization. He should be told that no political discussion would be permitted in any Masonic Lodge.

Here again we might refer to the Old Charges, where we are told:

"A Mason is to be a peaceful subject to the civil powers, wherever he resides or works, and is never to be concerned in plots and conspiracies against the peace and welfare of the nation, nor to behave himself undutifully to inferior magistrates; for as Masonry hath been always injured by war, bloodshed and confusion, so ancient kings and princes have been much disposed to encourage the Craftsmen because of their peaceableness and loyalty, whereby they practically answered the cavils of their adversaries and promoted the honor of the fraternity, which ever flourished in times of peace."

In our jurisdiction, the rule that the discussion of politics and religion in Lodges is to be avoided, has the force of an Ancient Landmark.

Another question a non-Mason might ask is whether Masonry is a benefit society, like the many fraternal societies offering insurance and death benefits. This is something which can and certainly ought to be discussed, to avoid any misunderstanding by a prospective candidate. The inquirer should be told that we have no insurance benefits, and that while Masons are second to none in their charitable endeavors, as is evidenced by our Homes for the Aged and for Children, nevertheless it would be financially impossible for the Fraternity to care for all of its members. The minimum dues of \$20 per year provide little surplus for any Lodge to render aid except to those in dire distress.

Another subject which could certainly be discussed with a non-Mason is the history of the Masonic society and its evolution from the Operatives, the builders of the Middle Ages, who created the great Gothic cathedrals, churches and other structures in the British Isles and on the continent of Europe. There are many interesting topics of Masonic history which are perfectly proper to be discussed and might possibly excite the interest of serious-minded listeners who are not Masons. The history of our Craft in America and the part which Masons played in the early history of our country is something of which we should all be justly proud. It is no secret and no Mason is prohibited from discussing it.

You should not discuss the ritual. Part of the fun of Freemasonry is the excitement and adventure of the ritual. You can explain that it is based in part upon the Holy Bible and that the ceremonies of Masonry are of a serious and dignified nature, without levity or horseplay. Certainly every candidate should be told this, and should be asked not to listen to the remarks of unthinking brethren about "riding the goat" and similar intimations that the candidate is entering into something like a high school fraternity. Such intimations are unworthy and untrue. Explain that Freemasonry is divided into three degrees and what is required to progress. Explain about the catechism, questions and answers, and what is expected: 6,000,000 Masons learned and be sure they know they can. All they need do is ask to start their travel from friend to brother.

We are proud of our fraternity and want you proudly to explain Freemasonry to the worthy and well qualified people in your sphere of influence.

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