

Our Relations with The Knights of Columbus

Unknown

This Short Talk is an address given by Worshipful Brother C. C. (Buddy) Faulkner to more than a thousand Masons assembled in Murat Temple, Indianapolis, Indiana, for the January 12, 1974 Founders' Day Communication of the Grand Lodge of Indiana. Brother Faulkner is a Past Master of Mystic Tie Lodge No. 398, Indianapolis, and is well known as the former Executive Secretary of the Indiana DeMolay Foundation and former Assistant Grand Secretary of Indiana. His gracious permission to publish his address in this form is sincerely appreciated.

The subject of my remarks today – "Our Relations with the Knights of Columbus" – was assigned to me some months ago by Right Worshipful Brother Frank J. Krug, Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana. Although his letter of invitation to me to accept the responsibility for presenting this subject to you contained no guidelines, the fact that the topic is being discussed during this mid-year meeting of the members of the Grand Lodge is significant.

Significant in that it means to us that the former relationship that existed for many years – nearly a century – now is evolving into one that is new and different and exciting, and that the leadership of our Fraternity in Indiana considers that new relationship to be not only noteworthy, but important.

By comparison with Freemasonry, the Knights of Columbus as an organization is, relatively speaking, a "youngster," only 92 years of age. When it was founded in 1882 by Michael J. McGivney, a Roman Catholic Priest, one of its principal purposes was that of providing insurance benefits to Catholic families. The organization has enjoyed an increasing membership through the years, and today the Knights of Columbus is international in scope, numerically about 1,200,000 members strong, with local groups called "Councils" in the United States, Canada, Mexico, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Panama Canal Zone, Guam and Guatemala. To my knowledge, the organization is not in existence on the European continent, nor in Asia, Africa, Australia or Greenland.

The mission and purposes of the Knights of Columbus are to provide financial aid to members and their beneficiaries; to help its disabled and sick members; and to foster participation by its members in religious, social welfare, and charitable projects.

Membership in the Order is limited strictly to practicing Roman Catholics 18 years of age and older. Solicitation of new members among the eligible not only is permissible, but is encouraged. A unanimous ballot is not required.

Displaying an awareness of the importance of training young people, the Knights of Columbus sponsors and operates, as a part of its permanent and on-going program, the "Columbian Squires," an organization for Roman Catholic boys between the ages of 13 and 18 years.

Each local K. of C. Council is governed by its chosen officers. The presiding officer is known as the Grand Knight, who is assisted and supported by a corps of officers in a progressive line. This state organization is known as a State Council, presided over by a State Deputy. Internationally, the Knights of Columbus is governed by a Supreme Council, presided over by the Supreme Knight.

Through the years since the Knights of Columbus was formed in New Haven, Connecticut (the International Headquarters is located there), its relationship with Freemasonry has paralleled the Roman Catholic Church's relationship with Freemasonry, for reasons that are obvious.

Therein lies at least a part of the background against which we view the contrasting and refreshing changes that began recently to occur. And so, for the purposes of better understanding where we are now, and why the changing relationship between the Knights of Columbus and Freemasonry is something to talk about, let us consider the following facts on a purely historical basis and for no other purpose.

The Roman Catholic Church many, many centuries ago patterned its form of Church government after the form of government of the Roman Empire. For nearly a thousand years before its first pronouncement against Freemasonry, the Church had disapproved of the various trades and professions and guilds that were organized outside the framework of the Roman Church. Such groups (and among them were the operative Masons) were organized for their own purposes and without control from the outside, but their members were members of the Roman Church.

In April, 1738, Pope Clement XII issued a prohibition against Freemasonry. He placed on the document the customary seal composed of a blob of lead, called a "bull," which explains the origin of the term "Bull," by which the prohibitions have been called. From 1738 until several years ago, the Roman Church prohibited its members from belonging to organizations considered by the Church to be secret societies or free associations. That prohibition extended to include a number of organizations, and specifically included Freemasonry. Indeed, there have been no less than eight Papal "Bulls" issued against Freemasonry, together with nine Papal Encyclicals on the same subject. The most recent "Bull" was proclaimed in 1884, two years

after the founding of the Knights of Columbus in the United States. Four of the Encyclicals were issued during and after 1882, the most recent being in 1890. Those pronouncements from the seat of power in the Roman Church had a long-term influence over relationships between the Knights of Columbus and Freemasonry. It is significant – and every Mason ought to know this – that in spite of the outright tension that existed during those years of separation, there has never been, and there is not now, in the philosophy and attitude, or in the ritual of Symbolic Freemasonry, even the slightest hostility toward the Catholic Church or to any of its members, or to any of its organizations, including the Knights of Columbus. From its beginnings in the Middle Ages, it has been a landmark of Ancient Craft Masonry to forbid Lodges and Masons from interfering with churches, governments, and other organizations and societies, to discuss their affairs, or to act officially concerning them. Freemasonry for that reason never has been in controversy with the Roman Church, nor has the Craft taken official recognition of any of the pronouncements against it by any Church or anyone else.

Up to the time of the Protestant Reformation, which had its beginnings in 1517, Operative Masons in Europe were under the patronage of the Church and State, and were of the Roman Catholic religion. And so, prominent in the mosaic of our fraternity's beginnings, the Craft has had many ancient ties with the Roman Church. In our Ancient Charges, under the first general heading, "Concerning God and Religion," we read: ". . . in ancient times Masons were charged in every Country to be of the Religion of that Country or Nation, whatever it was...."

Notwithstanding the events that I have just recalled for you from the pages of history, there are now, and there have been through the years, members of the Roman Church who have been raised to Freemasonry's Sublime Degree, both in Indiana and in other jurisdictions in this nation and around the world. The late Rudyard Kipling, Freemason, reminiscing about the brotherhood and fellowship in his Mother Lodge in India, poetized one such reference:

"We'd Bola Nath, accountant An' Saul the Aden Jew, An Din Mahammed, draughtsman of the Survey Office, too: There was Babu Chuckerbutty, An' Arnir Singh the Sikh,
An' Castro from the fittin'-sheds, The Roman Catholik."

Freemasonry never brands or compliments (and never will) a man for his sectarian religious views. It has insisted that a man have a firm belief and trust in a Supreme Being; and it has established certain criteria for membership in the Fraternity, including age, residence, being freeborn, and of good character. And that is all. Coming thus "well qualified," any man, including members of the Knights of Columbus, have been free to seek a relationship with us, within our fraternity.

Does it not logically follow, then, that if we can be friends with a man once he has become a part of our mystic circle, we should be able to become friends with him outside our fellowship?

In recent years, both in Indiana and in other parts of the nation, we have been pleased to see a relaxing of the Roman Church's restraint, and a ripening friendship between our Craft and the

Knights of Columbus. Lodges have entertained Knights and their ladies; Knights and their ladies have reciprocated, and in many instances have been the ones to make the first gesture of friendship. The resulting gatherings have been aimed toward having pleasant associations socially, concentrating on the similarities between the two organizations, forgetting about matters on which we do not agree.

And there are indeed many similarities: in our system of three degrees; in our efforts to help, aid, and assist our less fortunate members; in our aims to improve the community through the improvement of the individual member; in our active sponsorship of well-rounded and wholesome activities for the youth who come under the sphere of our influence. All those things are points of agreement on which we place emphasis during our social gatherings with our K. of C. friends.

Even the official publication of our Grand Lodge, The Indiana Freemason, has, on occasion, published articles written by leaders and spokesmen of the Roman Catholic Church and the Knights of Columbus. Always, those articles have been not only complimentary to Freemasonry, but have expressed pleasure at the bridge of friendship that is being built so carefully between our two organizations.

Several times each year, officers and leaders of our Grand Lodge meet together with leaders and representatives of the Indiana State Council of the Knights of Columbus, for an evening of social fellowship, and to explore new avenues of cooperation in our mutual interests and pursuits. As a token of friendship, each organization has contributed modestly to the other's foremost charity, they to our Indiana Masonic Home at Franklin, and we to their Gibault Home for Boys near Terre Haute.

Across the length and breadth of our state, and at many intermediate points in between, Lodges and Councils have extended to each other the arm of friendship in many ways. Hopefully, this new friendship and relationship will grow deeper and more meaningful to all of us in the months and years to come.

Let it be said emphatically that our joint meetings contain no effort or attempt, overt or otherwise, to solicit members or to have any joint venture but those of purely social intent, whereby we become better acquainted with each other's philosophies and views, aims, and purposes.

And so I am pleased to report to you that the status of our relations with the Knights of Columbus is good. Notwithstanding the events of history, there is no reason for our relationship to be other than good, or less than good. If you and your Lodge have not experienced the pleasure that comes from making new friends in your community, then perhaps you will want to give that ecumenical spirit a try, provided the members of your respective Lodges will give you their unqualified and enthusiastic support. I caution you that the support of your Lodge is important. If, after discreet exploration you find that kind of support, extend the invitation for a

friendly relationship, or respond favorably to an invitation if it is extended to you and your Lodge.

In closing, let me say that as a man and a Freemason, I claim no credit for the achievements of my forebears, nor any blame for their failures and defeats. I claim them all as a part of my heritage, and accept my obligation and responsibility to meet, as best I know how, the challenges that are mine today. The victories and failures of past generations give me insight and inspiration, and help me to chart my course. I believe that ought to be the dominating philosophy of all well-intentioned Knights and Masons as they seek to foster a friendship with each other.

I want to leave with you these thoughts about the refreshing but gentle ecumenical breezes that move about us today. One thought is about the value of our Craft's firm stand not to become embroiled in controversy. You will recall an admonition in our ceremonies, "Neither are you to suffer your zeal for the Institution to lead you into argument with those who may ridicule it." The blows of many sledge hammers have beat upon the anvil of Freemasonry in the centuries that have gone. The anvil is unharmed. The hammers have worn. Our ancient charges, like gold, have withstood the acid of time.

I believe too that the new friendship that we find among our brethren of the Knights of Columbus is a culmination or fruition of Freemasonry's firm and time-tested belief in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man – the brotherhood of ALL men.

During the last decade, man has extended his reach and has touched the very surface of the Moon. If men can do that, then I believe that men ought to be able and willing to extend the arm of brotherhood to a neighbor. If men cannot do that, then we might well be parties to the greatest tragedy in the history of the human race.

So, if Freemasonry is something that you and I are serious about, if it is inextricably a part of our personal character and life-style, and not merely words on our lips, then these new changes and friendships bode well for the cause of peace and brotherhood among men of good will.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

STB March 1974