



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS IN THE EXPERT FORUMS

Freemasonry

Declaration on Masonic Associations (Quaesitum est)

English Translation of a Latin Document from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith November 26, 1983

It has been asked whether there has been any change in the Church's decision in regard to Masonic associations since the new Code of Canon Law does not mention them expressly, unlike the previous code.

This sacred congregation is in a position to reply that this circumstance is due to an editorial criterion which was followed also in the case of other associations likewise unmentioned inasmuch as they are contained in wider categories.

Therefore, the Church's negative judgment in regard to Masonic associations remains unchanged since their principles have always been considered irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Church and, therefore, membership in them remains forbidden. The faithful, who enroll in Masonic associations are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion.

It is not within the competence of local ecclesiastical authorities to give a judgment on the nature of Masonic associations which would imply a derogation from what has been decided above, and this in line with the declaration of this sacred congregation issued Feb. 17, 1981. [1]

In an audience granted to the undersigned cardinal prefect, the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II approved and ordered the publication of this declaration which had been decided in an ordinary meeting of this sacred congregation.

Rome, from the Office of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Nov. 26, 1983

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect
Father Jerome Hamer, O.P. Titular Archbishop of Lorum, Secretary

1. Cf. AAS 73 (1981) pp. 240-241.

[This and other Church documents, as well as theological articles, are in our Library.
Keyword Search: masonry]

As the declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on Masonry says, no Catholic may be a Mason. By grave sin the Church means that to continue as a Mason in contempt of this decision of the Supreme Pontiff, Pope John Paul II, is grave matter, which together with knowledge of that fact and free choice makes for mortal sin. Such a person would be unable to receive Holy Communion until such time as he renounced Masonry and went to Confession. You will also notice that the statement of Cardinal Ratzinger says that the local priest or even a bishop has no authority to change this.

Someone who was not aware of these facts would, of course, not be guilty of mortal sin. However, once a Catholic is aware of the Church's position, he is obliged to follow it. From that point forward, to disregard the judgment of the Church would be, as the Congregation declares, seriously wrong.

Some have tried to say that American Masonry is different from European Masonry, which has a history of plotting against the government and the Church. The basic problem with all Masonry, however, is that it is a society which fosters a religious-philosophical attitude of indifference to religious truth, even substituting its own naturalistic dogma and rituals for those of Christianity. Such indifference is incompatible with belief in the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation. We may not "play-act" in the lodge of the Great Architect on Thursday night, then worship "in spirit and in truth" on Sunday morning at the altar of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the unique Lord and Redeemer of the Universe, the Word-made-flesh who reveals the Father, and who together with the Father sends the Holy Spirit. The Creed and the Masonic oath are irreconcilable!

Masonry is not the Jaycees, in which people of all religions and philosophies come together to work on local business problems. Masonry has its own religious and philosophical worldview, its own religious language, its rituals and its morality. In the library of every lodge you will find Albert Pike's *Morals and Dogma*. A top American Mason, he is the greatest writer on the real meaning behind Masonic beliefs and rituals. Even the title of his book shows that Masonry has a morality and a doctrine. If they are not Catholic morality and Catholic doctrine, and in fact they aren't even Christian, a Catholic or any Christian may not follow them. This is why, since the 1700s the popes have consistently rejected Freemasonry as incompatible with the faith. The motives and works of most masons may be good and benign, but this does not change the choice which the Catholic has to make between the religious philosophy of masonry and that of Catholicism.

If you wish to learn more you can go to any Protestant or Catholic bookstore and find books and pamphlets that show why Masonry and Christianity is incompatible. (Not only Rome, but also the Church of England and the Southern Baptists have ruled so.) I especially recommend the encyclical letter of Pope Leo, which is available from the Daughters of St. Paul in Boston (1-800-876-4463).

Answered by Colin B. Donovan, STL

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