

The Masonic Witch Hunt of the 1980's

by
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A Review of THE BROTHERHOOD (The Secret World of the Freemasons) by Stephen Knight

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"Freemasonry, although its leaders strenuously deny it, is a secret society." The members, including judges, policemen, politicians, and royalty usually break the Unlawful Societies Act of 1799 when they meet and are liable for two years imprisonment.¹ With this strident note, Stephen Knight begins what he describes as an impartial description of British Freemasonry. THE BROTHERHOOD is, he insists, "neither a commendation nor a condemnation of Freemasonry."² But the opening paragraph, cited above, clearly indicates that this disclaimer, like most of the author's reasoning and conclusions, is rubbish. The book is not a disinterested examination of Freemasonry, but a bitter denunciation.

The author seems to understand the organization and history of Freemasonry reasonably well, although he is misinformed on some points. For example, he is unaware that the operative lodges that erected the great buildings of the Middle Ages closely guarded the secret means of recognizing an itinerant craftsman for practical, economic reasons.³ He also seems unaware that modern Freemasonry is descended not from the guilds of masons in important cities, but from the operative lodges which functioned at the sites of major construction.⁴ Although he cites the Old Charges, he fails to notice that they gave practical rules for conduct and workmanship for Master Masons and workmen of their day.⁵ He did not understand that the third degree was not introduced until the transition from operative to speculative masonry. The third degree did not appear in Scotland until 1726.⁶ He is under the impression that "lodge doings" are secret. They are not. Comprehensive minutes are written for each meeting. Anything Masonic which is proper to be written is not considered secret. He

describes the Sovereign Grand Commander of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite as "Britain's highest Freemason, whatever might be said of the Duke of Kent, the current Grand Master of Craft Masonry."⁷ Masons recognize this as nonsense. The Grand Master is supreme in every jurisdiction. These misapprehensions do not affect the overall impression of the text. The book is not an effort to describe Freemasonry but to denounce it.

There is a brief appearance of fairness. The reader is warned not to attribute the evil deeds to Freemasonry as a body. Individual Freemasons, he says, were responsible for the death of the American William Morgan in 1828, the poisoning of Mozart for revealing secrets in THE MAGIC FLUTE, and the 1888 Jack the Ripper murders which he alleges were committed "according to Masonic ritual."⁸ The result of equating the acts of individual Freemasons with those of Freemasonry as a whole is that, Knight contends, "some people, even today, look on Freemasonry as an underground movement devoted to murder, terrorism and revolution."⁹ One might be led to the same erroneous conclusion by reading THE BROTHERHOOD. In fact, the sincerity of the author is called into question in that "The Morgan Affair" and Jack the Ripper murders, although generating much anti-Masonic hysteria were never solved. The rumor that Mozart was poisoned by Masons is no more than a rumor.

Knight makes a number of specific charges against Freemasonry:

1. That Freemasonry has infiltrated the police and facilitated the promotion of incompetent officers, protected dishonest

ones, and has made a life of crime easy for Masonic criminals who settle their differences with society at Lodge rather than in court.

2. That Masons illegally obtain confidential information about adversaries through the Masonic network, using Masonic bankers, postal officials, employers, doctors, lawyers, and others.
3. That membership in a lodge makes employment by Masonic owners and managers a matter of fraternal favoritism.
4. That Masonic membership is helpful in gaining preferment in the judiciary and that ties linking Masonic judges, lawyers, and defendants may influence the verdict or sentence.
5. That local governments to a large degree and the national government to a lesser degree are manipulated by Freemasons for their own benefit.
6. That Freemasonry is, for all practical purposes, a religion with its own distinct God, the Great Architect of the Universe. Even worse, Masonry is devil worship. It is therefore incompatible with Christianity, Knight contends, although this last assertion seems to be gilding the derogatory lily.
7. That "the Church of England has been a stronghold of Freemasonry for more than 200 years."¹⁰ Preferment and peaceable tenure of clerical office may depend on Masonic membership.
8. That "a masonic conspiracy of gigantic proportions" was effected through the Italian Lodge Propaganda Due [Propaganda Lodge No. 2, in English usage], shaking the Italian government to its foundations.¹¹
9. That the Russian secret police (KGB) were not only behind the Propaganda 2 scandal,

but have infiltrated British Freemasonry, so that Russian exploitation of the evils inherent in Freemasonry pose a major Masonic threat to the survival of a democratic government in Great Britain.

10. That the United Grand Lodge, although it has the power to revoke the charter of a subordinate Lodge guilty of corporate immorality, never takes punitive action. Masons who exploit the privileges of membership "are hardly ever expelled."¹²

The disparity between Freemasonry as perceived by Stephen Knight and as experienced in Scotland, England, Japan, and a number of American jurisdictions would be difficult to exaggerate. Instead of the vile chicanery described by Mr. Knight, I have consistently seen open-hearted and open-handed men of character practicing the friendship, morality, and brotherly love for which the Brotherhood exists.

The religious issue raised by the book should be of deep concern to Masons as well as those who look with suspicion at the Fraternity. The criticism seems to take three distinct concepts: conflict with the Roman Catholic Church, worship of the Great Architect of the Universe, and incompatibility with Christianity.

For nearly ten pages, details are given about the relations between Freemasonry and the Roman Catholic Church. However, all the data concerns criticism of Masonry by the Roman Church. Nothing suggests that the Masons have ever criticized the Catholic Church.

The charge that Freemasonry either is a distinct religion, or has its own religion, ruled by the Great Architect of the Universe is groundless. The Great Architect of the Universe is a recurring theme in medieval religious art. God is depicted in the act of creating the world with a pair of compasses in his hand, laying out His designs.

In response to the charge that Freemasonry is not compatible with Christianity, it must be admitted that Freemasonry is not an expression of Christian theology. If it were, which Christian theology would it embrace? With which denomination would it have to join in partnership? Would it be expected to engage in the religious warfare that has plagued humanity? Masonry does not champion a single religion or any sect of Christianity. Masonry advocates no "one true church," but feels that the relationship of each man with God is an essential but private dimension of life. Masonic Lodges or other groups of Masons, such as a Royal Arch Chapter, may attend worship as a body. Worship services are commonly held in a church or synagogue, conducted by the clergy (whether Masons or not) there. There is no secret ritual connected with worship.

When I first became active as Masonic Chaplain, I assumed that a large proportion of Masons shifted their religious allegiance to the Lodge. However, careful investigation has shown this assumption to be wrong. Most active Masons in this jurisdiction are also active members of their churches and synagogues. Masonry offers a valuable adjunct to the religions of the world, including Christianity, in that it respects the religion of the individual and offers a bond of friendship that transcends the strife so common between religious partisans.

Mr. Knight is not suggesting that the Church is a threat to all that is good and decent in our world, although the list of abuses of power and office by functionaries, clerical and lay, of institutional Christianity is long indeed. The sins of the Church include the more dreadful waging of war in the name of the Prince of Peace as well as the more subtle sins of pride and greed, which may be, at the Day of Judgment, as serious offenses. There are even those who have said that the Church is incompatible with Christianity. Yet, the Church is an asset to the world because of what it proclaims and what it does. In a modest way, much the same can be said about Masonry.

The preponderance of evidence cited by the book supports the thesis that Freemasonry is a vicious desecration of the ideals of society for the benefit of corrupt Masons. One compelling example is the "Countryman" investigation of the City of London police a few years ago. It would seem to the casual reader that the investigation revealed a great Masonic conspiracy. However, although the names and crimes of guilty policemen who are Masons are given, there is nothing to indicate that Masonic membership was anything more than coincidental. If the investigation concluded that Freemasonry was a factor in the crime wave, that fact is not mentioned. Another example is that of Propaganda 2, with a detailed account of the illegal activities of this group, without mentioning that the charter of the group had been revoked by the Grand Lodge of Italy before the scandal. In fairness, it must be noted that THE BROTHERHOOD makes occasional mention of Masonic charity or states that Masonry was the making of a man, but page after page is devoted to what must be described as Masonic depravity. It is difficult for the uninitiated reader to come to any conclusion but that Masonry is a vile and violent threat to every honest, decent, patriotic, and religious person. The book begins with the charge that Masonry is breaking the law and ends with a hint that Masonry may have been behind the invasion of the Falkland Islands.

If we judge only by the sales of the book in Great Britain, this work is certainly successful commercial journalism, but it is not research. There are too many uncited references, too many unverifiable reports, too much speculation, too many isolated instances from which the reader may inaccurately extrapolate a generally evil illusion of Masonry.

THE BROTHERHOOD appeals to the emotions, not to the mind. It, therefore, makes fascinating reading for the easily excitable and the uncritical. Its main attribute, however, is an aggressive, unfair sensationalism.

NOTES

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- ¹ Knight, op. cit., p. 1.
 - ² Ibid., p. 4.
 - ³ Coulton, G. G., *MEDIEVAL FAITH AND SYMBOLISM*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1928, Chapters VII-IX.
 - ⁴ Coil, Henry Wilson, Sr., *FREEMASONRY THROUGH SIX CENTURIES*, Richmond, VA: Macoy, 1967, Vol. I, Chapters II - VIII.
 - ⁵ Vide T. E. Weir, "A Taste of History," *THE ROYAL ARCH MAGAZINE*, Vol. 14, No. 9, Spring 1984, pp. 268 f.
 - ⁶ *GRAND LODGE OF SCOTLAND YEARBOOK*, 1985, p. 51.
 - ⁷ Knight, op. cit., p. 43.
 - ⁸ Ibid., p. 3; p. 49.
 - ⁹ Ibid., p. 3.
 - ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 240.
 - ¹¹ Ibid., p. 269.
 - ¹² Ibid., p. 307.