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MYSTICISM, MASCULINITY AND MASONRY

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Have you ever wondered why discussing religion is taboo during meetings of the Craft? Have you ever considered the reasons why females are not allowed to become Freemasons? Does this really have anything to do with our Ancient Landmarks? Why are there objections to Freemasonry on religious grounds? This paper will try to answer these questions and more.

Discussion of religion and women with respect to Freemasonry is by no means new. Back in 1923, J S M Ward, in *Freemasonry: Its Aims and Ideals*, enumerated a number of problems that the Craft would need to solve in the near future.[1] Some of these, such as the exclusion from Masonry of some with an African ancestry, are well on the way to being resolved. The acknowledgment of the legitimacy of Prince Hall Masonry is gradually permeating through American as well as Australian jurisdictions. Tony Pope's 1994 Kellerman lecture contributed to this acceptance in our part of the world in no small measure.[2] However, Ward also saw the relationship of Freemasonry to religion and the status of women within Freemasonry as problems that needed to be resolved. The position of these two has not materially changed since Ward's time.

The relationship of Freemasonry to religion and to women can be seen to be controversial. I know that many Masons will not agree with some, perhaps with all, of the propositions of this paper, but I also know that I am not alone in many of these opinions. Freemasonry is capable of being interpreted mystically. If Freemasonry has this mystical side, and if its members can gain some religious insights from this, in my opinion this is but one reason why we should acknowledge the existence of women Masons and be prepared to accept that they have as much right as us to gain from these insights. The place of women in the Craft will be considered later in this paper.

Unfortunately, I am not able to research these topics as well as I would have wished. I am not permitted to talk about religion with my brethren during Masonic events, at least where the Craft is concerned. Regular Grand Lodges discourage contact with members of lodges deemed to be irregular. In my own jurisdiction, the penalties for attending meetings of these irregular bodies are suspension or expulsion.[3] This has meant that I have not bounced around these ideas as much as I would have liked. I have not talked about the status of female Masons and Co-Masons with those who are members of those Orders, because Freemasons are discouraged from discussing Masonic matters with those who belong to Orders not recognised by their own Grand Lodge. So a large proportion of the research for this paper has been from secondary sources, namely books and the Internet. It would be useful if there was more scope for the discussion of religion and the position of women Masons, if only for research purposes.

The Lithgow incident

In my own jurisdiction, the question of religion has recently been given prominence. In December 2001, the rector of the Anglican parish of Lithgow in the Archdiocese of Sydney, the Rev Bill Winthrop, would not permit Freemasons and members of the Order of the Eastern Star to be part of his congregation unless they renounced their Masonic allegiances. A Past Grand Master, MWBro Harold Coates, whose family had been members of that church for generations, was one of those who was rejected from his own church. When Harold Coates subsequently died in April 2002, the rector refused to allow the funeral service to be conducted at his church. The local Uniting Church, with what could be termed a more Christ-like consideration, was prepared to conduct this service.[4] In 2003, this same rector moved a motion at the Sydney Anglican Synod regarding the incompatibility of Anglicanism and Freemasonry. This motion was

passed. As my mother lodge [5] is a lodge associated with a Sydney Anglican school, the repercussions of this motion worry me.

Despite discussion of religion being proscribed, this incident has engendered some talk both in the lodge room and in the South. In fact, the synod resolution produced a uniform response from brethren. I have also heard religion discussed in Masonic circles on other occasions and this has not produced disharmony. Even when there have been differences of opinion, discussion of religion can produce interesting and insightful exchanges. The disharmony predicted from the discussion of religion has not been realised, at least from my observations.

The Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, MWBro Tony Lauer, issued a response to the Synod's resolution. He sees it as being based on two 'fundamental errors', namely that 'Freemasonry teaches and upholds a system of false religions', and that 'Freemasonry and Christianity are fundamentally and irreconcilably incompatible'. [6] He argues against Synod's case, pointing out that Freemasonry encourages its members to practise their own religious duties according to the religious beliefs that they hold; however they must believe in a Supreme Being and be tolerant of the beliefs of others. He states that 'Freemasonry is not and cannot be regarded as a religion. It neither possesses nor teaches a theology nor any system of salvation'. From this it can be inferred that the Grand Master sees both the teaching of a theology and possessing a system of salvation as basic requirements for a religion. This point was again made in his address to the National Press Club in Canberra, [7] where he said that 'Freemasonry is *not* a religion, nor does it preach salvation through good deeds'. [8] He also said that religion is defined by 'a specific theology and by a particular statement of doctrine' and, because Freemasonry 'has neither dogma nor any creed or doctrinal statement nor is there a specific masonic god', Freemasonry is not a religion. Not all would agree with this. Perhaps this is one of the difficulties in reconciling the differing opinions between Freemasons and people of an anti-Masonic disposition. What is really meant by the term 'religion'?

Masonry and religion

Is Freemasonry a religion? Some Masons have claimed that it is. These have included J S M Ward and Albert Pike. They are frequently quoted in anti-Masonic literature in attempts to show the incompatibility of Freemasonry with the particular religions held by those opposing Freemasonry. Ward wrote: 'I consider Freemasonry is a sufficiently organised school of mysticism to be entitled to be called a religion' [9] and Albert Pike wrote: 'Every Masonic Lodge is a temple of religion and its teachings are instruction in religion'. [10] Although, it is interesting to note that Pike contradicts this by writing 'Masonry is not a religion. He who makes of it a religious belief, falsifies and denaturalizes it'. [11] This latter quotation is not cited in anti-Masonic literature.

The difficulty is mainly one of definition. What Ward means by religion I suspect differs from that assumed by anti-Masons. The same can be said for Pike, although many of his ideas are not held by the majority of Masons, contrary to the authority that Pike is given in anti-Masonic circles as a spokesman for Freemasonry in general. [12] The majority of mainstream Masonic jurisdictions, however, are adamant that Masonry is not a religion in any manner whatsoever. Apart from the question of definition, another reason for this is, I suspect, to try to deflect claims about the incompatibility of religion and the Craft.

Consequently, the mainstream Grand Lodges and many individual Masons are inclined to belittle the ideas of the likes of Ward, Wilmshurst, and Waite, as well as those of Pike. The first three of these brethren were of a mystical disposition. Religions have always had difficulties with mystics. Part of the mystic's quest is to find union with God, yet to express this identity with the Divine is not looked upon favourably by the established religions. In the 11th century the Sufi Al-Hallaj was put to death for claiming that he was God. Ten centuries earlier, Jesus of Nazareth was put to death for making the same claim. Religions can feel threatened by those who believe that they can find the Divine independently of established faiths. Those who see this mystical side in Freemasonry can give cause for concern for some traditional members of established religions, particularly those who believe that their religion has a unique and exclusive

relationship with God. Consequently, there can be a tendency for Masons themselves to feel uncomfortable with any esoteric or mystical interpretation of their ritual. So, mystical Masons are not universally revered by their brethren, and their ideas are often not given the consideration that they deserve.

Definitions of religion

What is religion? Many have tried to define the term religion, with varying degrees of success. One definition was given (*above*) by the Grand Master of my own jurisdiction. The Anglican theologian John Macquarrie gives another definition. He sees religion as ‘the whole complex of structures that grows up around the giving and receiving of revelation. Through this complex, the attitude of faith finds expression in the world’.[13]

Macquarrie distinguishes between ‘a general abstract conception of religion’ and ‘the concrete religions that are actually practiced [*sic*]’. Although admitting that a few philosophers have advocated ‘religion in the abstract’, he makes the point that to most people religion ‘assumes a concrete form’, having originated from ‘a particular occasion of revelation’, which in turn is received in ‘a particular situation, and in a particular historical culture’. Macquarrie then poses the question as to whether this particularity invalidates any general inquiry from this starting point, and answers that it does not, even though a perspective is implied.[14] Macquarrie writes:[15]

One can commit oneself within one’s own community of faith and in terms of the symbols established in that community, and yet believe that for a person in other circumstances, the same God reveals himself in another community and under different symbols, and that there may be nothing defective or inadequate about that person’s commerce with God.

From Macquarrie’s definition, two relevant points can be made. Firstly, religion is a revelation, and secondly, this revelation by God does not have to be the same for all peoples at all times and in all circumstances. Revelation can simply be any act of revealing or disclosing. Freemasonry can claim to be a revelation on this basis because much is revealed or, perhaps more accurately, Freemasonry gives its members the opportunity to explore matters both profane and sacred. Its revelation is often a self-revelation that can be obtained either by contemplation of its ritual or by discussion with like-minded brethren. However, revelation in a religious sense more usually involves insights from the Ultimate Reality, whom many call God. As most Freemasons do not claim that their rituals are revealed by God, in this sense most Freemasons do not see Freemasonry as being a religion.

However, it does have religious tendencies, and Freemasons should acknowledge and even be proud of this. Some religions have made anti-Masonic statements, but it is interesting that the majority of these have an exclusivist attitude regarding God and what can be termed ‘salvation’. They see little of value in religious or philosophical ideas other than their own. This, of course, conflicts with Macquarrie’s acceptance that different revelations are possible. His is a more inclusivist attitude.

Surely, in these days where the opportunity to mix and commune with people of other faiths is greater than previously, Macquarrie’s proposition is almost self-evident. Is this not what is happening in our lodge rooms? We respect that our brethren have an effective and adequate ‘commerce with God’ and do not feel that we must evangelise because of some misplaced idea that our own faith is the only true faith and that by not doing our best to convert others to our way of thinking and worshipping we are effectively ensuring that they will not be as well looked after in any post-death existence. In my own lodge [16] we have three Volumes of the Sacred Law on our altar, the Holy Bible, the Holy Qur’ān and the Dhammapada, reflecting the various religions held by our members. People who are anti-Masonic from a religious perspective are, in the main, those who believe in an exclusivist theology, one that excludes all other faiths from any eternal reward. If we reject ridiculous suggestions such as the propensity for Masons to be devil worshippers, the main objection from Christians who are anti-Masonic seems to be the exclusion of Jesus from Masonic ceremonies. As Jesus is seen as being identical with the second person of the Holy Trinity, they believe that it is only through Jesus that ‘salvation’ can be obtained and any acknowledgment of God that does not

include Jesus as an intermediary is pointless.

Religious anti-Masonry

This paper is going to concentrate on Christian objections to Masonry. There are other faiths that do not sanction their members becoming Masons, but their reasons are of a different ilk from that of exclusivist Christians.

For example, Bahá'ís have their voting rights taken away from them if they become or remain Masons. It seems that this was not always the case. In 1950, the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Tasmania was the chairman of a committee organising a Bahá'í-sponsored World Religion Day. Two years later, he became a Bahá'í. However, when it was realised that Shoghi Effendi, who was the Bahá'í leader at that time, had promulgated that Bahá'ís should not join organisations such as the Freemasons because they were considered to be 'secrets societies', the Tasmanian Bahá'ís inquired as to the effect of this. Grand Secretary Wilkinson had his voting rights taken away in 1958 and, having decided to remain a Freemason, he withdrew from the Bahá'í faith.[17]

Members of the Society of Friends also have difficulties joining Masonry. Quakers believe that their word should be enough and see no reason why they should take oaths. They see our obligations taken in front of the altar as oaths and this prevents them from joining the Craft. Some of the stricter Muslims also have difficulties with Freemasonry. However, much of Islamic propaganda against Masonry couples Freemasonry with Zionism and sees both as being involved with plans to take over the world.[18]

It is mainly Christian denominations that have raised objections in western society, which is not unexpected, since Christianity is the predominant faith in the West. As indicated above, some Christians have taken Freemasonry to task because of what they see as the absence of Jesus in Masonic rituals. Traditionally, there has been an antipathy between the Roman Catholic Church and Freemasonry. There has been a number of encyclicals promulgated by the popes. Even today, although there is a not insubstantial number of Roman Catholics in the Craft, officially Roman Catholics are not sanctioned to join Freemasonry. Roman Catholics who become Freemasons have been threatened with excommunication since 1738, when Pope Clement XII issued his Papal Bull, *In Eminenti*. As recently as 1983, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger included in a Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith the following statement:[19]

[T]he 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 enrol in Masonic associations are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion.

Clement XII's reasons for his opposition to Freemasonry are summarised in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. [20] These include 'creating religious indifferentism and contempt for orthodoxy and ecclesiastical authority' and a convoluted argument that, because Masons claim that their modes of recognition are the only essential secrets and these have been published, then the real secrets can only be political or anti-religious conspiracies. As Ward has pointed out, the opposition to Freemasonry by the Roman Catholic Church may have to do with Freemasonry being seen to be rivalling Catholicism in that both are worldwide organisations, in addition to its theological concerns.[21]

Walton Hannah, in his books *Darkness Visible* and *Christian by Degree*, [22] gives fairly reasoned and well thought out arguments as to why Freemasonry and Christianity are incompatible. In 1952, when he wrote *Darkness Visible*, Hannah was a high church Anglican. Subsequently he joined the Roman Catholic Church. Hannah sees difficulties in what he calls Masonic oaths, and lists some of the difficulties seen in Masonry by various Christian denominations. I feel that his concerns were not adequately considered by the Church of England in that the discussion which took place in Synod was really a Clayton's discussion.

Alexander Piatigorsky has a pertinent point to make regarding the religious aspects of Freemasonry:[23]

Generally speaking, to understand the religious aspect of British Freemasonry, and with some reservations Freemasonry in general, one has to realize that Masonry, taken both in its origins and in its present state, provides a possibility of freethinking within religion, conceived in the broadest sense.

If we are considered to be freethinkers and to be tolerant and accepting in our relationships with different faiths, then perhaps we are missing good opportunities in not being able to discuss religion among ourselves.

Esoteric Masonry

What is meant by the term 'Esoteric Masonry'? Literally 'esoteric' means 'hidden'. Some seem to think that Esoteric Masonry is Masonry with a bit of incense thrown in, or a bit more symbolism added to the ritual. In this paper, 'Esoteric Masonry' refers to the meaning seen in the ritual by Masons such as W L Wilmshurst and J S M Ward. They see Masonry as having a mystical interpretation, where the object is the quest for union with the Divine.

It could be argued that this is not supported by the history and origins of Freemasonry. But what are Freemasonry's origins? There are many theories. I tend to favour the theory that sees an indirect link between Operative and Speculative Masonry, developed mainly by Colin Dyer. John Hamill has stated that this theory is the one that appeals to him most.[24] This theory has the advantage of giving reasons for the development of Speculative Masonry. It posits that Speculative Masonry originated in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, a time of great intolerance in religion and politics in England. The theory sees those who formed Freemasonry as men who wished to end the religious and political strife of the time and to form an Order in which religion and politics had no part. For this reason, talk on religious matters was banned in Masonic lodges.[25]

But let us not worry too much about whence Freemasonry comes. If I may borrow terminology used in linguistics, the esotericism seen in Masonry can be considered to be 'synchronic' rather than 'diachronic'. In linguistics this means that the language is analysed in its present form, with any historical influences being ignored, rather than analysing the language through its historical development. In Esoteric Masonry the ritual can be interpreted as it is presented now, rather than looking at its historical development. To give an example, Wilmshurst realises that the ritual in the second degree at one time was more dramatic than it is now. However, he is able to regard the second degree as 'deliberately designed to stand in marked contrast with the other two, so that it may impress by what is implied but left unformulated'.[26]

Edmond Mazet argues for Freemasonry being esoteric in two senses. Taking the definition of 'esoteric' as being that which is secret or reserved for a few, Mazet claims Freemasonry to be esoteric in this sense because it is a society of men 'admitted to it through secret ceremonies, in the course of which they receive secret means of recognition which they swear not to reveal to people who have not been admitted in the proper manner'.[27] Mazet also sees Freemasonry as being esoteric as opposed to exoteric, 'inner' rather than 'outer'. He sees Freemasonry as conveying 'a body of moral, religious, and spiritual teachings' to its members through 'ceremonies and symbols'.[28]

Objections to Esoteric Masonry

Now, not all Masons believe that these esoteric interpretations are correct. In particular, in the Transactions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge, John Hamill writes:[29]

But what are we to make of the voluminous, indigestible and at times incomprehensible writings of A. E. Waite who saw Freemasonry as a manifestation of a profound and highly idiosyncratic Christian mysticism causing him to reject the universalist Craft in favour of his own curious interpretation of what he termed 'high grades' of the Christian Orders? Or the thesis put forward by W. L. Wilmshurst in his *The Masonic Initiation* (London 1922), in which he emphatically denies that

Freemasonry is a religion but then goes on to interpret the Craft ritual as a curious combination of the ancient mysteries and a very peculiar form of Christology? It is very difficult not to reach the conclusion that writers of the nature of Churchward, Ward, Waite and Wilmshurst, for a great deal of the time, had their feet planted firmly in the clouds.

On a more reasoned, factual and academic level, what are we to make of the various papers which have appeared in the *Transactions* of this lodge arguing as to whether or not eighteenth-century Freemasonry was a manifestation of Deism or Theism? Surely their writers were wasting their time and that of their readers. If Freemasonry is not a religion and has no theology, how can it be a manifestation of any religious 'ism'?

Hamill was then Librarian and Curator of the United Grand Lodge of England. That Grand Lodge, along with most other 'regular' jurisdictions, is adamant that Masonry is not a religion. This does not mean that Masonry cannot be a 'manifestation' of some particular religious theory or have a theology. Freemasonry may not be a religion but it does have certain motifs that can be interpreted in a religious manner. Even without pursuing the esoteric interpretations of Wilmshurst and Ward, it is obvious that Freemasonry would be meaningless unless certain theological concepts are taken by its members as given. A belief in a Divine Being is an essential prerequisite for membership of a lodge and without a belief in an afterlife of some sort, references to 'that Grand Lodge above, that House not made with hands, eternal in the heavens'[30] and, some would argue, the significance of the third degree would be meaningless.[31]

Although it is possible to obtain much from any exoteric interpretation of Masonry, there is no reason to gainsay those who obtain even more from esoteric interpretations. Whether Freemasonry is derived from the 'ancient mysteries', as indicated in our ritual,[32] or not, is really immaterial. Hamill is against an esoteric interpretation of Freemasonry on the grounds that this is not a 'reasoned, factual and academic' approach—but does it need to be?

There could well be other reasons for this belittling of Esoteric Masonry. Just as many traditional Christians feel ill at ease with mysticism, so too do many of the more conservative members of the Craft. In my own lodge, I have prepared commentary based on Ward's interpretations, for an exemplification of the first degree, and commentary based on both Ward's and Wilmshurst's interpretations for the second degree.[33] Some brethren were fascinated by these interpretations and wanted to read more of the writings of these Esoteric Masons. Others were less than enthusiastic.

As well as there being distinct advantages in an esoteric interpretation, in that it gives a theme to our rituals, the theme of the quest for union with the Divine, there are also disadvantages. The use of the writings of Esoteric Masons in anti-Masonic literature was alluded to, above. There could also be a fear that Freemasonry could be seen to sanction some of the more extreme esoteric movements. Some Masons were deeply involved in the Order of the Golden Dawn. These included Westcott and Waite. However, one should not disregard Esoteric Masonry on the basis that some Masons may have been carried away with esoteric interpretations.

There are Masons who gain much from an esoteric interpretation of Masonry. There is a web site on Contemplative Masonry.[34] A booklet on meditation, using Masonry as its basis, can be obtained through this website. Three prominent members of the ANZMRC are featured on this site, one giving the endorsement of the Holden Study Circle and another two entering positive statements in the guest book. To give some idea of the *raison d'être* for this group, the following introduction appears on this site:

In seeking initiation, we believed that Masonry could be the companion of our various religions, and a means by which the great mysteries of existence could be more fully revealed. After receiving initiation, we hoped that somewhere within its edifice we would find contemplative brethren who could guide us along such a path. Unfortunately, except for the most rare cases, Masonry has responded to such desires with debate, confusion, silence and only the dimmest flickers of light from an ancient unseen source.

The idea, the practice and the movement of Contemplative Masonry seeks to fulfill [*sic*] that vision. Its mission is to offer every Master Mason education, training, guidance and fellowship in his

rightful pursuit of more spiritual light in Masonry. Contemplative Masonry does not denigrate other Masonic purposes and pursuits, such as academic research, community service, charity, and moral and social brotherhood. Rather, it seeks to compliment [*sic*] and enhance the whole. It is also important to note that Contemplative Masonry does not seek to make a religion of the Craft. It maintains, even supports and pays homage to every Mason's right and responsibility to exercise his own form of faith. Likewise, Contemplative Masonry imposes no doctrines or creeds upon its practitioners.

Now, if Freemasonry has a mystical side and is of assistance in the quest for union with the Divine, who are we to prevent more than half the world's population from pursuing the ultimate reality by this method? In any case, our not recognising feminine and Co-Masonic Orders has not resulted in there being no such Orders. They do exist and their members see themselves as being legitimate Masons.

Co-Masonry

Why do we not recognise the right of women to be Masons? A number of years ago, the then Grand Master of my jurisdiction, MWBro George Currey, visited Canberra and held a question and answer session. We were told that any questions regarding women in Freemasonry were not to be asked. However, I got around this by asking whether there was any likelihood of Co-Masonry being recognised in the near future because I had Co-Masonic friends in my church and would dearly like to join them in lodge, which at present I was not able to do. I pointed out that there was a time when both Prince Hall Masonry and the Order of the Eastern Star were not acknowledged, but that there is no longer a blanket rejection of these orders; indeed, many jurisdictions recognise these as being legitimate. This question was answered with another question—would I prefer the short or the long answer? His short answer was 'no' and his long answer was 'never'. He did amplify a little on this, stating that if the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory were to acknowledge Co-Masonry, we would risk losing our recognition from the other mainstream jurisdictions.

To me, this is no reason not to acknowledge Co-Masonry, if in fact there are good grounds on which to base this acknowledgment. We should do what is right, and not be dissuaded simply because others may not agree with our actions. In the third degree we are told about a man who would rather suffer death than do what is wrong, and we are encouraged to 'imitate the example of that great and good man'. If some act is correct, then it should not matter what the consequences are. Yet the reason given for not recognising Co-Masonry is that others may not acknowledge us. I would expect greater moral fortitude from Masons. Returning to my chair, I got the feeling that not all were enamoured by my question, although one brother indicated to me that he approved. I was later told by a Grand Lodge officer that I had better take care. He cited the case of two Freemasons who were also Co-Masons being brought before Grand Lodge at a Quarterly Communication. As brethren, they were asked to explain their actions. When their explanations did not satisfy Grand Lodge, the epithet of each changed from 'Brother' to 'Mister', and they were expelled from Grand Lodge.[35]

The regularity of lodges

Grand Lodges have instituted a scheme of mutual recognition in which they determine whether other Grand Lodges and individual lodges are 'regular' or 'irregular'. The premier Grand Lodge, the United Grand Lodge of England, has listed a number of standards by which it determines whether or not another Grand Lodge can be considered to be regular. These are:

- (a) the necessity for a Grand Lodge to have been lawfully established by a regular Grand Lodge or by three or more private lodges with warrants from a regular Grand Lodge;
- (b) for a Grand Lodge to be independent and self-governing with an undisputed authority over Craft Freemasonry within its own jurisdiction;
- (c) for its members to be male and for it and its lodges to have no contact with lodges that admit women;

- (d) for its members to believe in a Supreme Being;
- (e) for its members to take their obligations on, or in full view of, the Volume of the Sacred Law;
- (f) for the three Great Lights of Freemasonry to be displayed when the Grand Lodge and its private lodges are open;
- (g) for discussion of religion and politics to be prohibited within its lodges; and
- (h) for it to adhere to the established principles, tenets and customs of the Craft and for it to insist that these are observed within its lodges.[36]

Standards (c), (g) and (h) are those most germane for this paper. Standard (g) is one that I would argue is no longer relevant because it was instituted at a time when the ramifications of religious and political dissent were much greater than they are now. Standard (c) relates to the irregularity of feminine and Co-Masonic Orders. Standard (h) relates to the ability to innovate in Masonry and will be considered later in this paper.

Women and Masonry

Feminine and Co-Masonic Grand Lodges and private lodges do exist, irrespective of whether or not they are recognised by mainstream Grand Lodges. Some of these admit only women and others admit Masons of both sexes.

In England, there are two Grand Lodges that admit only women, namely the Order of Women Freemasons and the Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons. There is also the Grand Lodge for Men and Women, which admits both sexes.[37] These Grand Lodges satisfy the standards set down by the United Grand Lodge of England for regularity, except (a)—origin, and (c)—admission of women.

There are other Grand Lodges that, in addition to (a) and (c), break some of the other standards set for regularity. One of these is the *Grande Loge Féminine de France* [38] which accepts only women candidates, does not require its members to believe in the existence of a Supreme Being and permits the discussion of religious and political matters. The International Order of Co-Freemasonry Le Droit Humain (DH)[39] similarly does not require its members to believe in a Supreme Being and permits religious and political discussion. However, it does allow its constituent members to make their own decision on these matters. The Australian Federation of DH has, in fact, decided to insist on the use of the Volume of the Sacred Law, that its members believe in a Supreme Being and that the discussion of topics of a religious or political nature may not occur.

As recently as 2000, there are two DH lodges in New South Wales, two in Queensland, one in South Australia, five in Victoria and one in Western Australia. There are also two lodges belonging to the Order of Women Freemasons in South Australia.[40] In New Zealand, there are Co-Masonic lodges in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, and there was one in Dunedin that closed in 1985.[41] So, there are many women Masons in our part of the world, despite our not recognising them.

One difficulty with Co-Masonry in particular is that the main Co-Masonic body, DH, makes reference to the Comte de St Germaine as the head of Masonry. Also, the writings of one prominent Co-Mason, C W Leadbeater, can be seen as rather strange. Reference to the position of the Comte de St Germaine certainly featured in the Grand Lodge of South Australia and the Northern Territory's paper on *Women and Freemasonry*. [42] This was seen as a definite barrier to any acknowledgment of DH. One Grand Lodge officer of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory on a couple of occasions has indicated to me that he finds esoteric interpretations of Masonry unconvincing, pointing out on both occasions his concerns regarding his reading of Leadbeater's claim in *The Hidden Life in Freemasonry* that the ritual taking place in the lodge room reminded Leadbeater of his being present, in a former life, at exactly the same ritual in Ancient Egypt.[43] Also, there is some trepidation regarding the theosophical influences in DH. However, for an Order which accepts all worthy men who believe in a Supreme Being, irrespective of their interpretations of this Being, and which does not exclude men because of any theological beliefs, it is rather strange that one of the reasons for the rejection of this Co-Masonic Order is that it gives a special status to the Comte de St Germaine and adopts Theosophical ideas. It would

seem that there might be some limits to the tolerance espoused by Freemasonry.

Powerless to change

Of course, the usual reason given is that 'from time immemorial' Freemasonry has not accepted women and, as 'it is not within the power of any man or body of men to change Masonry', therefore nothing can be done. There are examples of what could be conceived of as being Landmarks being changed. In my jurisdiction, the candidates used to be prepared for all three degrees. There was a change in the mode of preparation for the first degree, and the modes of preparation for the second and third degrees were abolished. At first it was for the Worshipful Master to decide. Further down the track, this was no longer to be at the Worshipful Master's discretion and all had to follow the new regulations. It seems that the former mode of preparation was no longer considered a Landmark and, indeed, it was possible for a body of men to change Masonry.

Each Worshipful Master-elect has to agree during his installation ceremony that 'it is not in the power of any man or body of men to make innovations in the Body of Masonry'.^[44] Now, it appears that this is not the case. This came from the omission of a phrase from Anderson's *Constitutions* of 1738, Regulation 39, which states 'that it is not in the Power of any Man or Body of Men to make any Alteration or Innovation in the Body of Masonry, without the Consent first obtained of the G. Lodge.' These final nine words have been omitted and they make a lot of difference to the meaning of this agreement.

The change to the mode of preparation in the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory is but a fairly recent innovation in the history of Freemasonry. There are many others, going right back to the union of the Antients and the Moderns.^[45]

So, it is possible to change the mode of preparation if Grand Lodge's consent is obtained. It should also be possible to admit women to Freemasonry, if Grand Lodge's consent is obtained. This is not very likely, but there is a glimmer of hope. I mentioned earlier MWBro George Currey's answer to my question on Co-Masonry. My present Grand Master is not as intransigent. At his National Press Club presentation mentioned above, MWBro Tony Lauer stated that 'if in time both parties are proved to be wrong and the men and women are agreeable, we may well envisage the possibility, in time, of some form of united leadership'.^[46] Previous to this statement, the Grand Master had claimed that 'women in fact do have parallel organisations created for women by women'. The only Order with women members usually acknowledged is the Order of the Eastern Star, but this is a co-Masonic Order created by a man, Dr Rob Morris. So, the Grand Master must be referring to Orders whose membership consists only of women. His statement is very guarded, but at least there is a possibility of some future recognition of feminine Masonic Orders.

I would be quite happy to sit in lodge with a female Mason, but I realise that there are many to whom this is anathema. If it were permissible for females to join our Order, there is still no way that a woman could become a member of a particular lodge if sufficient members were opposed to it. Depending on the by-laws of the lodge, one, two, three or more black balls can reject any potential candidate or affiliate.

So, what is the harm in acknowledging women Masons? They already exist, whether we like it or not, and acknowledgment does not mean that all lodges must have both men and women members. Indeed, some of the women's lodges prefer not to have men present. It is a pretence that there are no female Masons, when in fact there are women who meet in lodges and participate in rituals very similar to ours. Because we don't recognise them does not mean that they are not Masons.

Summary and concluding remarks

In answer to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper, the following can be said. The reason usually given for not discussing religion in lodges is that such discussions can cause disharmony among brethren. This makes more sense if we consider the times in which Speculative Masonry began, a time of religious

intolerance. In today's world, at least in our society, there is much more tolerance and even acceptance of different faiths and religious views. It is not a given that the discussion of religion produces disharmony. Although Freemasonry does have religious tendencies, it cannot be considered a religion in the sense that it has dogma and advocates a preferred way to 'salvation'.

There are some who claim Freemasonry to be a religion, but they have a different definition of religion. In any case, those attracted to Freemasonry are likely to be spiritual beings. It is unfortunate that there is a proscription on the discussion of religion within the lodge. If I am correct in my surmising that the main reason religion cannot be discussed in a Masonic setting is historical, then I can see no reason why such a proscription should continue. There could be definite advantages in allowing religion to be discussed. Just as the members of various religions today are in dialogue, so should the members of Freemasonry, who can hold various religious points of view, be able to discuss such matters. Much good has come from inter-faith dialogue outside the lodge. Much good should come from the discussion of religion within the lodge.

If there is a mystical side to Masonry, then those of a mystical frame of mind can gain much from Freemasonry. Why should women be prevented from gaining the benefits of being Masons? Of course, they are not so prevented and there are feminine and Co-Masonic Orders. However, masculine Masonry does not acknowledge the legitimacy of such Orders. Even if one wants to restrict Freemasonry to men, this is no reason why there cannot be an acknowledgment of Orders consisting solely of women or having members of both sexes. An organisation that is tolerant in so many other matters appears intolerant in not acknowledging the rights of women to gain spiritual insights from Masonic ritual. It also prevents its own members from visiting Co-Masonic lodges. Such visits could well give them a greater insight into the esoteric side of Masonry.

One argument against allowing religious matters to be discussed in lodge, acknowledging the legitimacy of feminine and Co-Masonic Orders, and allowing visits among these lodges, is that these involve Ancient Landmarks but, as indicated above, innovation is possible within Masonry, if the Grand Lodge approves.

So, if there are sufficient reasons to change our attitude regarding the discussion of religion, and to recognise and be in amity with feminine and Co-Masonic Orders, then this can be done if Grand Lodge consents to such alterations and innovations. I am not prepared to predict that such changes will occur in the near future, but one can live in hope.

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- [3] This is specified in Regulation 11.2.2 of the *Constitutions* of UGL NSW&ACT.
- [4] ‘Farewell to an exceptional man and a brother Freemason’, *NSW&ACT Freemason*, v34 #3, UGL NSW&ACT, June 2002, p5.
- [5] Lodge The King’s School, #760, UGL NSW&ACT.
- [6] Lauer, Tony: ‘Sydney Anglican Synod 2003’. This appears on the website of UGL NSW&ACT <<http://www.uglnsw.freemasonry.org.au/>>.
- [7] Lauer, Tony: ‘Freemasonry and Freemasons: Past, Present and Future’, presented at the National Press Club, Canberra, on 28 April 2004.
- [8] ‘Highlights’ of this address, including this quotation, can be read in ‘Grand Master’s address to the National Press Club’, *NSW&ACT Freemason*, v36 #3, UGL NSW&ACT, June 2004, pp10–11.
- [9] Ward, J S M, op cit, p185.
- [10] Pike, Albert: *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Rite of Freemasonry*, the Supreme Council of the Thirty Third Degree for the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States, Charleston 1871, 1925 reprint, p213. This is also available on the website <<http://www.illuminati-news.com/e-books/morals-dogma/apike05.htm#13>>. The quotation is taken from Pike’s explanation of the 13th Degree, the Royal Arch of Solomon.
- [11] *ibid*, p161. The website is <<http://www.illuminati-news.com/e-books/morals-dogma/apike05.htm#10>>. The quotation is taken from Pike’s explanation of the 10th Degree, the Illustrious Elect of the Fifteen.
- [12] Pike was the Sovereign Grand Commander of the Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction of the USA, from 1859 to 1892.
- [13] Macquarrie, John: *Principles of Christian Theology*, rev edn, SCM Press, London 1977, p151.
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- [16] Lodge Commonwealth of Australia, #633, UGL NSW&ACT.
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- [18] For example, the Islamic Jurisdictional College at its meeting on 15 July 1978, issued an opinion concerning Freemasonry which included the statement that there is ‘a clear relationship between Freemasonry, Judaism and International Zionism’. This opinion is quoted in the article by Celil Layiktez, ‘Freemasonry in the Islamic World’, which appears in the Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry website at <<http://users.libero.it/fjit.bvg/layiktez1.html>>.
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- [28] *ibid*, p248.
- [29] Hamill, J M: ‘The sins of our Masonic fathers’ in (1988) *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 101:131–136, QCCC Ltd, London 1989.
- [30] UGL NSW&ACT of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons: *Third Degree*, October 1998, p157.
- [31] Although resurrection is only one possible interpretation of the third degree, many Masons hold this interpretation. In my lodge, at the time of the raising of the candidate, the following words are sung: ‘I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord; He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live’. This appears in Hart, A F: *Masonic Music*, Allan & Co, Melbourne 1930, p17. See Claudy, Carl H:

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- Introduction to Freemasonry – Master Mason*, for possible interpretations of the Hiram Legend. This is also available on the website <<http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/claudy4.html>>. When referring to the lost secret, Claudy states that the ‘Sublime Degree teaches that in another life it may be found’.
- [32] For example, the observation ‘that light was ever an object of attainment in all ancient mysteries’, UGL NSW&ACT of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons, *First Degree*, October 1998, p23.
- [33] Presented at Lodge Commonwealth of Australia, #633, UGL NSW&ACT, on Tuesday 5 March 2002 and Tuesday 6 April 2004, respectively.
- [34] See website <http://www.mastermason.com/contemplative_masonry>.
- [35] This incident was confirmed by the minutes of the Communications of the UGL of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, kindly sent to me, at my request, by VW Bro Peter Court from the Grand Secretary’s office.
- [36] See the website of the UGLE, <<http://www.grandlodge-england.org/masonry/freemasonrys-external-relations.htm>>.
- [37] Henderson, Kent and Pope, Tony: *Freemasonry Universal, Volume 2—Africa, Europe, Asia & Oceania*, Global Masonic Publications, Williamstown 2000, p119.
- [38] Henderson & Pope, op cit, p198.
- [39] *ibid*, pp196–197.
- [40] *ibid*, pp365,375,385,386,402,408.
- [41] The information on the three existing NZ lodges comes from a posting by a Co-Mason, writing under the pseudonym of Whistler, on 28 April 2004, at an Internet discussion forum. <http://www.thefreemason.com/forum/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=1476敳>. The information on Dunedin comes from Booth, Bob: ‘Lodges of Southern New Zealand’ in (2002) *Welcome to the Hocken Bulletin #43*, Friends of the Hocken Collections, available on the website <http://www.library.otago.ac.nz/pdf/Hoc_Fr_bulletins/43_bulletin.pdf101:131>.
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- [45] See Haunch, T O: ‘It is not in the power of any man . . .’ in (1972) *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 85:194–216, QCCC Ltd, London 1973.
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