Greetings and Compliments of the season Brethren
Here is a peper I received quite recently. Perhaps you might enjoy it.

Another important Paper from Wor Tim Bryce
FREEMASONRY AND RELIGION: ADVERSARIES OR ALLIES? by W. Tim Bryce, PM, MPS HTUtimb001@phmainstreet.comUTH Palm Harbor, Florida, USA "A Foot Soldier for Freemasonry"

"Through Freemasonry, however, I have had opportunity to break bread with good men of other than my own Christian faith. Freemasonry does not promote any one religious creed. All Masons believe in the Deity without reservation. However, Masonry makes no demands as to how a member thinks of the Great Architect of the Universe. Freemasonry is, for all its members, a supplement to good living which has enhanced the lives of millions who have entered its doors. Though it is not a religion, as such, it supplements faith in God the Creator. It is supporting of morality and virtue.

Freemasonry has no dogma or theology. It offers no sacraments. It teaches that it is important for every man to have a religion of his own choice and to be faithful to it in thought and action. As a result, men of different religions meet in fellowship and brotherhood under the fatherhood of God. I think that a good Mason is made even more faithful to the tenets of his faith by his membership in the Lodge." - The Reverend Dr. Norman Vincent Peale

I remember the horror in the eyes of my Irish Catholic in-laws when they discovered I had become a Mason. According to them, the Masons were responsible for all of the union problems over the years and were not to be trusted. I also remember the shocked expression on the face of the rector of my Episcopal Church when he found me participating in a Masonic funeral service at the church. Fortunately, he was a little more understanding and asked me about the fraternity. Up until then, he had been suffering under the misconception that Masons were anti-Christian. Obviously, these are not isolated incidents, overcoming misconceptions is something Masons have grown accustomed to over the years. I guess it goes with the territory. Even in our degree work we are charged not to get into arguments with those who, through ignorance, may ridicule us. I have to question the validity of this charge in today's world. True, Masons like to maintain a low profile, but make no mistake about it, the fraternity is still under attack by religious institutions, which hurts us by clouding the minds of the public and affects our membership.

Let me say unequivocally from the outset that Freemasonry is not a threat to religion. Instead, it is probably one of the strongest proponents of organized religion. To become a Mason, a person must believe in a supreme being; an atheist is ineligible to join the fraternity. This criterion is not done to contest the candidate's beliefs as it is to act as a litmus test of the moral fiber of the person. I have personally seen men of many different faiths initiated into the fraternity; Christians, Jews, and Muslim. Following this, talk of religion (and politics) is barred from discussion in a Masonic Lodge so that it doesn't cause any contention and discontent between members. True, we offer a nonsectarian prayer to open and close a Lodge, but this is essentially no different than what military chaplains offer in the field and offends no particular faith.

If you were to ask what religion Freemasonry adheres to, you might as well ask what political party we support (e.g., Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, Socialist, Independent, etc.). Frankly, such talk is inconsequential as it is simply not discussed.

This is a key reason why Masons enjoy harmony in the Lodge. We may not agree with each other's religious beliefs but we respect the individual's right to practice his own faith. This is called "religious tolerance," something more people should practice. Opponents to Freemasonry
believe the fraternity should be used as a bully-pulpit to preach the gospel of a particular religious denomination and try to convert people to their point of view. Hogwash. This is not what we are about. This is a fraternity; a Brotherhood that promotes fellowship, morality, charity, integrity, citizenship, honor, and brotherly love. The ultimate aim of Freemasonry is world peace and harmony, not world domination as some critics argue.

Another gross misconception of the fraternity in the middle East is that Freemasonry originated from Judaism. This misunderstanding is the primary reason why the offices of the Grand Lodge of Turkey was bombed a couple of years ago. Again, this is self-inflicted ignorance as preached by religious extremists/terrorists in the middle East. If you go into any Masonic Lodge you will find a "Volume of Sacred Law" on the Lodge's alter to represent divine guidance. In those Lodges where the membership is primarily Christian, you will find the Holy Bible; in a Jewish Lodge you will find the Torah, and; in the Lodges in Turkey, I will guarantee you will find a Koran (I'll bet the terrorists did not know this). As an aside, when Masons are initiated, the candidate's holy book of choice is used in the ceremony.

RECENT EVENTS
Over the years, various religions have cast a suspicious eye on Freemasonry; Southern Baptists in the United States, the Anglican Church in England and Australia, the Presbyterian Church in Africa, and, of course, the Catholic Church. The division between the Catholic Church and Freemasonry is an old one dating back in history. Frankly, the reasons for the division gets cloudier with the passing of each year but widened recently with the passing of Pope John Paul II and the election of Pope Benedict XVI. Following the new Pope's installation, the following item appeared in the HTUCatholic News ServiceUTH:

*Found among the list of the principal public documents and decisions issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from 1981 to 2005 when Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) was prefect of the office was the following item:*

**NOV 26, 1983:** "Declaration on Masonic Associations," saying Masonic principles and rituals "embody a naturalistic" religion incompatible with Christianity. Those who knowingly embrace the principles or attend the rituals are involved in serious sin and may not receive Communion. Following the 9/11 disaster, the Grand Lodge of New York invited New York Governor George E. Pataki to become a Mason in recognition of his work responding to the disaster. Initially, Pataki was pleased to accept the offer and even posed for a photo with New York's Grand Master which was published on the cover of the HTU "Empire State Mason" UTH (New York's magazine). However, after the Catholic's declaration was brought to his attention (Pataki is a Catholic), he respectfully declined to join the fraternity.

The declaration has also led to problems in the Philippines where the local Bishop asked Catholics who are members of Freemasonry (and appendant bodies such as the Eastern Star) to stay out of the church:

"We would like to inform our Freemason brothers and sisters that you are no longer allowed to enter the church because your group contradicts the teachings of the Catholic Church." - Bishop Alo in a pastoral message read during masses

*Fr. Medardo Salomia, spiritual director of the Diocese of Mati, said Bishop Alo and majority of the priests in the province have also agreed not to give Holy Communion to Catholics who are members of Freemasonry.*

"The reason given why they are being barred from taking the Holy Communion was that they are being anti-Christ," Father Salomia said.
Do not look for Pope Benedict to change his mind regarding Freemasonry any time soon as the subject of secret societies is a pet project of his; see related stories at: HTUReference 1UTH HTUReference 2UTH

These recent events have been unsettling to Catholic Freemasons:
"Is it any wonder they call him the 'German Shepherd'? It is this incredible arrogance of the church that has caused me to stop having anything to do with the Catholic Church. This is just another example of how they believe that they are the end all, and be all, of everything to do with the GAOTU. The epitome of arrogance." - a Mason from Sarnia, Ontario, Canada

"My background is fourteen years of Catholic private schooling, altar boy, etc. Theology (four years) taught by French monks that came in the US as brothers vs. priest. We became French Catholic Theology students, so to speak, didn't know there was a difference until later in life. The teachings were pretty much the same as what I see in Masonry, treat each other with value and respect, the basic 10 commandments theme, with the difference being the church addition of specific scripture, a typical focus and part of religious beliefs, this is what makes a religion a religion. Masonry being non-religious, no scripture to believe in, cannot be a religion. I know it is hard to understand this when there is a Bible on an altar, prayer is given and things have names like catechism etc., should fall outside the above statement because it does not fit the incompatibility test. How can it be incompatible when it is pointedly non-religious? Masonry probably does itself a disservice by using the old terms and symbols that scare people looking for something to be scared of. I have spent plenty of time out in the field, doing crazy things to evaluate our military strength, sometimes I was asked, "Did you see any snakes?" My answer is always the same, "I wasn't looking for any." They might be there, I'm sure some exist, but I didn't have or let any of them hinder my mission. I'm convinced that if you go into the field looking for "snakes" you will indeed find them.

We were taught that each person, not just an ordained priest, has a special relationship with the trinity and no one can judge it but the two concerned. The fear of religious leaders is that they might lose followers, when they should be concerned with saving souls and doing good work. If they look to history, as we did, they will be enlightened as to the mistakes that are repeated continuously throughout history.

I have not seen the basis of the sin that is referenced here, like it is easy to see, killing an innocent person is wrong. Taking another's wife or goods is wrong. Brotherhood and passing on an old mouth-to-ear order of words being a sin needs more explaining. I think the author is misinformed and has not done the research and homework needed to make a clear accurate proclamation. Too gray an area, there is only mortal and venial as far as I know. Keep in mind the background, with all due respect, of the human person involved, Germany is very tender about any other than mainstream groups because of the Hitler event and their lack of action against such atrocities. Look how they went crazy over the Scientologists in Germany. I support my church, but it is my church, a church between me and my trinity as taught in theology at Trinity High School in the 1960's. Remember in the 60's it was a sin to be friends with a person of another faith. They would lead you to sin. You lead you to sin, not others. Others may need the road map to heaven, we were given it as were others of other religions. We studied the old and new testament, everything brought into context of the time it was written, a year on each. We studied every religion known to man at the time and considered the differences of the teaching and beliefs.
I could go on forever, but, I know I'm okay because I do not embrace Masonry as a naturalistic religion replacing my Catholic upbringing and I know plenty of other Catholics that are of the same mind.

We all hope for the "lessons learned" part of the middle east to surface and hope religious leaders of all faiths, get over the "I'm the right one" and see the error of that way. Unite for peace thru understanding, temperance and defensive posture, it is the only future we can have or give our loved ones. What we see today is the other choice. 

*Man is what messes up religion. History proves it.* - a Past Master from Dunedin, Florida, USA

**POLL**

Wanting to understand the separation of Religion and Masonry, I established some Internet polls through the various Masonic Discussion Groups I participate in throughout the world. The question was rather simple:

"If your place of worship (church/temple/mosque) said you must either abandon Freemasonry or the church, what would you do?"

3 (02%) - I would abandon Freemasonry
119 (93%) - I would abandon my place of worship and find another
6 (05%) - I would abandon my faith altogether

The results were to be expected. The overwhelming majority did not see any incompatibility between religion and the fraternity, but instead of causing a problem, they opted to move to another church where they could practice their faith.

Only a few others felt it necessary to choose sides. Here is a Brother who described why he would abandon Freemasonry:

"Well, I guess I am a stand out in this poll. Being a newer member of a lodge I can say without a doubt, I would abandon Freemasonry. I was told from the very beginning that Masonry should never interfere with your service to your family, your usual occupation or your service to God. I belong to my church because I believe and have faith in my pastor. He has the vision of God (through the Holy Spirit and the Holy Bible) and does His work within and outside of our church. If I had no faith in this I could not remain an active member there. Please don't think I belong to a cult or follow some nut job out there, our church is full of free thinking men and women who will let their opinion be known. Our pastor will listen to and consider all free thinking ideas, but when the final decision is made, it is made according to God's word (Holy Bible) and not our pastor's word. That is the reason I would abandon Freemasonry if it came down to a choice. I am very glad that choice will never have to be made. I spoke to my pastor before joining Masonry and although he is not a member of a lodge we have several members who are. My only problem is that there are several Brothers who attend my church who are Prince Hall Masons. In Tennessee our Grand Lodge does not recognize PH Masons. We treat each other as brothers anyway without holding any Masonic communication. But that is another discussion all together. Thank you for your time to hear me out." - a Mason from Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Another Brother felt entirely different:

"What has the Church done for me lately? First to criticize. Very dictatorial. Masonry promotes tolerance and mutual understanding.

If the choice was mandated by my Church, we would cease our association with each other. For I believe the terrible atrocities committed in those centuries past were by the Church that did not allow its parishioners the right to think for themselves.
As Freemasons this is our most treasured gift and ability. To be able to think for ourselves and to teach others of like minds to do the same for themselves is who and what we are. This is a major reason our way of life has existed for so many centuries! For if we cannot practice charity to or for whomever we wish, if we cannot have fellowship with whomever we wish or if we cannot hold a belief in whatever Supreme Being that we wish, what will our satisfaction be in belonging to a Church that refuses us these simple important pleasures?

I for one, like you too, believe in the life hereafter, and when push would come to shove, my relationship with my God is not hinged on belonging to a particular church! My faith in Him is contained in my heart, the same place my love for our ancient fraternity will live until the day that I die." - Past District Deputy Grand Master, Havre, Montana

OVERCOMING IGNORANCE

As I see it, this division between religion and Freemasonry is primarily our own doing. True, the ceremonies of the fraternity are well maintained secrets and, as far as I'm concerned, it is nobody's business but our own. After all, Masons have no intention in meddling in the workings of our places of worship, why should others meddle in ours? Aside from this, we have done a horrible job of communicating to the public about our stance on religion.

One of the best ways to overcome misconceptions with the public is to develop a one-on-one relationship with members of the clergy. Let me give you an example; I know of a Past Master living in Clearwater, Florida who considers himself a well-read Catholic and actively supports both his Church and Lodge. He invited his priest over to his house for dinner where they talked for hours about Freemasonry and cleared up a lot of the priest's misconceptions about the fraternity. I also know of another Brother who retired and taught Sunday School at his Baptist Church. Initially, his pastor was very suspicious when he discovered the Brother was a Mason. But over time he found the Brother to be an honest and honorable man, and an active supporter of the church. When the Brother passed away, the pastor not only wept, he openly welcomed the Masons into the church to perform a Masonic funeral service.

Knowing there is no discrepancy between practicing one's faith and Freemasonry, I invite all members of the clergy to contact a local lodge to discuss the fraternity and to find ways to work together. Better yet, I encourage all Masonic Lodges to establish a program to meet with the local clergy and discuss the fraternity. One-on-one meetings can overcome a lot of problems. Maintaining a total cloak of secrecy over the fraternity does nothing but cast a cloud of suspicion over our motives. We must take a pro-active approach to communications as opposed to reactive. Failure to do so leads to rumors and innuendos which only creates barriers.

Do we really have anything to hide? Not really. After all, are we the 'Good Guys' or the 'Bad Guys'? We're the 'Good Guys' who help the needy and try to make the world a better place by practicing charity, citizenship, patriotism, honesty and integrity. Let's continue to leave religion to those institutions charged with practicing it.

To summarize Freemasonry's stance on religion:

1. Yes, men of many faiths are Masons.
2. No, Freemasonry does not advocate a specific religion.
3. Yes, many Masons have been (and still are) members of the clergy.
4. No, Masons do not worship Lucifer.
5. Yes, Masons are regular church-goers.
6. No, Freemasonry is not a religion.
7. Yes, Masonic Lodges have been used by many religious faiths to hold service (Lodges also make their facilities available for boy/girl scouts, civic and governmental organizations, and other non-profit organizations).

Anyone who thinks otherwise probably has a hidden agenda.

So, to those religious orders reading this article, what will it be - allies or adversaries? Since Freemasonry respects religious institutions and encourages its members to attend the places of worship of their choice, why can't religion accept Freemasonry?

*Keep the Faith*