

FREEMASONRY AND THE CHURCH

What is God Saying to the Churches?

PART I – Introduction

The title above is carefully chosen. My purpose in writing is not to presume to state what God might be saying to Freemasons, but to reflect on what he may be saying to the *Church*.

Freemasonry is no secret! Freemasons have recently opened their temples to the public for the first time in an attempt to demonstrate that they 'do not worship a god with two horns'. Bookstalls have paperback books exposing Freemasonry, and Christian bookshops have publications condemning it. My purpose is to do neither. What follows does not focus on Freemasonry as such but on **THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IT RAISES FOR THE CHURCH**.

PART II - First Things First

The Pattern of Evil

We know that evil is the enemy of good, but too few Christians realise that the evil works mainly for the **distortion** of good rather than its abolition. The most common signs of evil are the *distortions of good*. If we only see evil where it is at its blackest and bleakest we will be missing most of it. Most evil is *distorted good*.

To give just one Biblical example. When Jesus foretold his forthcoming suffering, Simon Peter in his care and love of Jesus reacted just as I imagine I would have done in the circumstances by saying '**God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you**'. Peter's suggestion was one of loving protection, it is was not 'bad', or immoral or blasphemous. But with the best will in the world, Peter was *distorting* God's plan of salvation and Jesus's path of obedience. Peter's natural and kindly protest was being used by Satan himself in an attempt to divert Jesus. Jesus therefore i) attacks the evil head-on, and ii) explains to Peter why his kind suggestion was in fact satanic.

'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.' [Matthew 16:22-23]

It has been *distortion* that has torn the Church apart in every age rather than raw evil. Satanists occasionally mess-up a church building, but it is the *Christians* who have regularly torn the church asunder by not keeping their good things in balance but by stressing one good thing at the expense of others - and thereby *distorting it*. (Church history is a **catalogue of good things distorted**: authority, Bible, the corporate, discipline, experience, freedom, the individual, ministry, sacrament, teaching, etc., etc.)

It is not Satanists that are responsible for our divided Church - but Christians. They have done this by allowing good things to become *distorted*.

It is the process of *distortion* that turns good things like patriotism, authority, belief, enthusiasm and love to nationalism, authoritarianism, heresy, fanaticism and idolatry.

The Devil is busiest where good is distorted, and we need no reminding that it was God's worshippers who crucified his Son for basically good reasons.

With diabolical frequency man succeeds in finding good reasons for terrible deeds.

If one seeks the Holy Spirit's aid in discerning distortions something happens which is very uncomfortable!

The Boomerang Effect

Beware of praying for the gift of discernment! Not only does it bring great pain as we become more aware of distortion, sin and evil, but the Holy Spirit has a disconcerting habit of turning the critical spotlight back on *ourselves*!

Over-reaction?

If we are alert to *distortion* as a symptom of Satanic activity or a hall-mark of evil (it doesn't matter much how we describe it), then many of our reactions have to change. The usual pattern is as follows -

We see that 'A' is wrong. This makes us very upset and annoyed and we want to fight to put it right. The trap is that our right reaction has so much momentum about it that it swings us from our usual 'central' position 'B', to an extreme one, 'C'. This means that **in fighting distortion we have allowed ourselves to be distorted!** We have the same evil characteristics as the evil that we are judging in others! *An over-reaction means that the critic is as distorted as those whom he is criticising.* This is a victory for evil because the last state is worse than the first! The situation started with one distortion but by the over-reaction of good people ends up with two!

A Lesson of history

An example of the above can be seen in the over-reaction of the Reformers to the then practice of the Roman Catholics in *anointing*. They discerned, correctly - as Romans would now themselves acknowledge - that their practice was distorted.

God was calling them to 'reform', but they over-reacted and virtually *abolished* anointing. But wrong use is not corrected by non-use, but by *right-use*. The result of their over-reaction was to deprive the 'protestant' Christians of a Biblical means of Christian healing for about three centuries! Who knows the suffering and deaths that have resulted from that error? With the best intentions they replaced one distortion by another one which may well have been worse for the life of the Church than the original evil they were attempting to put right.

Penitence

It is the demonic danger of *over-reaction* together with the Holy Spirit's 'boomerang' tendency that creates the second theme - **penitence**. *Penitence is the greatest safeguard to over-reaction*. If we allow ourselves to take too judgemental a stance the 'power' of that position will distort our judgement, and maybe make us instruments of evil rather than reform.

Of course we must speak out; *of course* we must reform; *of course* we must be militant in establishing God's Kingdom of justice and righteousness in society. I am not suggesting that the voice of the Church should be quietened or muffled so as not to upset others! (No one who has read the New Testament could suggest that!)

Love

What I am saying is that **we speak from penitence**. Those whom we address are so often those whom we, the Church, have failed.

Where the Gospel is inadequately proclaimed in the life and witness of the Church there will arise semi-religious substitutes to satisfy folk and provide a basic need that the Church has failed to give.

For example:

a) A failure to affirm spiritual experience

It has been said that the Church is the last section of society to believe in the supernatural [Os Guinness, from a taped lecture at the L'Abri Fellowship] and that 'religion is on the increase everywhere, perhaps, except *inside* the church!' [Kenneth Leech in *The Real Jesus Revolution*, quoted in my book *But Deliver Us From Evil*, DLT, 1974, page 33.] The Church's *fear of spiritual experience* has driven folk to seek for its substitutes through the occult, through magic, distorted sex, through drugs and through violence.

b) Our failure concerning death

About death the Church habitually says too little too late. Protestant *over-reaction* against the position of the Saints in Roman Catholicism and its own failure to live an 'Easter Faith' has effectively deprived many Christians of comfort. The sub-Christian teaching of Spiritualism easily fills the vacuum for many, including churchgoers.

c) Our failure to heal

The Reformer's *over-reaction* and virtual abolition of both anointing and laying-on-of-hands created a vacuum which Spiritualism and Witchcraft fill. When the King of the Witches was on TV the switchboards were jammed with calls for healing. Rarely does such a reaction follow when Christians are on! A witch once wrote 'unlike other religions we believe we have the power to heal'. [*But Deliver Us From Evil*, DLT, 1974, page 78.] What an indictment of us Christians!

The word 'occult' means 'hidden'. Folk would not search for the *hidden* truth if the Church had shown that God's Truth had been **revealed** for all to see in the person of Jesus Christ. As I once wrote:

Who would renounce Christ and swear allegiance to Satan if *first* they had been attracted to the soldiers and servants of Jesus Christ and invited to join their ranks and follow Him? who would seek out the destructive powers of the psychic, the magic or the demonic if they had *first* met with the transforming power of the Holy Spirit? [*Renewal* No. 40, 1972.]

PART III - How the Church Encourages Freemasonry

It is necessary to grasp my themes of **distortion** and **penitence** (in Part II above) if you are to understand the nature of my reaction to Freemasonry.

I believe that the eruption of Freemasonry into the public and Christian consciousness may be one means by which the Holy Spirit may challenge us - and thus reform and renew us.

Freemasonry challenges and exposes our weaknesses - a necessary first step to our reformation. Let us examine some of those areas where the Church may have failed.

1. Our Failure with Men

Is God saying something to the Church about its failure with men? How is it that Freemasonry flourishes while most congregations consist mainly of women?

Have many denominations failed to give men real roles outside of the few selected for leadership? Would St. Paul be satisfied to see the vocations of male laity so often limited to taking collections, mowing grass, or clearing gutters?

It is quite false to say that women are 'more religious' than men. The style in which men and women are religious differs, but women are not 'more' religious. It is in religion that God is found, and *all hearts* are restless until they find their rest in God.

Anaemia

Men are not attracted to an anaemic religion. Anaemic Christianity should be a contradiction in terms, for its centre is the Cross, and the seeds of the Church are its martyrs. Some Christian bookshops undermine the Gospel by associating Jesus with twee teddybears, pandas and kittens. Such Cross-less sentimentality denies and betrays Christ and his Gospel.

2. Our Failure to Challenge

The story is told of Garibaldi who encountered a group of idle men. He promised them that if they would follow him they would encounter bloodshed and death - they followed him to a man!

I recently heard an appeal to follow Christ being made to young people. Life, they were told is costly: make sure you give your life to an adequate cause. Follow Jesus and perhaps face

martyrdom. The majority stood immediately to accept the challenge.

Freemasonry is **costly** in terms of time, commitment and money. Have we too-often made the mistake of thinking that Christianity will be more readily accepted if we stress its benefits rather than its cost? History shows that 'we rise to a challenge'. If men, in particular, are not rising-up to follow Christ is it because we have presented the Gospel as challenge-less?

If there is Christian outreach at all, it is all too easy to 'sell' it as 'Great comfort at little cost'. St. Paul's life alone disproves this. 'Great cost at little comfort' is a much truer description of the Spirit-led life.

Daffodils or Dynamite

Where spirituality becomes anaemic, described by Tom Smail as 'middle-aged ladies giving thanks for daffodils', it is no wonder that men are turned off!

When the explosive potential of nitroglycerin was discovered no existing word conveyed this great new power. They turned to the New Testament and found there a word used over 300 times for God's explosive power - *dunamis*.

[For example: '**...by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.**' Romans 15:19]

They coined a new word '**DYNAMITE**'! Men will be attracted by the challenge of a dynamic Gospel.

Onward Christian Soldiers?

The Church '**Militant**' gets its name from *soldiering*. How ironic that its ranks consist mainly of women who, traditionally, have not been soldiers. The absence of men is due to the fact that the Church present little or no challenge. ***The challenge exists.***

Many of these men have, in baptism, been signed with the sign of the Cross, in token that they would *...confess the faith of Christ crucified and manfully fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil and continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants until their lives' end.* [The Prayer Book wording.]

There is no better calling,
no finer privilege,
no tougher challenge,
no greater task,
no richer reward.

Surely we need look no further to find something for Christian men to do!

I suspect that many new young Christians could help the older generations in learning how to apply this. I suspect also that the increasing persecution of Christians around the world will backfire because it toughens Christians more than it diminishes them.

3. Our Failure to Define

I was amused to read - 'To define Freemasonry ... is an almost impossible task ... if six members were asked to define what Freemasonry was to them six differing answers would result.'

The above comment was quoted in the Anglican Report on Freemasonry [*Freemasonry & Christianity: Are They Compatible?*, Church of England Synod Working Party, Church House Publishing, 1987], and when I read it I could not help but recall the number of times on parish retreats or training weekends I have asked those present to state (mentally or on paper) what a *Christian* is!

I am convinced that no more than one-in-ten of the average church-goers can adequately know or describe what they are professing to be!

Behaviour or belief

MOST FOLK DEFINE 'CHRISTIAN' IN TERMS OF **BEHAVIOUR**.

This error touches much secular and Church life.

'**Them as goes to church are no better than me!**' This oft-repeated excuse for avoiding church is at least theologically accurate! It expresses not the Church's condemnation, but its glory! For the wonder is that Jesus did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance [**'I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.'** Luke 5:32]. It is the not-much-good whom he welcomes, invites, forgives, reinstates, adopts and enables!

'Christian'

The word 'Christian' is used by folk to apply to almost anything quite irrespective of its relation to Christ! We are, according to some, a 'Christian country' and there is our alleged kindness to animals and prohibition of bull-fighting to prove it!

Because of this wrong *behaviour-link* to call someone 'non-Christian' is immediately taken as an accusation of *misconduct*! If X is considered not to be a Christian because he is a professed atheist, his friends will rally to his defence by saying that really he *must* be a Christian because of how good he is with his children, how patient he is with his mother, how generous he is to charity, and how kind he is to animals.

The dictionaries are very helpful here. As a **noun**, 'a Christian' refers primarily to

- A follower of Jesus Christ.
- A member of the Church.

Used in an informal, i.e. imprecise, way it may refer to

- A person who shows Christian virtues.

The word 'Christian' can also be used as an **adjective** to describe things or people, i.e.

a. To describe that which belongs to Christ.

There is another use. Without its capital letter, 'christian' may be used –

b. To describe something / someone good or kind.

It cannot, alas, be assumed that the Faithful are the most correct in the use of the word 'Christian.' It is sheer arrogance to assume that society should describe us aright, if we do not ourselves take the trouble to do so! It is the responsibility of the Church to proclaim the truth about itself. If *Christians* fail to distinguish between **behaviour** and **belief**, we can hardly blame others when they wrongly assume that Christianity must be about the quality of behaviour, not about following Christ as Lord.

4. Our Failure of Leadership

Vagueness breeds misunderstanding. In 1979 the students of Durham protested when the cathedral was used for a Freemasons' Service following their magnificent gift of £10,000 towards the cathedral bells. The then Dean described the Freemasons as a 'Christian body', and justified his invitation to them. He can only have used 'Christian' in the vaguest sense (see definition (b) above), and would have been wiser not to have used it at all of a multi-faith group. A great thanksgiving was appropriate - perhaps a banquet? But *worship* was inappropriate since it is almost the only activity which is exclusively based on *belief* and *doctrine*!

The *Church Times* published my reaction at the time -

'...I have no doubt at all that they [i.e. Freemasons] are wholly good in their works, and probably love their neighbours more than I or the students do. The masses would call this 'Christian', but I am saddened when my former lecturer, and professor of theology, seems to equate doing good with being 'in Christ' - and I know that my former excellent doctor, a devout Jew, would share my bewilderment.'

Not only has the Church failed to proclaim with charity and clarity the essence of Christianity, but actually encourages misconceptions because of some fearful belief that it is better to deceive than it is to upset.

5. Our Failure to Distinguish

The introduction of a Jew into these reflections indicates the right place to make some distinction between *deeds* and *doctrines*. Constant confusion about this lies at the heart of the Christianity / Freemasonry issue. Let's take an example.

An orthodox Jew and an orthodox Christian hold irreconcilable beliefs about Jesus. To the Jew Jesus Christ is not God; to the Christian he is. If each retains their orthodoxy there is *no possible way that their doctrinal differences can be lessened or reconciled*.

The Jew and the Christian may work in complete harmony in their mutual care for others. The Jew may be excellent and the Christian despicable.

But BEHAVIOUR DOES NOT CHANGE, MODIFY OR IMPROVE BELIEFS.

Deeds done do not alter doctrines held.

The fine living of a Jew does not mysteriously bring his doctrines and beliefs about Jesus nearer to mine.

To say of my Jewish friend that he is not a Christian *has no moral stigma or judgement attached to it*; it is an accurate statement of his doctrines and beliefs. It does not 'black' his character to describe him as a 'non-Christian', any more than it would be a moral attack to call me 'non-Jewish'!

If a Jew, or a Hindu, a Satanist, a Buddhist, an atheist, an agnostic, a Muslim **behaves well, he/she does not become 'Christian' as a result.**

Royal

In the secular scene one is either a 'Royal' or one is not; it is a family fact; it cannot be earned or altered. A badly-behaved 'Royal' is no less royal than a well-behaved one. Similarly 'Christian' is a description of family status, as an adopted son/daughter of the Father, and a joint-heir with Christ [Romans 8:13-17]. Viewed spiritually Christians are 'Royals' by adoption and grace [Galatians 4:7]. Behaviour is important, but it is irrelevant to such *status*; good behaviour cannot earn us such royalty, neither can bad behaviour remove it! There are good and bad 'Royals' in the spiritual as well as the secular world!

We're better Christians than you!

When the Church says, as it is increasingly doing, that 'Freemasonry is incompatible with Christianity' it is important to realise that it is

- not making a moral condemnation
- but a *doctrinal distinction*.

I have stressed the distinction between doctrines and deeds because in discussions between Christians and Freemasons there is invariably a shift from one to the other - like this:

'I don't think Freemasonry is Christian'

'That's nonsense! What an insult! Look how much more money we give to charity than you do. Freemasons are better Christians than you are!'

That reads to me like a sit-com gag, but I have quoted it because due to a wrong understanding of Christianity and a mis-use of the word 'Christian' it is said in deadly earnest! I think Freemasons are mis-hearing what the Church is saying, and feel hurt and bewildered. Who is to blame?

6. Our Failure in Grace

If Freemasons share society's assumption that Christianity is a system by which God is reached through *good behaviour*, from whom has this impression been obtained? Obviously the Church!

It is the old problem. By nature we tend to slide back into Law, so that we may be proud of our achievements, rather than believe that we are accepted just as we are by God's unmerited love.

It has been rightly said of Christians that the only thing that they can contribute to their own salvation is the sin from which they must be set free. Christians are, therefore, the Royal Community of Grace.

We frequently fail to reflect our acceptance by God by a similar acceptance of one another. Although, among Christians, 'grace' may be taught, requirements for real acceptance still seem to creep in! Certain 'standards' of dress, class, speech, behaviour, literacy and religious expertise tend to be necessary. Those outside the Church must not be blamed when they see our narrow and stereotyped groupings for assuming our religion is one of merit under 'Law' rather than acceptance by 'Grace': or for assuming that we live by meeting demand rather than receiving forgiveness.

This assumption is underlined when the Church appears to the public to be so much stronger on judgement than it is on mercy. The Church is not a gathering of the perfect and strong but a rescue station for sinners.

7. Our Failure with Symbols

Symbols are the most powerful things. The symbol of Argentina on a flagpole in the Falklands; the handshake of two heads of state; for good or ill world history hangs on such things.

Our personal history's great moments are marked by symbols, whether it is birth, achievements, marriage, promotion, or death. We use symbols when things are too deep or difficult for words, and we use them to assist words. There is a profound truth in the slogan 'Say it with flowers', and folk naturally express themselves by a hand shake, a pat on the back, by the use of a gift, by the giving of a ring, and so on.

When we approach mystery, we then need symbols to express the inexpressible for us. Symbols indicate that something important is happening, so it is hardly surprising that *the* Christian symbol is the Cross and that symbolic washing, symbolic eating and symbolic touching (Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation/Ordination) are important focal points in the life of a Christian fellowship.

The mystery and symbol of Masonic ritual undoubtedly has its appeal. I find myself wondering at the tendency of some Christians to down-play mystery and reduce symbol, and I query whether the Holy Spirit is saying to us that this drift towards ordinariness, the everyday, the instant, and the effortless, has gone far enough?

Your God is too Small!

When we discover and celebrate God's immanence/presence with us there is always a danger that we allow this to eclipse his might and majesty. A God diminished and diluted to suit our feelings and wants is no God at all! The richness of informality must not deprive us of the richness of formality and its ability to symbolise God's greatness. Christian mystery nourishes us and upholds us; Christian triviality starves us and lets us down. I see countless congregations who make the mistake of swinging towards new patterns of worship and responses to God but in doing so they reject all earlier patterns. The poverty of A is not made better by switching to the poverty of B. In the best of A plus B there is richness. God is both great and close. In true celebration we celebrate both and experience both - the one balancing the other.

8. Our Failure at Integration

It is easy to spot when others have failed to think things through and, as we say, failed to 'get their act together.'

It is easy to accuse Christian Freemasons of a failure to integrate their beliefs when, having encountered the Light of the World, they allow themselves to be described as 'poor candidates in a state of darkness'!

I frankly cannot envisage how any Christian leader can reconcile his vocation with swearing upon an open Bible that he will not reveal to anyone the Secret name of the God which will later be made known to him.

- If the Name is true he is commissioned to proclaim it;
- if the Name is false he is commissioned to renounce it!

But if I discern such lacks of integration in Masonic practice, I am painfully aware that I belong to the Church which, after 2000 years of God's grace and human co-operation has not 'got its act together' either!

The Church is God's chosen instrument of reconciliation [2 Corinthians 5:18-20] but it often displays as much unity as an un-made jigsaw! (It is only by faith that we believe it to be one since the various pieces have rarely come together enough to demonstrate it!)

A trade-unionist replied to a Christian 'It's no good you telling workers and management to be reconciled. If the *churches* can't manage reconciliation what chance have we ever got?' Sadly, the failure of Christians to 'get their act together' must be apparent to all.

Thinking things through

It is not only Freemasons who may fail to think things through. How is it that Christians can be superstitious? How can they believe that their Father God works at the dictates of his own creation, being manipulated by black cats and ladders?

Does the Church really know what it is doing when it blesses something, and is a nuclear submarine an appropriate object for such treatment?

Has the Church thought-through the implication that in Christ there is neither male nor female [Galations 3:28] ? The list is endless.

My point is neither to accuse nor judge, but to show that if we discern that Freemasonry is not an integrated whole, we need to see that many of us do not speak from any position of superiority in this.

In a glass darkly

These reflections of mine have highlighted eight areas of failure. This is not to discourage, but to challenge, so that through them we may hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church.

PART IV - Some Words to Freemasons

My comments above have been addressed to Christians, to the Church.
What have I to say to Freemasons?

To Freemasons

Peace to your house [Luke 10:5].

Forgive us Christians for our failure to testify to the essence of our faith and to the Lordship of Christ.

Forgive us for the decades in which we have allowed mis-conceptions to go uncorrected.

Forgive us when we have failed to witness God's grace and have presented our religion as one of achievement rather than faith and adoption.

Forgive us our imbalances and distortions; our arrogance and lack of penitence; the distance between our doctrines and our deeds.

Suggestions

- Since it is your *doctrines* not your *deeds* which conflict with Christianity, and since you claim not to be a religion, the obvious step is to **forego your rituals** altogether. This would -
 1. Strengthen your 'non religion' claim
 2. Remove your doctrinal incompatibility with Christianity
- Since Freemasonry claims to be 'private' rather than 'secret', but since its secrets are now widely known and available to all, why not **drop the secrecy** altogether? It invariably breeds suspicion, misunderstanding and confusion.

To the Christian Freemason

- Please consider whether the exclusive claims of Christ [John 14:6] do not demand from his followers at best an *exclusive* allegiance [Luke 14:26].

Does not the Church's *faithfulness* to Christ, as of his 'Bride' mean that flirtation with other spiritualities (however attractive) is no longer appropriate? We are warned against trying to serve two Masters [Matthew 6:24], and experience shows that to try to do so blunts rather than sharpens the spiritual life.

Countless martyrs have **given their life** rather than compromise their allegiance to Christ or dishonour his Name. Should we not accept the challenge to give ourselves *wholly and exclusively* in the service of him who gave himself wholly for us?

Will you not manfully fight under ***just Christ's banner, against sin, the world and the devil and continue just his faithful soldier and servant unto your life's end?***

APPENDIX - Belief and Behaviour

Official Methodist, Anglican and Roman Catholic reports have found that the *beliefs* of Freemasonry are incompatible with Christian belief.

They distinguish between

- belief, and
- behaviour.

I hope all readers will do the same.

Identical **deeds** need not arise from identical **doctrines** - as all multi-faith co-operation on social issues happily demonstrates.

The important distinction between **belief** and **behaviour** is one that Christians must uphold with the same consistency with which Freemasons habitually ignore it.

It would be arrogant if Christians claimed that all doers of good deeds must be 'Christian'!
It is foolish for Freemasons to assume so.