



STATEMENT DM-166

## THE MASONIC LODGE AND THE CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE

by John Weldon

### Summary

The Masonic Lodge in America is a highly influential organization claiming some four million members. Masonic leaders argue the lodge is not a religion but merely a fraternal body that seeks to better society and also assist the Christian church. It does this, they claim, by helping Christians become better members of their own faith.

The truth is that Masonry is a distinct religion that espouses teachings incompatible with Christian faith in the areas of God, salvation, and other important doctrines. It is therefore inconsistent for any Christian to swear the oaths of Masonry to uphold and support the Lodge when Masonry's own ritual, doctrines, and impact in history have denied and opposed biblical teaching.

This is so despite the 1993 recommendation of the Southern Baptists at their annual convention that membership in the Lodge can be left to the Christian's individual conscience.

"Because of your support, the vote of the Southern Baptist Convention is a historic and positive turning point for Freemasonry. Basically, it is a vitalization of our Fraternity by America's largest Protestant denomination after nearly a year of thorough, scholarly study. At the same time, it is a call to renewed effort on the part of all Freemasons today to re-energize our Fraternity and move forward to fulfilling its mission as the world's foremost proponent of Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God." *The Scottish Rite Journal*, Aug. 1993.

Millions of men throughout the world, including four million Americans, look to the Masonic Lodge for brotherhood and fellowship. They are proud to be part of an organization that engages itself in worthwhile causes, such as children's hospitals. Many of them feel strongly about the Masonic tenets of the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the immortality of the soul.

Masonry (or Freemasonry) claims to be the friend of Christianity, and yet it contains doctrines that are contrary to biblical teaching. As unpleasant as it may be, it is the obligation of the discerning Christian to point this out, both for the sake of the hundreds of thousands of Christian Masons and for those who might yet become Masons.

The relationship of Masonry to Christian faith has been controversial for at least 200 years, and over that period the different sides have attempted to defend their positions to the best of their abilities. Therefore, confusion often befalls the layperson who must carefully wade through the arguments on both sides before he or she can hope to resolve the issue responsibly. While this article cannot relieve such laypeople of the task of discerning the matter, its purpose is to provide them with a strong yet concise presentation of the case against Christian involvement with Masonry. (Further documentation and analysis of the claims and arguments of Masonry can be found in *Bowing at Strange Altars* [an evaluation of the Southern Baptist Study on Masonry] and *The Secret Teachings of the Masonic Lodge: A Christian Appraisal*, both of which I coauthored with Dr. John Ankerberg. I urge interested readers to

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secure these volumes for further study in dealing with this issue. This article is primarily excerpted, with some changes, from *Bowing at Strange Altars*.)

This article was planned for the JOURNAL long before controversial publications on Masonry were released by the Southern Baptists. However, because the Southern Baptist publications bring all of the concerns I intended to address into sharp focus, and because they are of significant contemporary concern, they will play an important role in my evaluation of Masonry.

## MASONRY AND THE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS

A committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in America, concluded in its two 1993 publications, *A Study of Freemasonry* (hereafter *Study*) and *A Report on Freemasonry* (hereafter *Report*) — and at its annual convention the same year — that it cannot frankly state it is wrong for a Christian to join the Masonic Lodge.<sup>1</sup> In so doing the Southern Baptists are perhaps the only conservative Christian denomination in America not to warn their constituents that membership in the Masonic Lodge is not compatible with biblical teaching.

In the coming years many other churches and denominations will face the question of whether their members should participate in the Masonic Lodge. What happened in the Southern Baptist Convention's examination of Masonry points to the necessity for churches and denominations examining this subject to carefully select their investigative committees. Such committees should be composed of individuals who not only accept the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, but who will also not uncritically accept Masonic claims of compatibility with Christianity or be influenced by political pressures — as was true for the Southern Baptists.<sup>2</sup>

In its six-page *Report*, the Baptist Home Mission Board listed numerous reasons why it is wrong for a Christian to be a member of the Masonic Lodge. For example, it cited several illustrations from the first three degrees of Masonry (the Blue Lodge degrees) concerning the taking of bloody oaths by the Masonic initiate. It warned, "Even though these oaths, obligations and rituals may or may not be taken seriously by the initiate, it is *inappropriate* for a Christian to 'sincerely promise and swear,' with the hand on the Holy Bible, any such promises or oaths, or to *participate* in any such pagan rituals" (emphases added).<sup>3</sup> The *Report* also stated, "Many tenets and teachings of Freemasonry are not compatible with Christianity and Southern Baptist doctrine...." and again cited examples such as the teachings of salvation by personal character/good works and the doctrine of universalism.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, both the *Study* and the *Report* offered solid reasons why Masonry and Christianity are incompatible and why Christians shouldn't participate in the Lodge. But then, illogically, they gave the contradictory advice that membership in a Masonic Order should be a matter of personal conscience. In what follows I demonstrate the problems with this conclusion.

## MASONRY AND SALVATION

It is my contention that the Masonic ritual (i.e., Masonry's ceremonial rites of initiation that all Masons must pass through) of the First, Second, and Third Degrees teach all Masons exactly what God condemns as a false gospel, namely that a person is saved and goes to heaven as a result of his or her personal character and good works. As all Christians know, the Bible places such a teaching under God's curse. Paul said in Galatians 1:8-9: "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that we have preached to you, let him be accursed." The Bible clearly teaches how a man is saved: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9. Cf. John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; Rom. 3:28-4:6; 11:6).

Proof of Masonry's false gospel can be found in standard "Monitors" — the official textbooks containing authoritative Masonic ritual which are more or less uniform for each state. In the ritual, the Masonic symbol of the lambskin or white leather apron is explained, in part, to each candidate as follows: "The lamb has in all ages been deemed an emblem of innocence; he, therefore, who wears the lambskin as a badge of Masonry, is thereby continually reminded of that purity of life and conduct, which is essentially necessary to his gaining admission into

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*the Celestial Lodge Above*, where the Supreme Architect of the Universe [God] presides (emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

Please keep in mind that the instruction concerning the lambskin can be found in the Ritual book of all the Lodges in all 50 states. *None* exclude it, although it may be placed in different rituals in the manuals of different states.

When a Mason is told that his purity of life and conduct is necessary to his gaining admission into the Celestial Lodge Above (i.e., heaven), how can anyone deny that Masonry is teaching another way of salvation than what the Bible teaches? How can anyone deny that this is a *works* gospel?

In the Second Degree (the Fellow Craft Degree) and elsewhere the candidate is instructed further in the importance of the lambskin as follows: "You are to wear it as an emblem of that *purity of heart and conscience that is necessary to obtain for you the approval of the Grand Architect of the Universe*" (emphasis added).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as even some Masonic authorities have admitted, Masonry has, in all, some 40 degrees implying or teaching its candidates salvation by personal merit.<sup>7</sup>

What did the Southern Baptist *Report* conclude on this issue? The Committee that engaged in the study agreed that such teachings were "not compatible with Christianity or Southern Baptist doctrine."<sup>8</sup> The *Report* likewise concluded that Masonic writings and rituals imply that "salvation may be attained by one's good works," and therefore that some "Masons...may be led to believe they can earn salvation by living a pure life with good conduct."<sup>9</sup> In addition, the *Study* confessed that Masons "insist the lambskin [i.e., lambskin apron, used in Masonic ritual] does not bring salvation, but rather, '*the purity of life*' it symbolizes brings salvation" (emphasis added).<sup>10</sup>

The Committee stated that there was "the prevalent use of the term [Masonic] 'light,' which some may understand as a reference to salvation rather than knowledge or truth."<sup>11</sup> The *Report* further conceded that "the heresy of universalism (the belief that all people will eventually be saved), which permeates the writings of many Masonic authors...is a doctrine inconsistent with New Testament teaching."<sup>12</sup>

In its mention of former Mason Jack Harris, the *Study* noted that "Harris was *typical* of other Masons *who hope Freemasonry will take them to heaven*" (emphasis added).<sup>13</sup> Here it is acknowledged that Masons can indeed believe that Masonry alone is sufficient for salvation.

But Masonry also teaches that individuals may be saved by being good members of their respective religions — whether Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, or other. For example, Dr. Jim Tresner, director of the Masonic Leadership Institute, affirmed that Masonry "leaves the member to devote himself to his own religious faith to receive...salvation."<sup>14</sup>

In light of the above confessions I am perplexed. In 1992 the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution entitled, "On Christian Witness and Voluntary Associations," encouraging Christians everywhere to (1) "maintain Christian witness *openly* before the world"; (2) avoid "*any association which conflicts with clear biblical teaching*"; and (3) "affirm that biblical doctrine is to be open and public knowledge and that the Christian faith is to be a clear and public expression of the truth *that Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation*, that *the Bible* is our infallible guide..." (emphases added).<sup>15</sup>

By stating such confessions and conclusions in its resolution in 1992, the SBC had effectively *prohibited* Christians from joining the Masonic Lodge. In light of these admonitions to Christians everywhere, how can the Home Mission Board and the Southern Baptist Convention a year later conclude that Freemasonry does *not* ultimately oppose Christian doctrine and that individual Christians are *free* to join the Masonic Lodge?<sup>16</sup>

## THE MASONIC GOD

During the ritual, Masonry has its candidates swear that they believe in God, typically called the "Great Architect of the Universe." It also informs them that all Masons are to bow before the sacred name of Deity, and explains that all Masons of every country, religion, and opinion are united in the belief that they have been created by one Almighty Parent. The question is, Is this Almighty Parent or Great Architect — the God of the Masonic Lodge — also the God of the Bible? The answer is clearly *no*.

In the "Masonic Bible," published by the A. J. Holman Press, we are told this "Almighty Parent" is the one true God that all men worship. This is so regardless of the name by which He is identified: Jehovah, Krishna, Buddha, Allah, or some other.

The Masonic Bible is actually the King James Version bound with a special cover stamped with the Masonic insignia. In the front of this Bible there is a lengthy preface made up of articles concerning Masonry and the Bible. One of these articles is entitled, "The Great Light in Masonry," written by Masonic authority Joseph Fort Newton, who states: "For Masonry knows, what so many forget, that religions are many, but religion is one...therefore, *it [Masonry] invites to its altar men of all faiths, knowing that, if they use different names for 'the nameless one of a hundred names,' they are yet praying to the one God and Father of all*" (emphasis added).<sup>17</sup>

But when a Hindu prays to Vishnu or Shiva, is he really praying to Jesus? When a Muslim prays to Allah, is she really praying to Jehovah? When Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons pray, are they really praying to the same God the Christian prays to? The answer is *no*, because all these concepts of God are opposed to the concept of God as revealed in the Bible.<sup>18</sup>

Another Masonic authority, Carl H. Claudy, writes:

[The Mason] must declare his faith in a Supreme Being before he may be initiated. But note that he is not required to say, then or ever, *what* God. He may name him as he will, think of him as he pleases; make him impersonal law or personal and anthropomorphic; Freemasonry cares not...*God, Great Architect of the Universe, Grand Artificer, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge Above, Jehovah, Allah, Buddha, Vishnu, Shiva, or Great Geometer* (emphases added).<sup>19</sup>

And,

Masonry does not specify any God of any creed; she requires merely that you believe in some Deity, give him what name you will....A belief in God is essential to a Mason, but...*any God will do*, so [long as] he is your God (emphasis added).<sup>20</sup>

Masonry thus argues that all people of varying faiths are really praying to the one true God, the universal Father of humankind, regardless of the name they give him. Nevertheless, this "Almighty Parent" of Masonry is a different God than Christianity teaches — a fact conceded by both Masonic sympathizers as well as Masons themselves. The Baptist *Study* agreed that the Great Architect of Masonry is not the Jehovah of the Bible: "The Masonic Great Architect of the Universe appears more like the Aristotelian 'First Cause' than the personal God who has revealed Himself in the Bible."<sup>21</sup>

In his encyclopedia on Masonry, Masonic authority Henry Wilson Coil refers to the biblical God as "a partisan, tribal God" and implies that such a God-concept is far inferior to the God of Masonry, which is

a boundless, eternal, universal, undenominational, and international, Divine Spirit, so vastly removed from the speck called man, that He cannot be known, named, or approached. So soon as man begins to laud his God and endow him with the most perfect human attributes, such as justice, mercy, beneficence, etc., the Divine essence is depreciated and despoiled....The Masonic test [for membership] is a Supreme Being, and *any qualification added* is an innovation and distortion (emphasis added).<sup>22</sup>

Coil even admits that "monotheism... *violates* Masonic principles, for it requires belief in a specific kind of Supreme Deity" (emphasis added).<sup>23</sup> Of course, at this point Coil has just excluded the God of biblical teaching and Christian faith for being too specific *despite* the fact that he has ascribed a *specific* doctrine of God (eternal, unknowable, etc.) to Masonry.

Masonic authority<sup>24</sup> Albert Pike also denies the biblical God. He argues that "if our conceptions of God are those of the ignorant, narrow-minded, and vindictive Israelite...we feel that it is an affront and an indignity to [God]...."<sup>25</sup> Anyone who has ever read what Albert Pike and other Masons have taught about God in the higher degrees of Masonry knows that the God of Masonry has nothing whatever to do with the God of the Bible.<sup>26</sup> For example, Pike categorized the God of Scripture as a false god and an idol when he wrote that "*every religion and every conception of God is idolatrous*, insofar as it is imperfect, and as it substitutes a feeble and temporary idea in the shrine of that

Undiscoverable Being [of Masonry]..." (emphasis added).<sup>27</sup>

If Masonry rejects the God of Christianity, however, how can it logically claim to be the true friend of Christian faith? Further, if it offers an unknowable, unapproachable, and undiscoverable God beyond the different concepts of God found in other religions, how can it appropriately or logically ask the men of those religions to join its local lodges?

Masonry does this because it seeks to develop a worldwide religious brotherhood *beyond* the sectarian religious beliefs of humankind. To further this goal it must, at one level, accept all religions, while simultaneously pointing and leading to a "higher" truth beyond separatist religion — a truth that is capable of uniting all men in a common universal brotherhood, that is, the fraternity of Masonry.

Masonry therefore encourages all members of different religions to pray to and worship their own respective gods: Brahma, Krishna, Allah, Buddha, Jehovah, Vishnu, Jesus, and so forth. This is the means by which Masonry can appeal to the members of all the different religions in the world and attempt to unite them in a universal "common brotherhood."

But then Masons cannot possibly all be praying to the *same* God because all these gods are different in nature and in what they expect of humans (if they expect anything). In other words, the Masonic doctrine of the spiritual "Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man" is only valid if there is some *larger* God beyond the contradictory lesser gods that people worship.

On the one hand Masonry claims it is an organization of tolerance that accepts the different religions of all people; on the other hand, it offers a supreme God that is supposedly the one true God that all people are really praying to, who is beyond the inferior, primitive concepts of individual religion — whether Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, or any other.<sup>28</sup>

At whatever level Masonry approaches God, however, its theology presents irresolvable conflicts for the Christian. If the Christian God is merely an inferior and false concept, then Masonry denies that the God of the Bible is the one true God. Further, if Masonry points Christians to an unknowable "Almighty Parent" beyond all religion, then it encourages Masons to worship a *false* god, and this is idolatry. This violates the first commandment in which God warned His people, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (*see* Exod. 20:4-6; Deut. 13:1-5).

Even at a surface level Masonry actively encourages idolatry. The Baptist *Study*, for example, cites *The Freemasons' Diary* as setting "this priority for a Mason concerning his faith and religious practice: a Freemason is encouraged to do his duty first to his God (*by whatever name he is known*) through his faith and religious practice..." (emphasis added).<sup>29</sup>

To encourage Masons to do their religious duty to their various gods is to encourage the Muslim Mason to worship and serve *Allah*; the Hindu Mason to worship and serve *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Shiva*; the Buddhist Mason to worship *Buddha* and various Buddhist deities; the Mormon Mason to worship Mormonism's own gods; and the pagan Mason to worship any variety of additional gods. This is unacceptable for the Christian in that it promotes spiritual deception under the guise of alleged spiritual brotherhood.

Jesus emphasized, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, *the only true God*, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). God Himself declares, "I, even I, am the Lord; and there is no savior besides Me....I am the Lord and there is no other; besides Me there is no God" (Isa. 43:11; 45:5). Jesus also emphasized that "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit *and truth*" (John 4:24). How, then, can Christian Masons logically join and swear allegiance to actively support Masonry when it encourages people to believe in false gods and to deny the truth that God has revealed in the Bible?

## MASONRY AND PAGAN RELIGION

The previously mentioned 1992 SBC resolution that encompassed Freemasonry stated: "Be it finally RESOLVED, That we urge all Southern Baptists to refrain from participation or membership in organizations with teachings, oaths, or mystical knowledge which are contrary to the Bible and to the public expression of our faith in the gospel

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of Jesus Christ, which must be above all reproach."<sup>30</sup> Further, the *Study of Freemasonry* submitted to the Baptist Home Mission Board conceded that "a Christian Mason who takes the higher degrees of the Scottish Rite will be exposed to beliefs and practices quite different from his own. For example, the candidate is introduced to Egyptian deities Osiris, Isis, Horus, and Amun; to Scandinavian deities Odin, Freya, and Thor; to Hindu, Greek, and Persian deities; and to Jewish Kabbalism [i.e., occultism]....*It cannot be denied that some of the religions studied in these degrees are pagan and that their teachings are totally incompatible with Christianity*" (emphasis added).<sup>31</sup>

The *Report on Freemasonry* concluded that paganism is not only found in Masonic rituals, but it also discovered paganism in many readings that Masonry encourages its initiates to pursue: "[Many of] the recommended readings, in pursuance of advanced degrees, of religions and philosophies...*are undeniably pagan and/or occult...*" (emphasis added).<sup>32</sup> Among those mentioned are the writings of Masonic authorities or authors Albert Pike, Albert Mackey, Manley Hall, Rex Hutchins, and W. L. Wilmshurst.

Even some official Masonic Monitors encourage paganism. The Texas *Monitor*, for example, tells us:

These [aspects and teachings of Masonry] were practiced from remote ages, in ancient temples of many nations....The most learned among Masonic scholars...conclude that Masonry is of very ancient origin, and is, in some aspects, the modern successor of, and heir to, the sublime Mysteries of the Temple of Solomon, and of the Temples of India, Chaldea, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, as well as the basic doctrine of the Essenes, Gnostics and other mystic Orders.<sup>33</sup>

Because the Texas *Monitor* argues that Masonry is related to ancient paganism, it advises that

every candidate for the Mysteries of Masonry, at the proper time and in an appropriate manner, should be taught the truth that the *rite of Initiation* means much more than a formal ceremonial progress through the Degrees....*Initiation* is to be attained only after real labor, deep study, profound meditation, extensive research and a constant practice of those virtues which will open a true path to moral, intellectual, and spiritual illumination.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, the Texas *Monitor* itself maintains that the initiate is to be informed as to and/or practiced in the deeper pagan meanings of the Masonic Ritual.

## JESUS CHRIST

The Baptist *Study* comments, "*it is not true* that Freemasonry ignores or denies Jesus Christ" (emphasis added).<sup>35</sup> The *Study* nevertheless admits that "Freemasonry today does not see Jesus as the unique Son of God and Savior of the world."<sup>36</sup>

The Masonic Ritual of the First, Second, and Third Degrees never instructs its members that Jesus is the only mediator between God and men. It never tells them they can't truthfully call God their Father until they have a relationship with His Son. It doesn't tell initiates that they can't build their spiritual house until they ask Jesus Christ to forgive them of their sins and build it for them. No Mason is ever told officially that a man can never do enough good deeds or live a pure enough life to gain admission into the Celestial Lodge Above, or that entrance into heaven comes only by faith in Jesus Christ. The truth is that by its ritual, teachings, and prayers, Masonry *does* ignore and deny Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup>

## IS MASONRY A RELIGION?

One of the key issues in this discussion is whether or not Masonry is a religion.<sup>38</sup> The Baptist *Study* concluded: "Strong feelings have been expressed on both sides of this difficult issue....*the overwhelming majority of Masons reject the idea that Freemasonry is a religion*. The various monitors of the Grand Lodges and statements from the overwhelming majority of Masonic leaders in the past and today *deny that Freemasonry is a religion*"(emphases added).<sup>39</sup>

No one denies that the vast majority of Masons *say* Masonry is not a religion, but one must go beyond mere claims. For example, virtually all Mormons *claim* their religion is Christian, which is demonstrably false.<sup>40</sup>

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Masonry claims it has the *qualities* of a religion but is still not a religion; or that it is *religious* but still not a religion. However, the latter point makes as much sense (as even Coil pointed out) as to say that a man has no intellect but is intellectual, or that he has no honor but is honorable. *Religious* is defined as "imbued with or adhering to religion or a religion."<sup>41</sup>

While it is possible for an organization to have a religious quality and yet not be a religion — such as Christian groups that specialize in missions or research and have daily periods of prayer, Masonry is more than this. The religious quality of Christian organizations is based on Christianity while the religious quality of Masonry is based on Masonry itself, which qualifies it as a religion.

The *Study* wrongly concluded that Masonry is not a religion. Nevertheless it was forced to confess that "many men make the Lodge their religion."<sup>42</sup>

The major issue in determining whether Masonry is a religion is to look at its demands on the candidate. Masonry *requires* the candidate to believe in God, obey Him, worship Him, seek His guidance, and so forth, which qualifies it as a religion. And, as I have already documented, Masonry claims its members will earn admittance to heaven based on personal character and good works. This also classifies the Lodge as a religion. In fact, any standard dictionary or encyclopedia definition of religion proves beyond doubt that Masonry is a religion.<sup>43</sup> Dr. Shildes Johnson is only one of many scholars of comparative religion who have concluded: "A comparison of the moral, allegorical, and symbolic teachings of Freemasonry with these definitions of a religion reveals that the lodge is a theistic, non-Christian, man-centered, and universal religion."<sup>44</sup>

All this is why numerous leading Masonic authorities have publicly confessed that Masonry *is*, in fact, a religion. For example:

*Albert G. Mackey*: "The religion of Masonry is cosmopolitan, universal...."<sup>45</sup>

*Henry Wilson Coil*: "Religion is espoused by the Masonic Ritual and required of the candidate"; and, "Freemasonry is undoubtedly religion"; and, "Many Freemasons make this flight [to heaven] with no other guarantee of a safe landing than their belief in *the religion* of Freemasonry" (emphasis added).<sup>46</sup>

*Albert Pike*: "Masonry...is the universal, eternal, immutable religion...."<sup>47</sup>

*Joseph Fort Newton*: "Everything in Masonry has reference to God, implies God, speaks of God, points and leads to God. Not a degree, not a symbol, not an obligation, not a lecture, not a charge but finds its meaning and derives its beauty from God the Great Architect, in whose temple all Masons are workmen."<sup>48</sup>

Doesn't all this constitute evidence that Masonry is a religion? Yet the *Study* of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board concluded it is not a religion.<sup>49</sup>

The Baptist *Study* offered a number of reasons to allegedly substantiate its claim that Masonry is not a religion. For example, it points out that in a 1921 decision the Supreme Court of Nebraska ruled that Freemasonry is not a religion. But all this means is that the Supreme Court of Nebraska was wrong. State Supreme Courts and even the Supreme Court of the United States have frequently been wrong, as can be proven by the number of opinion reversals enacted by those bodies. The United States Supreme Court has reversed itself no less than 200 times in its history. These are admissions of error.

The *Study* next cites the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America. It points out that not all Scouts are Christians. Yet Christians may become members of the Scouts without worshipping the gods of those in the Scouts who follow other religions, such as Mormons and Hindus. "Baptist youth certainly do not worship the physical god of Mormonism or the impersonal god of Hinduism, yet they join with youth and leaders from these religions to earn religious emblems. They have certain rituals that identify them as Scouts anywhere in the world...."<sup>50</sup>

What if the Boy Scouts of America claimed it was not a religion when it was? What if the Scouts had an agenda that they kept hidden? What if the Scouts had their own plan of salvation? What if the Scouts actively taught members that they could be saved and go to heaven by good works? What if the Scouts had bloody oaths requiring secrecy on pain of death?<sup>51</sup> Who would argue that Christian youth should join such an organization?

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Next, the *Study* claims that those individuals who allow Masonry to become their religion do so only because of their own misinterpretation or misunderstanding of Masonry and (quoting a Southern Baptist Mason) "not due to Masonic teaching."<sup>52</sup> In *The Secret Teachings of the Masonic Lodge*, however, John Ankerberg and I devoted some 200 pages showing that the reason individuals *do* make Masonry their religion *is* "due to Masonic teaching."

Perhaps it is worth noting that of all the conservative Christian bodies who have studied Masonry, I discovered almost unanimous agreement among them that Masonry is a religion and that Masonry and Christianity are not compatible.<sup>53</sup> The conclusion of a Presbyterian report is only one of almost two dozen denominational inquiries that concluded Masonry is a religion: "In our study of Freemasonry's promotional literature, through personal interviews with Masons, and by letters received from Masons, we were told that Freemasonry is not a religion. *However, a close scrutiny of the ritual of the lodge and books written by authoritative Masons points to the contrary...*(emphasis added).<sup>54</sup>

In its section on the position of other Christian denominations relative to Masonry, even the Baptist *Study* documents that Masonry has been rejected by the Roman Catholic church, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Presbyterian Church in America, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Church of the Brethren, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Assemblies of God, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, "and other Christian denominations have also taken positions against Freemasonry, or against secret societies without mentioning Freemasonry."<sup>55</sup>

One must wonder, "Didn't this near-unanimous condemnation tell Baptist committee members something?!" If Masonry and Christianity are really compatible (as the Baptist *Study* implies), and if individual Christians can actually become Masons "in good conscience," then why all the negative conclusions condemning Masonry and urging Christians *not* to join the Masonic Lodge from all these widely varying Christian bodies?

The *Study* acknowledges that "this issue has divided Baptists for two centuries."<sup>56</sup> But *why* has it divided Baptists for two centuries? We think the reason is evident — because the Baptist tradition has never officially taken a position on Masonry, thereby allowing individual Christians in every generation to be deceived by its false claims. This would seem to explain why, as the *Study* itself concedes, half a million Southern Baptists (at least) are now Masons — including many Southern Baptist pastors, ministers of education, deacons, and directors of missions.<sup>57</sup> But even if there were ten million Christians in the Lodge, this fact alone would not justify Masonry. I can only agree with the conclusion of the Presbyterian report and many others that say:

- a) Joining Masonry requires "actions and vows out of accord with Scripture."
- b) "Participation in Masonry seriously compromises the Christian faith and testimony."
- c) "Membership in Masonry and activity in its Ritual lead to a diluting of commitment to Christ and His kingdom."<sup>58</sup>

Certainly the Baptist stress on individual freedom of conscience cannot be carried so far as to accept the right of Christians to join the Mormon church or the Baha'i Faith. On what basis, then, can the Southern Baptist Convention say it is permissible for a Christian to join the Masonic Lodge? The issue is not individual conscience. The issue is, Can Christianity and Masonry be logically joined together without violation of scriptural teaching and Christ's glory? If not, then the verdict of each Christian's conscience must be to abstain from the Masonic Lodge, and the obligation of each church body must be to proclaim this basic incompatibility of Masonry and Christianity.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In the text and endnotes, the term *Study* refers to the 75-page analysis, *A Study of Freemasonry* (Atlanta, GA: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1993), available from the Home Mission Board, SBC, 1350 Spring Street, N.W., Atlanta, GA 30367-5601 (1-800-634-2462). The term *Report* refers to the six-page *A Report on Freemasonry*, published by the Home Mission Board, SBC, 17 March 1993.

<sup>2</sup> See John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Bowing at Strange Altars* (Chattanooga, TN: Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, 1993), 10-12.

<sup>3</sup> *Report*, 5.



- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.
- <sup>5</sup> Code Revision Committee, *Masonic Manual of the Grand Lodge of Georgia, Free and Accepted Masons*, 10th ed. (n.p.: Grand Lodge of the State of Georgia, 1983), 17.
- <sup>6</sup> Most Worshipful Grand Lodge Free & Accepted Masons of Arkansas, *Masonic Monitor of the Degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason* (n.p.: Grand Lodge of Arkansas, 7th ed., 1993), 17.
- <sup>7</sup> See John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Secret Teachings of the Masonic Lodge: A Christian Appraisal* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 86, cf. 78-92.
- <sup>8</sup> *Report*, 4.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.
- <sup>10</sup> *Study*, 34.
- <sup>11</sup> *Report*, 5.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.
- <sup>14</sup> Jim Tresner, "Conscience and the Craft," *The Scottish Rite Journal*, February 1993, 23.
- <sup>15</sup> *Study*, 2-3.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.
- <sup>17</sup> Joseph Fort Newton, "The Great Light in Masonry" (title of the section containing: "The Words of a Great Masonic Divine: The Bible and Freemasonry," in *The Holy Bible: The Great Light in Masonry* (Nashville: A. J. Holman, 1940), 3-4.
- <sup>18</sup> See Ankerberg and Weldon, *Secret Teachings*, 194-95.
- <sup>19</sup> Carl H. Claudy, *Introduction to Freemasonry*, vol. 2 (Washington: The Temple, 1984), 110.
- <sup>20</sup> Carl H. Claudy, "Belief in God," in "A Master's Wages," in *Little Masonic Library*, vol. 4 (Richmond: Macoy Publishing, 1977), 32.
- <sup>21</sup> *Study*, 43.
- <sup>22</sup> Henry Wilson Coil, *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia* (New York: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply, 1961), 516-17.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 517.
- <sup>24</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon, *Bowing*, chs. 7, 9.
- <sup>25</sup> Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (Charleston, SC: Supreme Council of the 33rd Degree for the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States, 1927), 223.
- <sup>26</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon, *Secret Teachings*, chs. 8-9.
- <sup>27</sup> Pike, 516; cf. 226, 295-96.
- <sup>28</sup> Tresner, 18. See also J. N. D. Anderson, *Christianity and Comparative Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 11-12.
- <sup>29</sup> *Study*, 26.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.
- <sup>32</sup> *Report*, 5.
- <sup>33</sup> Grand Lodge of Texas, *Monitor of the Lodge: Monitorial Instructions in the Three Degrees of Symbolic Masonry* (Waco, TX: Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F.&A.M., 1982), xiii, xiv.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, xv, xvi.
- <sup>35</sup> *Study*, 48. See also Ankerberg and Weldon, *Secret Teachings*, 126-29; Jim Shaw and Tom McKenney, *The Deadly Deception: Freemasonry Exposed by One of Its Top Leaders* (Lafayette, LA: Huntington House, 1988), 72.
- <sup>36</sup> *Study*, 48-49.
- <sup>37</sup> For further information on Masonic views of Jesus Christ, see Ankerberg and Weldon, *Bowing*, ch. 4, and *Secret Teachings*, ch. 10.
- <sup>38</sup> *Study*, 23.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.
- <sup>40</sup> See, e.g., John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1991) for detailed documentation.
- <sup>41</sup> *Macmillan Dictionary for Students* (1984), 842.
- <sup>42</sup> *Study*, 26.
- <sup>43</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon, *Secret Teachings*, 37-38.
- <sup>44</sup> Shildes Johnson, *Is Masonry a Religion?* (Oakland, NJ: Institute of Contemporary Christianity, 1978), 21.
- <sup>45</sup> Albert G. Mackey, *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Masonic History Company, 1921), 301.
- <sup>46</sup> Coil, 512, 158; Henry Wilson Coil, *A Comprehensive View of Freemasonry* (Richmond: Macoy, 1973), 186.
- <sup>47</sup> Pike, 219.

- <sup>48</sup> Joseph Fort Newton, *The Religion of Masonry* (Richmond: Macoy, 1969), 58-59.
- <sup>49</sup> *Study*, 70.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.
- <sup>51</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon, *Secret Teachings*, chs. 2, 13-16.
- <sup>52</sup> *Study*, 26.
- <sup>53</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon, *Secret Teachings*, 269-71; cf. ch. 16, Epilogue; and James Holly, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Freemasonry* (Beaumont, TX: Mission and Ministry to Men, 1993), ch. 3.
- <sup>54</sup> Minutes of the General Assembly, appendix R, The Report of the Ad-Interim Committee to Study Freemasonry, 16th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 6 June 1988, 466.
- <sup>55</sup> *Study*, 63.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.
- <sup>58</sup> Presbyterian Report, 473.