

THE RIFT

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Delivered April 15, 2002
To The Grand Junction Scottish
Rite Bodies



A rift developed between the Freemasons and the Vatican many years ago. There have been attempts to reconcile the differences, but the Vatican still feels there are significant differences. The causes of the rift lie in European history, a subject of which I have a poor understanding. Bro. William G. Madison has thoughtfully and meticulously explored this area in a series of articles titled *THE MITER AND THE TROWEL*. It is his work that I have summarized.

Everyone has heard the following two questions:

1. Why are Masons anti Catholic?
2. Why is the Catholic church anti Masonic?

Modern regular Masons are not anti Catholic. They only require that you believe in a Supreme Being.

The short answer to the second question is that the church found itself in direct opposition to most of the goals of the Enlightenment, and Freemasonry was the only identifiable body whose goals generally supported those of the Enlightenment. Condemnation of Freemasonry was safe since traditionally the Craft refuses to defend itself against scurrilous attacks.

The Enlightenment was an 18th century European philosophical movement characterized by rationalism, an impetus toward learning and a spirit of skepticism and empiricism in social and political thought.

The Church's condemnation was spearheaded by a series of twenty one bulls published between 1738 and 1902. The Church condemned Freemasonry on seven counts:

1. Supporting public education.
2. Supporting separation of Church and State.
3. Supporting equality of all men, including clergy, under the law.
4. Advocating complete religious tolerance.

The Craft is certainly "guilty" of these four counts. In fact they are the foundation of our Constitution How could anyone object to these principles? More about this shortly.

5. Advocating or condoning overthrow of Church and State.

There may possibly have been some basis for this, if one makes the error of equating the Italian Masonry of that period with the entire Masonic Fraternity. From their foundation the Italian Grand Lodge, if not explicitly anti clerical, was strongly political.

6. Having sacrilegious and obscene practices as a part of its ritual.
7. Practicing Satanism.

These last two charges are of course totally false.

To understand how and why all of this took place we must look at the changes that were occurring in European history, Freemasonry, and the Catholic church. These events are intertwined.

First let us look to the burgeoning of the age of Enlightenment. There was an explosion of original political and social thought. Locke, Hume, Newton, Spinoza and Voltaire will challenge conventional wisdom in the areas of philosophy, government and religion. The idea that human reason is the only possible guide to wisdom will become accepted and anticlericalism will become a force to reckoned with in Rome.

The ideas of original sin and the necessity of Divine redemption have been rejected and replaced by the idea that the human condition can be improved through the effort of individuals and human nature.

Voltaire advanced the idea of equal rights under the law and completely rejects the concept of any absolute authority. He considered the Church to be among the greatest oppressors of mankind because of its absolutism; its insistence that it has the only truth and its demand for complete obedience.

Montisquieu promoted the idea of a government based on separation of powers into legislative, executive, and judicial branches with checks and balances.

John Locke published his *SECOND TREATISE ON CIVIL GOVERNMENT*, rejecting the idea of Divinely inspired or sanctioned

government. The list goes on. As you can see the Church would be striped of its political power.

Freemasonry defines itself as a system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. While this definition is universally true, it must be realized that there is no single entity known as Freemasonry. Freemasonry is made up of men who assemble in Lodges. A Lodge is a group of Masons organized into autonomous Grand Lodges. Each Grand Lodge practices Masonry in its own way, but according to certain fundamental principles. The chief among these for all regular Grand Lodges is a belief in the "The brotherhood of man under to Fatherhood of God."

The earliest unequivocal reference to Freemasonry, *The Regius Poem*, outlines much of the conduct of the Craft at the time and has been reliably dated around 1390. The language suggests that the Craft had been in existence for a long time prior to the 14th century. The language also hints of the relationship with the Church.

Though tradition holds that Masonry had its genesis in the craft guilds of the European cathedral building period, this almost certainly is fiction. Current historical research indicated a confluence of traditions resulting in what we now recognize as Freemasonry. The most prominent of these were the European Craft Lodges of Stone Masons, The Knights Templar and much later the Jacobites.

During this time the Craft was strongly Catholic. This position softened some what following the Protestant Reformation. Masonry required its members to adhere to the religion of the country in which they were living and working. The religion was strongly Christian but no longer exclusively Catholic. About 1600 a new view come to be held. A view which required only a belief in a Supreme Being, leaving the name of this Being and the manner of worship solely to the conscience of the individual. This view was formalized in 1723 in the Old Charges, one of the foundation stones upon which modern Freemasonry rests. This event finalizes the movement of the Craft from an exclusively Catholic body to its present character as a common ground for all who believe in a Supreme Being, however they wish to worship.

In 1733 the Duke of Dorset established a Lodge at Florence, Italy. He apparently did this on his own initiative for no warrant empowering him to do so has ever been found. The fortunes of the Craft were shaky at first, until the Grand Duke of Tuscany was initiated. Then the prospects of the Craft improved greatly. From the beginning, Italian Masonry was outspokenly political. By 1737 the membership of the Lodge at Florence included the best of local society; men of education, learning, and culture, poets and painters; priests and politicians. The unconventional views and the wealth of some of

the members attracted the attention of the Inquisition. In June of that year, at a conference of Cardinals held in Rome under the chairmanship of the Chief Inquisitor of Florence, the first bull to condemn Freemasonry, *IN EMINENTI*, was drafted.

The Inquisition could trace its origins back to the 5th century when it was set up to discover and punish heresy. For over 1000 years it was largely autonomous and was not answerable even to the pope. Its powers began to decline in the 16th century, coincident with the rise of the Reformation. By the 18th century it could usually be ignored with impunity. With the rise in naturalism, rationalism, and anticlericalism it could no longer command a strong hold on the lives of the people of Post Renaissance Europe.

With this back ground it is understandable that ambitious men would be alert for opportunities to re-capture their earlier power and wealth. The drafting of *IN EMINENTI* was not only understandable but perhaps inevitable. Unfortunately for the Church, its effect was the opposite of that desired as the Craft was growing in influence while the Church's influence was declining. Thus it was natural for the church to forbid its adherents to join the Craft.

Let us look at the basis that *IN EMINENTI* set forth for the condemnation of Freemasonry. Specifically:

1. Masonry is formed by men of any religion. Religious indifferentism must be condemned by the Church since the Church believes that it holds to the only Truth and therefore may tolerate no country opinion.

2. Members have pledged by a strict and unbreakable bond which obliges them, both by an oath and a host of grievous punishments to an inviolable silence about all that they do in secret. This must be condemned by the Church, since it believes that it must act as the only intercessor for forgiveness of sins.

3. They do not hold by either civil or canonical sanctions. Freemasonry does not even permit political or religious discussions to take place.

4. There are other just and reasonable motives known only to us.

The Church had long held to a doctrine that it alone was granted the wisdom and knowledge to interpret God's will for the faithful. Thus the Church could not be sympathetic to an organization which accepted men of any religious stripe into its ranks.

By the time of their arrest and suppression in 1307, the Templars were undoubtedly the richest organization in the known world. By simply calling a small portion to their outstanding loans they could have bankrupted France, put the Church into serious financial difficulty, and upset the financial stability of much of Europe. The Freemasons were a party to the concealment of the Templars and were automatically guilty of heresy. So now there are political, religious and economic motives for the suppression of Freemasonry.

The manner in which this bull was done fostered a virulent anticlericalism within Italian and French Masonry. Thus its effect was the opposite of that desired by the Church. So it is not surprising that no further strong papal denunciations occurred for many years.

In 1840 the Italian war of unification begins. While this specific adventure failed, it reflects the rise of strong nationalistic sentiments in Italy which were linked to a feeling of anticlericalism.

By 1840 Italy, with the exception of the Papal States, had been unified through the efforts of the combined Italian armies under the leadership of the Freemason Giuseppe Garibaldi. He was stopped from conquering the Papal States and bringing them into unified Italy only because they fell under the protection of France and Napoleon III. The fact that Garibaldi was a Freemason must have been the final element in the proof that Freemasonry was in opposition to the Church.

In 1870 the Franco-Prussian War broke out, forcing Napoleon to withdraw his protection of the Papal States. Thus with the door left open, the Italian army, under Garibaldi the Freemason, entered Rome. The Church was stripped of the last of its temporal domains and authority. Again, there was a failure to distinguish between Latin Freemasonry and that practiced elsewhere.

One year later, 1871, Rome is declared the capital of united Italy under Victor Emmanuel II. With this declaration, the papacy enters a voluntary exile inside the Vatican from which it won't emerge until the signing of the Lateran Treaty in 1929. By this time, Mussolini's Fascist Party was in control.

Leo XIII was elected in 1878. His election marked the end of the "interregnum" and the beginning of full scale attacks by the Church on the Craft. As he was 68 years old at the time of his election he must have been regarded as a short term fill in, but he reigned for twenty five years. While he worked to advance and liberalize Catholic education and to arrive at an

accommodation between science and the Church, he was unable to recognize that natural science, education or political science could walk hand in hand on an equal footing with the Church, in his view the Church must always be supreme.

One must sympathize with Leo. He had seen the Church, which had never hesitated to use both its political and spiritual power to achieve its ends, forced to rely strictly on its spiritual power. He saw the Church stripped and beggared. With the Age of Enlightenment sweeping the world, he was an essential liberal bound with unbreakable ties to a conservative institution. In an attempt to come to terms with his times Leo issued a series of one hundred seventeen bulls and encyclicals, or an average of five per year. But he was powerless to halt the effects of the Enlightenment, especially nationalism, to the prerogatives of the Church. Freemasonry, the visible embodiment and bulwark of ideas which were hateful to him became the symbol as well as the agent of the wonton destruction of all the he held dear.

The bull, *HUMANUM GENUS*, published in 1884, is held by the Masonic Fraternity as the arch type of anti Masonic propaganda, and Leo XIII as one of the chief persecutors of the Craft. It accuses the Craft of many ideas of which it is quite proud of. Albert Pike said *HUMANUM GENUS* was not only a brutal attack upon Freemasonry, but an attack upon the human race and progress.

In 1961 the Supreme Council authorized that each candidate at the completion of the 30° be given a copy of The Letter "*HUMANUM GENUS*" of The Pope, Leo XIII Against Freemasonry and the Spirit Of The Age April 20, 1884 And The Reply of Albert Pike, 33° Sovereign Grand Commander of The Supreme Council, 33° Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry.

Unfortunately, the inaccuracies and distortions contained in *HUMANUM GENUS* have driven a wedge between the Craft and the Church which has thus far been impossible to totally overcome.

With in a few months of the publication of *HUMANUM GENUS* the American bishops issued a pastoral letter vigorously supporting *HUMANUM GENUS*. The message it conveys runs counter to the core teachings of Freemasonry. Hence it magnifies the distance between the Church and the Craft.

In 1917 Benedict promulgates a new code of canon law, containing article 2335 which explicitly forbids access of Freemasonry, under punishment of automatic excommunication. Nothing further was officially heard from the Church for many years.

The election of John XXIII in 1958 seemed to signal a change in wind direction but there was no change in official position. After the election of Paul VI in 1963 there was a partial relaxation in the Church's position on many items. This spirit was carried further by Vatican II as proclaimed in the declaration *DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ*.

The new spirit of openness under Paul even permitted the clergy to openly disagree with the hierarchy. A Spanish Jesuit published a book in 1968 which argued that the bans of the papal bulls should not be extended to regular Grand Lodges.

In 1971, two English Freemasons were permitted by the Holy See to join the Church without renouncing their Masonic affiliations. This had happened before in many parishes, but 1971 marks the first occasion on which the Vatican had explicitly given permission.

In 1974 the Congregation of The Doctrine of The Faith reinterprets article 2335 of canon law saying that it only pertains to Lodges known to be hostile to the Church. A new code of canon law 1374 was published in 1983 which only forbids association with organizations known to be hostile to the Church.

With the pronouncement of canon 1374 there was a general feeling that the door was open for cooperation, that the period of ill will of the past 200 years was at an end. This optimism was soon called into question.

The 20 year period of toleration and dialog beginning with the election of John XXIII was paced in jeopardy in 1978 with the election of John Paul II.

Only days before the new article 1374 was to go into effect a new pronouncement, *QUA ESI TUM EST* was issued, supposedly clarifying the article 1374 pronouncement. In effect it said article 1374 doesn't really mean what it says. Nothing has changed

Since 1983 numerous voices with in the Church have called for relaxation of the Church's attitude toward Freemasonry. Also, some dioceses have rejected the authority of *QUAESITUM EST*. Nothing of an official nature from the Vatican however has emerged.

So, while the future appears promising, the end of this bit of history has not yet been written.

While reconciliation at the official level moves with glacial speed, fortunately it is quite different at the local level. The cooperation of various Masonic bodies and St. Mary's hospital, a fine Catholic hospital is both amicable and productive.

ED NOTE: For a good understanding of Freemasonry and politics in 18th century Europe *LIVING THE ENLIGHTENMENT* by Margaret C. Jacob is highly recommended.

Source material:

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