

THE FACTS ON THE MASONIC LODGE

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Introduction to Freemasonry

1

What is Masonry?

*As a fraternity, we are always ready to
be judged—severely and critically.*

—FRANCIS G. PAUL,
33RD DEGREE SOVEREIGN GRAND COMMANDER,
IN THE MAY 1988 *NORTHERN LIGHT*

Masonry—also known as Freemasonry, or “the Lodge”—is a powerful, centuries-old fraternal order that began in the early eighteenth century. According to most Masonic authorities, modern Masonry—also called “speculative” Masonry—can be traced to the founding of the first Grand Lodge in London in AD 1717 (70, 1:131,152; 1:3; 15:12).

The Lodge is also a secret society. To maintain its secrets, Masonry uses symbolism, secret oaths, and secret rituals to instruct new members, called *initiates*. Each new member swears during these secret ceremonies to remain loyal to the Lodge and its teachings. The teachings instruct each new candidate how he is to serve and the rewards he can expect.

If we examine the definition of Masonry as given by Masons themselves, we find the following. In *The Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, Albert G. Mackey, one of the most respected Masonic scholars, declares, “All [Masons] unite in declaring it to be a system of morality, by the practice of which its members may

advance their spiritual interest, and mount by the theological ladder from the Lodge on earth to the Lodge in heaven” (96, I:269).

Other definitions by respected Masonic authorities say that Masonry is

- “a science which is engaged in the search after Divine Truth, and which employs symbolism as its method of instruction” (96, I:269).
- “that religious and mystical society whose aim is moral perfection on the basis of general equality and fraternity” (96, I:269).
- “in its broadest and most comprehensive sense...a system of morality and social ethics, a primitive religion, and a philosophy of life...incorporating a broad humanitarianism...It is a religion without a creed, being of no sect but finding truth in all...It seeks truth but does not define truth” (36:234).

A man who becomes a Mason is defined as “one who has been initiated into the mysteries of the fraternity of Freemasonry” (96, I:378).

What we present in this book is an analysis of Masonry itself, as presented by Masonic authorities recommended to us by a large group of the Grand Lodges in the United States (see question 2).

2

What is the final authority for the teachings presented in each Masonic Lodge?

If anyone is going to investigate the teachings of the

Masonic Lodge, who or what is the authority that they should listen to?

When we asked this question on our television program of Bill Mankin, a thirty-second-degree Mason, he said, “The authoritative source for Masonry is the Ritual. The Ritual—what happens in the Lodge, what goes on” (1:3,5).

The Grand Lodge of each state sets the Ritual and the interpretation of that Ritual that is to be followed by the members of that state. When a person examines Masonry today and compares the different manuals containing the Ritual for each state, it is apparent that, today, the Ritual and the interpretations given are almost identical. Therefore, the Ritual in the Masonic manuals can be considered the authoritative teachings of the Lodge. As former Worshipful Master Jack Harris comments, “In [all] other states...the principle and the doctrines [of the Ritual] are exactly the same. The wording only varies slightly” (13:29).

3

Which books and authors have been recommended by the Grand Lodges as being authoritative for Masons?

We also wanted to know which authors and books Masons themselves recommend to outsiders as authoritative. In order to answer this question, a letter was sent to each of the 50 Grand Lodges in the United States. We addressed the letter to the Grand Master of each of the Grand Lodges and asked him to respond to the following question: “As an official Masonic leader, which

books and authors do you recommend as being authoritative on the subject of Freemasonry?"

Twenty-five of the fifty Grand Lodges in the United States responded.* (Remember, for each state there is no higher authority than its Grand Lodge.) When we received their replies, we tabulated the responses. These are the authors the Grand Lodges recommended:

Percentage Work and Author

- | | |
|----|--|
| 44 | <i>Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia</i>
by Henry Wilson Coil |
| 36 | <i>The Builders</i>
by Joseph Fort Newton |
| 32 | <i>Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry</i>
by Albert G. Mackey |
| 24 | <i>Introduction to Freemasonry</i>
by Carl H. Claudy |
| 24 | <i>The Newly-Made Mason</i>
by H.L. Haywood |
| 20 | <i>A Masonic Reader's Guide</i>
by Alphonse Cerza |
| 20 | <i>History of Freemasonry</i>
by Robert F. Gould |
| 20 | <i>The Craft and Its Symbols</i>
by Allen E. Roberts |
| 16 | <i>Morals and Dogma</i>
by Albert Pike |

Because Coil, Newton, and Mackey (49:172; 57:8;

* Those in Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Delaware, Iowa, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

51, I:130; 57:148) are held in the highest esteem by the Grand Lodges, we will often document our analysis of Masonry from their texts. At the same time, we have not neglected the other recommended Masonic authors and have tried to quote fairly from them all.

Thus, we have based our arguments on material that any Mason would consider authoritative and reliable. Masons must acknowledge that these authors and books do represent their most authoritative interpreters of Freemasonry.

Key Masonic authorities

Albert Mackey, MD (1807–1881), held the highest positions Masonry has to offer. He was a thirty-third-degree Mason and the Sovereign Grand Inspector General of the Thirty-third and Last Degree. His key works include *Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, *A Manual of the Lodge*, *The Principles of Masonic Law* and *The Symbolism of Freemasonry* (116).

Henry Wilson Coil (1885–1974) was a thirty-third-degree Scottish Rite Mason who also served as master, high priest, and commander in the York Rite. Among other major works, he is the author of the standard work *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia*, which the reviser, Allen E. Roberts, wrote is “still considered the best by far of any Masonic encyclopedia” (117). In 1997, the Grand Lodge of California opened the Henry Wilson Coil Library and Museum in San Francisco, an indication of the high regard in which Coil is held.

Joseph Fort Newton, LittD (1880–1950), was an ordained Baptist minister who studied at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and became pastor of numerous churches throughout his life. He was Educational Director of the Masonic Service Association. He is perhaps best known for *The Builders: A Story and Study of Freemasonry* (1914), a general survey of Masonic origins, history, purpose, and moral philosophy, often considered “an outstanding classic in Masonic literature” (118).