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The Masonic Apostasy from Christ

(Another Look at Walton Hannah's Interpretation of Freemasonry)

By PAUL M. BRETSCHER

C*hristian by Degrees* (1954) is the second of two books written by Walton Hannah, clergyman in the Church of England. In this book, as well as in an earlier work, *Darkness Visible*, the author demonstrates the irreconcilable difference between Christianity and Freemasonry. This journal published a review of *Darkness Visible* (XXIV [1953], 316 f.) and of *Christian by Degrees* (XXV [1954], 709 f.). In addition, we kept our readers informed regarding the controversy in the Church of England caused by Rev. Hannah's analysis of the religious character of Freemasonry. See "Freemasonry in England under Fire" (XXII [1951], 353 f.) and "The Church in Its Relation to Freemasonry and Related Orders" (XXIII [1952], 372 ff.).

Since letters from pastors and laymen indicate an interest in the questions raised by Rev. Hannah; since, furthermore, Freemasonry as well as the entire subject of lodges is a live and oftentimes troublesome issue in our church; and since the staff of this journal believed that it could render our clergy a service by submitting a more extensive review of Rev. Hannah's interpretation of Freemasonry, especially of his latest book, this writer consented to examine Rev. Hannah's position in greater detail and to present the argument of *Christian by Degrees* at greater length. Before doing so, however, I find it desirable to sketch the situation in the Church of England that led Rev. Hannah to write his critiques and to record their reactions. In concluding paragraphs an attempt will be made to relate Rev. Hannah's findings to the American scene, especially to the situation in our own church.

I

The Background

Rev. Hannah did not write his books for the sake of starting a controversy and bringing about a schism in the Church of England. His concern was to have Christian people in England ask themselves the question whether they could with a good conscience confess the fundamental truths of the Christian faith and at the same time the basic teachings of Freemasonry. Rev. Hannah is not, and never has been, a Freemason. Yet for reasons which need not concern us he made

a thorough study of the Craft and devoted to it years of patient effort and careful research. He purchased rituals and other available Masonic literature wherever he could find them. He examined source materials available in the British Museum. He concluded that an informed Christian who is aware of the implications of the Christian faith, and whom the Spirit of God has recreated into a child of God, cannot with a good conscience pledge himself to assume the obligations in the several degrees of Freemasonry. He expressed his convictions in an article titled "Should a Christian Be a Freemason?" This article appeared in the January, 1951, issue of *Theology*, a theological journal published by S.P.C.K. (Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge). In a concluding paragraph he writes:

It is perplexing, to say the least of it, to understand the position of those who can lead in the recitation of the Creed on Sundays and partake of these strange mysteries on weekdays. Freemasons may claim that these pre-Christian beliefs have much of moral value, that even the cardinal facts of the Christian Gospel of redemption have possibly their pagan ante-types. True, but for the Christian irrelevant. To revert for spiritual light to these shadowy types and secret mysteries of bygone centuries when in Christ we have God's full and final revelation of truth is to go behind Christ's back and dishonour the Incarnation.

The article created a sensation hardly different from that caused by Luther's Ninety-Five Theses. Its shot was heard around the world. Hundreds upon hundreds of letters reached the editor of *Theology* and Rev. Hannah. The newspaper presses on Fleet Street in London featured Rev. Hannah's article in glaring headlines. *Reynold's News* (February 4, 1951) told its readers "the King may act in row over Freemasonry." A staff reporter wrote in the same issue: "The King may be asked to intervene in a row that has broken out among Church of England clergy over a move to set up a committee of inquiry into Freemasonry. The King is a Past Grand Master of the Order. . . . The article, published while the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. G. F. Fisher—President of the Society—was out of the country, was the subject of a bitter 'inquest' after his return. Dr. Fisher is a prominent Freemason."

In May, 1951, S.P.C.K. issued a pamphlet containing a reprint of Rev. Hannah's article, a number of letters addressed to the editor, and a reply by Rev. Hannah. One letter approved in essence of Rev. Hannah's position. Another expressed no final judgment but said that the church ought to investigate Rev. Hannah's charges. A third letter was

a denunciatory attack on Rev. Hannah. It was signed J. L. C. Dart, who, so the editor informs the reader, "served for twenty-three years in India and was a Canon of Bombay Cathedral and is now Chaplain at St. Mary's Abbey, West Malling." In a footnote to the letter the editor quotes Rev. Dart as having written him in a covering letter: "I am entitled to place after my signature the letters, P. M., P. D. G. C. (Bombay), P. A. G. C. (England), P. D. G. S. (Bombay), M. M. M., K. R. C. C., K. T., P. M. W. S., 30°. That gaggle of letters will not mean much to most readers [a gracious admission!], but it at least indicates that I know what I am talking about." Rev. Dart fails to document a single statement. He does what Freemasons frequently do when authorities are cited. He recognizes no authority and pontificates as though his word were final and absolute. Indeed, if a person with a "gaggle of letters behind his name [K. T.—Knight Templar, P. M. W. S.—Past Most Wise Sovereign of the Rose Croix de Heredom; the others we have not had the patience to track down] knows what he is talking about," then, surely, Rev. Dart must know. But, fortunately, there are in existence more reliable criteria for determining what a person knows.

In the last week of May, 1951, the Church of England had its Convocation. It could not escape dealing with the issue raised by Rev. Hannah. A motion was submitted on the first day of the Convocation requesting the Lower House "to appoint a joint committee to inquire into the theological implications of Freemasonry." This motion was ruled out of order. On the last day of the Convocation, the Lower House resolved not to hold a debate on Freemasonry. Said Rev. G. B. Bentley, whose advice was followed: "I implore the House not to do so foolish a thing as to arouse the intense feeling as between Freemasonry and the Church which exists elsewhere and which is wholly absent in our country and in the constitution of the Grand Lodge of England." And so the Convocation disposed of an irksome and delicate problem in a way in which the church has on more than one occasion disposed of a problem. It said nothing. Perhaps the unknown parish priest who wrote to the editor of *Theology* came close to the truth when he said:

It is the poverty of Anglican worship and teaching that is the primary cause of this increase of modern Gnosticism. . . . I still insist that the clergy should have direction and information from the authorities of the Church.

In the meantime Rev. Hannah was taking stock of himself, of his article in *Theology*, of the correspondence which had reached him,

of the interest of many members in the Church of England, both clergy and laymen, in the problem of Freemasonry, and, above all, of the future of the Church of England. He decided to write a book in which he would expand the argument of his article in *Theology* and publish the rituals of the basic degrees of Freemasonry. Upon completion of the manuscript he submitted it to well-known publishers for publication. They refused to print it. It was finally published, however, by Augustine Press, 46-8 Princedale Road, London. At the end of March, 1952, after circulars had gone out announcing the impending publication of *Darkness Visible*, Rev. Hannah received a telephone call asking him to be in the foyer of the Savoy Hotel, London, at a fixed time the next day. He went. He met a man who said to him: "I'm not going to beat about the bush, Mr. Hannah, nor am I going to tell you whom I represent. But I'll pay you 1,000 pounds in currency notes—no cheques—[\$2,800 in American exchange] for a signed statement in your own handwriting that you won't publish this book of yours or anything like it." Mr. Hannah replied, "No! Nothing doing!" Asked about the person who had approached him to make this deal, Rev. Hannah replied: "He did not come from the Grand Lodge (official Masonry). They do not go in for this sort of cloak-and-dagger clumsiness."

Darkness Visible appeared soon thereafter. It, too, created a sensation. Headlines like these appeared in the leading papers: "What Is the Truth about the Freemasons?" "A Snooper Among Masons," "A Book Which Will Start a Storm," "Freemasonry: Are They on Oath to Help Their Brethren in Business Dealings?" "Masons and Archbishops—Astonishing Statement." The newspapers on Fleet Street and church papers opened their columns for reader comment. A veritable flood of reactions poured into editors' offices, some of which were published. For a time Masons maintained a dignified silence. But not for long. Their answer appeared in a book titled *Light Invisible* by an author who signed himself "Vindex." (See review of this book in this journal (XXIV [1953], 318). The book proved to be a scurrilous attack on Rev. Hannah and, in reality, vindicated the truth of *Darkness Visible* and promoted its sales. When I was at Foyle's bookstore in London in the late summer of 1952, I discovered at least a half dozen copies of *Darkness Visible* among rituals and other Masonic literature. According to latest information, *Darkness Visible* has now appeared in the seventh edition.

That Masons were not altogether put at ease by *Light Invisible* appears from an article published in *Freemasons' Magazine* (No. 677,

Vol. V, Third Series, Winter, 1952—53) in which the author expresses himself as follows:

The present disturbance differs from those which have gone before in the amount of attention and excitement raised in certain newspapers. . . . Had it not been for this Fleet Street interest, the reasons for which are still obscure, Mr. Hannah's original article in *Theology* would have attracted no attention beyond the small readership of theologians which that periodical claims. . . . It is another version of the old Fleet Street adage about man biting dog. Attack is news. Defence is not. . . . Bearing these aspects in mind, then, Masons may well feel flattered at the recent Press publicity. There is no evidence that the newspapers concerned were motivated by malice or hostility to the Craft; they merely seem to have discovered the news value of Don Quixote tilting at well-established and soundly imperturbable windmills. Yet it would be idle to deny that the compliment, if such it be, is as unwelcome to the Mason as it is in bad taste. The Mason is by nature quiet and peaceable, loyal to the State, firm in his moral convictions and in his faith in T. G. A. O. T. U. [The Grand Architect of the Universe], unostentatious in his charities, a believer in brotherhood and tolerance, who harms no one and only asks to be left alone. It is known, however, that the minute but noisy anti-Masonic element in the Church of England is tending to increase as a result of this ill-informed agitation based on fallacious arguments and misunderstandings. Some of the Reverend Brethren who realise the value and importance of Masonry in the life of the nation and in the life of the Church are deeply perturbed at the damage which might ensue were this agitation to continue unchecked.

Masonic policy has always been to confute and confound its critics with dignified silence, and in the end Masonry always wins through with renewed strength, to survive the wreck of mighty empires and the destroying hand of time.

Darkness Visible is divided into two parts. Part I contains ten chapters which deal with the ritual. The chapters are headed: How Known; Why Written; Masonic Obligations; Is Masonry a Religion? The Clergy and the Craft; The Great Dilemma; Benevolence, Brotherhood and Tolerance; Context; Much Ado about Nothing; Ecclesiastical Condemnations of Freemasonry. Part II presents the complete rituals of the first three degrees and the Royal Arch degree. Appendix A discusses variations in the rituals in Scottish, Irish, and American Workings. Appendix B summarizes other Masonic degrees, as Mark Masonry, Knights Templar, Knights of Malta, the Allied degrees, the Secret Monitor, The Ancient and Accepted Rite, The Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, and Operative Masonry. Of special significance is Rev.

Hannah's discussion of the character of Masonry in the United States (pp. 213—215). Appendix C presents the ritual of a Masonic Order of Service. Pages 222—228 contain an annotated bibliography of both Masonic and non-Masonic writings.

Among the reactions to *Darkness Visible* expressed by friends and foes of Freemasonry, there were some which moved Rev. Hannah, as he informs the reader in the preface of *Christian by Degrees*, to write a sequel to *Darkness Visible*. These criticisms were: *Darkness Visible* did not take into account the "Christian implicits" of Freemasonry; it practically ignored the higher degrees which are regarded to be Christian; and it failed to discuss the history of Freemasonry. *Christian by Degrees* appeared in the summer of 1954. It, too, was published by Augustine Press, London.

Also this book stirred the Church of England, though it did not create as widespread a sensation as did the article in *Theology* and *Darkness Visible*. It was reviewed sympathetically in leading English church papers. The public press and the official organs of Freemasonry failed to become much perturbed. This may have been principally due to the fact disclosed by a review of *Christian by Degrees* in *The English Churchman and St. James's Chronicle*. This reviewer wrote:

The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, over which the Freemason Archbishop of Canterbury presides, banned the sale of *Darkness Visible* . . . and Masonic influence is such that *Christian by Degrees* will doubtless be inadequately advertised and displayed.

The following extracts from reviews which came to our desk seem significant:

After carefully studying *Christian by Degrees*, it is difficult to conceive how any Christian reader, unless intellectually paralysed by preconceived notions, can fail to agree with the author that Freemasonry exerts a parasitic influence which weakens the Church's distinctive witness to the supernatural Christian faith by its syncretistic universalism and natural religion. And having regard to the manoeuvres which went on behind the scenes in order to stifle discussion in Convocation and the Church Assembly, it is hard to escape the conclusion that it is the "friends" of Christ who "bring reproach upon Him." (*English Churchman and St. James's Chronicle*.)

It is high time, in these days when the spirit of antichrist is rampant in the world, that our Church leaders were frank enough to acknowledge this fact in public and clear-headed enough to declare that Freemasonry and genuine Christianity (i. e., that of the New Testament) cannot be regarded as compatible with each other. This might face some of our leaders and perhaps many of the rank and file of the

Church with the necessity for the renunciation of their association with this secret cult. But single-minded devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ is still required of us today; and how can anyone conscientiously believe that denial of Christ in the Masonic circle goes together with confession of Him elsewhere? (*The Church Gazette.*)

Canon Marcus Knight, Chancellor of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, who reviewed *Christian by Degrees* in the *Church of England Newspaper*, commented:

There is no kind of accusation against the sincerity or integrity of clerical or lay Masons made in the book. But one is left with the feeling that some awkward questions are being raised and perhaps not being answered. . . . Is there any hope that one of them [Bishops] could make a reasoned reply to these charges, or does the oath of secrecy mean that only silent indifference to these charges is possible?

Perhaps the most thorough review we have seen is that by H. S. Box, whose letter addressed to the *Church of England Newspaper* (July 30, 1954) contains the following gem:

Freemasonry is to be regarded as a human groping after that very thing which God Himself has established in the Church. Its relationship to Christianity is precisely the same as obtained between the ancient mystery cults and the Christian religion. The mysteries and Christianity are to be contrasted as different forms of religious cultus, the one imperfect and the other perfect, both directed towards the achieving of the same end. That which pagans sought in their mystery rites the Christians actually found in the Church and its sacraments.

II

Christian by Degrees

Like *Darkness Visible*, also this book is divided into two parts. The six chapters in Part I are headed: Exit Christianity; The Growth of Universalism; Christian Reminders; the Hiram Legend as a Christian Allegory; The Holy Royal Arch; Mark and Ark. The six chapters in Part II carry the captions: The New Covenant; The Ancient and Accepted Rite; the Ritual of the Rose Croix of Heredom; The Ritual of the Grand Elected Knight Kadosh; Masonic Orders of Chivalry; The Ritual of the Knights Templar and Knights of Malta. In Appendix A the author presents a substantial part of the ritual of the Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. Appendix B gives a list of Anglican clergy and Free Church ministers who took the obligation for one or more of the higher degrees. This list includes seventeen bishops, about 450 other members of the Anglican clergy,

and 102 Free Church ministers. "This is very far from being a complete list of all Anglican Masonic clergy; it gives only those in the degrees for which there is a Christian qualification for membership, that is, the Ancient and Accepted Rite, and the Knights Templar. A complete list of all the clergy in the Craft would be many times larger." (P. 207.) The higher degrees referred to above are: Knights of the Pelican and Eagle, Sovereign Prince Rose Croix of Heredom (18); Chevalier du Soleil, or Knight of the Sun (28); Grand Elected Knight Kadosh, Knight of the Black and White Eagle (30); Grand Inspector Inquisitor Commander (31); Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret (32); Grand Inspector General (33); Knight Templar. Appendix C gives a list of the members of the Thirty-Third Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Rite for England and Wales (1954). In this are included *honoris causa* several representatives of the Northern and Southern Jurisdiction of the United States.

Let us examine the book piecemeal. It begins with a foreword in which the writer, E. L. Mascall, raises two questions. The first is "whether Mr. Hannah has transcribed the masonic rituals and described the masonic ceremonies with substantial correctness" (p. 5). The second question is "whether it is possible for a Churchman, whether clerical or lay, to take part in ceremonies such as Mr. Hannah describes, without falling into grave irreverence" (p. 5). Mr. Mascall replies to these questions as follows:

I can only record the impression which, as a complete outsider, I have received from Mr. Hannah's transcription of the rituals. Assuming that transcription to be correct (and this is an assumption which my own examination of the rituals, so far as it goes, confirms), I have been both amazed and shocked at the idea of a Christian, and above all of a Christian priest, taking part in some of the ceremonies which he describes. . . . It is not a question of the probity of persons but of the rational compatibility of two systems of doctrine. (P. 6.)

There follows Rev. Hannah's formidable preface. In it he disposes with inescapable logic of some objections raised to his first book and states the purpose of *Christian by Degrees*, to wit:

I am setting out to disprove the validity of a Christian interpretation of the ritual; hence those who have tried to prove it are clearly relevant to my case. For I maintain that if a Christian interpretation is even attempted it must inevitably lead to the Gnosticism of Wilmshurst or Waite, or to the vague sentimental caricature of historic Christianity presented by Fort Newton. No book has ever been written, or in my opinion could be written, that explains the ritual in terms compatible with the full Christian faith. (P. 12.)

The preface closes on the ringing challenge: "Is the Church of England too mortally involved, too embarrassed, or too frightened to speak her mind?" (Page 13.) But perhaps the most important passage in the preface is the quotation from an article by a Grand Chaplain published in *Freemasons' Chronicle* for January 2, 1954. It reads:

I love this institution because it is non-denominational, or rather supra-denominational, and would like to prophesy that Freemasonry will play a large part in the unification of the diverse elements in Protestantism. It has been argued at great length as to whether or not Freemasonry is a religion. I firmly believe that it is. The tests of any religion lie (1) in its belief in Almighty God and the obligation to serve Him; (2) on the performance of duties to God and man based on the divine law found in a divine revelation (the Bible); (3) all religions comprehend a system of faith and worship. Freemasonry conforms to all of these, and those who have met within its sacred precincts have experienced that inspiration which comes from being nearer to God. It may not be a complete religion since it does not attempt to minister to women and children, and because it is highly selective, but it is nonetheless a religion. (Page 12.)

Let us examine the content of Part I. In this section the author pursues a twofold aim. He traces the history of Freemasonry from its beginnings to the present day. But he does this for the purpose of showing how in course of time Freemasonry, which in its earliest form was charged with distinctively Christian elements, gradually eliminated these and became more and more deistic and universalistic. This is not to say, as the author demonstrates, that one will not discover Christian and Scriptural phraseology and symbolism in present-day workings of the Craft. But it does mean that these remnants of Christian and Biblical expressions and symbols have either been completely demythologized or are lost in a humanistic and naturalistic environment.

The author rejects, as do most informed historians of Freemasonry, legends and myths and wholly unreliable historical data which trace Freemasonry as far back as the ancient mystery cults and the reign of Solomon. He also discounts the relationship of Freemasonry to certain medieval phenomena. He writes:

We may dismiss out of hand the lunatic fringe of fantasiasts who profess to trace a direct historical continuity between the Craft today and King Solomon, or the Druids, the mysteries of ancient Egypt, of Eleusis, of Dionysius, or any other ancient system. . . . We may also dismiss, for want of evidence, but with a little more respect, the discarded historical hypotheses of Dionysian Artificers, the Roman *Collegia* or the *Comacine Masons* as forming the genesis of

the Craft. Nor have advocates of the German *Steinmetzen* or the French *Compagnonage* substantiated their case. . . . No theory which postulates an arcane or esoteric tradition preserved by stonemasons through Saxon, Norman, or medieval history can be supported by any evidence which a critical historian could take seriously, though popular superstitions to the contrary die very hard. (Page 23.)

Two dates, however, are of great historical significance in the history of Freemasonry. They are "the year 1717, which marks the birthday of modern Freemasonry" (p. 26) and the year 1813 in which the two rival Grand Lodges known as the "Ancients" and the "Moderns" became reconciled and brought into being the United Grand Lodge of England with the Duke of Sussex as its first Grand Master (p. 31).

There was compromise on both sides. The "Moderns" gave way on the Royal Arch, which was accepted by them in a face-saving expedient and which was defined not as a separate degree, but as the completion and fulfillment of the third. The "Ancients" gave way on the other "higher degrees," which were jettisoned. . . . It was declared definitely in Article II that "pure Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees, and no more: viz. those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch." (Page 31.)

In a concluding summary of the history of Freemasonry the author observes:

Looking at English Masonry as a whole, it may be said that 1813 rather than 1717 or 1723 was really the date on which the final apostasy became complete. The Grand Master, the Duke of Sussex, was both an autocrat and a convinced Deist, and the spirit of Anderson and his associates triumphed. Non-Christian Universalism and natural religion were established. Only such prayers were offered to the Great Architect as could not prove a stumbling-block to the Jew nor foolishness to the Greeks by being offered in Christ's name. The first of the Charges in the new Constitutions . . . excluded only the stupid atheist and irreligious libertine from that body which has since been described as "more than a Church . . . not a religion but *is* Religion, a worship in which all good men may unite that each may share the faith of all." Such is the position today. (Page 32.)

In chapter two of Part I, Rev. Hannah discusses reactions to Freemasonry by the public. Down to the late decades of the eighteenth century few attacked Freemasonry from the religious point of view. Whatever attacks were made were directed chiefly against the puerilities and insobriety of the Craft. By and by, however, when Freemasonry came to regard itself as a school of moral and religious philosophy

and when Christian people noted that Freemasonry had disowned the unique character of the Christian faith, attacks became louder and more frequent. One such attack came from a certain M. C. Trevilian, a former Mason. In a letter published over his own name in 1849 and titled *A Letter on the Antichristian Character of Freemasonry* he wrote in part:

What was the most bitter ingredient in the cup of sorrows which the Man of sorrows was presented with on that eventful night? Was it the ill-treatment and buffetings of his persecutors? No; this He took voluntarily upon Him. . . . It was the desertion of His friends, and particularly the anti-Christian declaration of Peter; this moved His gentle spirit, and was grief to His soul. . . . The crime of the Christian Freemason is that, in a similar assembly, i. e., in an assembly where the name of Christ is by many held in contempt, and His mediation refused, he also does not stand by his Master, but in complaisance to his fellow-Masons suppresses his knowledge of Him, a silent act which, speaking as loudly as words, may be regarded as equivalent to an open denial. . . . As to the wrong done, the denying on the one hand, and the suppression on the other, Christ being in each case disowned, surely no one will say that there is any great difference between them. Peter denies that Christ is his Lord and Master; the Christian Freemason suppresses or suspends the pretensions of Christ to be his necessary Mediator and Intercessor in prayer . . . *disowning Christ for the time being*; and both answering to the prophecy (Psalm VI, 12) that it should be the "friends" of Christ who should "bring reproach upon Him." . . . Let us make the addition of *motive* to each. The parallel will then stand thus. Peter disowned Christ *through fear*; the Christian Freemason disowns Him *through complaisance* . . . to disown Christ on such an account is nothing less than to betray Him . . . to crucify Him afresh, and to put Him to an open shame. Indifference is the basest quality of the mind. (Page 39 f.)

Rev. Hannah admits that the higher percentage of intellectuals in Freemasonry in recent years over that of previous decades has raised the standards of Masonic scholarship. There are available at present carefully done investigations of the origins, aims, and purposes of Freemasonry. He lists a number of outstanding studies. But he concludes:

Not one of these Masonic scholars, however, has attempted seriously to tackle Freemasonry on its philosophical and religious aspects, particularly its relationship to Christianity, and hence this field has been left wide open to the ravings of the lunatic fringe. . . . Masonry and Christianity in its dogmatic and exclusive sense are incompatible if both are taken seriously; hence no Masonic scholar or Christian

theologian has dared risk his reputation in their camp by attempting a reconciliation. Either the religious side of Masonry is played down or denied . . . or Christianity is reduced to mere morality and a sentimental affection for the Sermon on the Mount. (Page 44.) The existence of the dilemma seems embarrassing both to the Grand Lodge and to the Church. The former, obsessed with its respectability and social status, greatly values the ecclesiastical support of Archbishops and Bishops among the clergy who enjoy the rank of Grand Chaplain, just as local Lodges usually welcome the presence of the Vicar. Any withdrawal would be an intolerable and humiliating affront. The Church, on the other hand, dares not offend or provoke thousands of influential and often financially substantial laymen by enquiring into the religious implications of their Freemasonry, even if the mutual solidarity of the episcopate were ever to allow such an enquiry. There is fear on both sides, hence the search for truth is stifled, and the religious bigamy continues. Only Rome can afford to smile at the situation, and continue to win converts. (Page 47.)

In chapters four to six Rev. Hannah examines the "Christian implicits" in the Hiram legend (prominent in the Master Mason degree), in the Royal Arch, and in the Mark and Ark degrees. Interpreters of the third degree, determined to rescue the Christian character of the Craft from complete extinction, find great satisfaction in interpreting the Hiram legend as an allegorical reenactment of the drama of our redemption. Rev. Hannah quotes the entire legend (much abbreviated in the American working), which, he suggests, entered Masonry in the early eighteenth century, after the Craft was substantially de-Christianized (p. 63). His conclusion, to which the informed Christian who has thought through the implications of the legend will agree, reads:

If Hiram represents Christ, we are faced at once with the fact that this degree teaches a Gnostic heresy rather than Christian orthodoxy. The death of Hiram itself, even though symbolizing the death of Christ, avails nothing; it is not an objective propitiatory sacrifice wrought for the Candidate, but rather a type of the experience which the Candidate himself, representing Hiram, must undergo by his own efforts in his quest for light. This is precisely how the Gnostics, roundly condemned by the Church, regarded the crucifixion. Apart from the superficial blasphemy, then, the allegorical identification of Hiram with Christ in this context is extremely dangerous in that it lays Freemasonry wide open to the charge of being a revival of the old Gnostic heresies and mystery-religions. (P. 63.)

Royal Arch (sequel to the Master Mason degree) fares no better than the Hiram legend. Indeed this degree has some Christian

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elements. Yet its prayers never make reference to Christ. It contains, so the author shows, a blasphemous caricature of the most sacred name of God, so that even Albert Pike, surely one of the most prominent figures in American Masonry, protested in 1873:

We find Royal Arch Masons pretending to bring up into the *Sanctuary*, from the place where it was deposited by Solomon, the Holy Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, on which once were the cherubim, and where the Shekinah, the very God, cohabitant, spoke to Israel the oracles of truth; and written on this, by the side of the name of God, *and forming part of the same Triad*, the unclean name of Baal. . . . When they so accept Baal as a name of the true and Supreme God, and as put upon the Ark as such by Solomon, they accept it with all its surnames. It is Baal-Zebub, Baal-Amun, Baal-Tsaphun, and the Baal-Paar or Peor. . . .

The whole question . . . is whether Baal was *to the Hebrews of the time of Solomon* the name of an evil and malignant being, at enmity with Jehovah, accursed and detested. If it was, it has no business on the Ark, and infinitely less in a word of Triads. . . . The name of Baal *cannot* form one of those Triads; because Baal *is not* a member of the divine trinity. To make it so is sacrilege, is blasphemy, is an insult offered to God, with whose name the abomination is thus coupled. . . . No man or body of men can make me accept as a sacred word, as a symbol of the Infinite and Eternal Godhead, a mongrel word, in part composed of the name of an accursed and beastly heathen god, whose name has been for more than two thousand years an appellation of the devil. . . . No word has any business in the Royal Arch degree that makes the name of a heathen deity one of the names of the true God. (Page 81.)

"Any attempt, therefore," so Rev. Hannah concludes, "to read Christian symbolism or allegory into the Royal Arch leads to blasphemies even greater than in the Craft" (p. 83).

The Mark degree (traditionally an offshoot from the Fellow Craft degree) is discussed at great length. It is of interest because it contains elements claimed to be Messianic. It centers in the "Stone which the builders refused" (Ps. 118:22). But it fails miserably in all the lectures and prayers of the degree to do justice to the Messianic implication of the Stone referred to in the Psalm. Thus also this degree is no more Christian than the three basic degrees.

The Ark Mariner degree, since 1871 taken over by the Mark Masons, "plunges us backwards into the waters of the Flood" (p. 99):

Worshipful Commander Noah rules the Lodge, assisted by Shem and Japhet as Wardens. The other ceremonial officers are the Senior and Junior Deacons, the Director of Ceremonies, the Guardian, or inner

guard, and the Warden, or outer guard. God is saluted in this nautical degree as the Supreme Commander of the Universe. Ham is not respectable enough to be represented at all; he is omitted with execrations, presumably for his unfilial conduct in stripping off his father's Masonic apron and revealing his nakedness. The fact that his descendants became slaves of dark complexion, and therefore, generally speaking, ineligible for regular Masonry (*sic!*), contributes to his disfavor; as the lecture explains, Ham has "no place amongst us on account of the curse pronounced on his posterity." (P. 100.)

The ritual of the Ark Mariner degree appears not to contain the highly objectionable elements found in the rituals discussed above. And yet one cannot escape the impression that the puerilities and inanities in this degree reduce the majestic story of Noah's ark, from which the Savior and Peter draw important lessons, to a level where the sacred words of Scripture are taken in vain.

We proceed to review hurriedly Part II of *Christian by Degrees*. In this section Rev. Hannah presents in full the rituals of the so-called "Christian degrees," to wit: the Rose Croix of Heredom (18); the Grand Elected Knight Kadosh (30); Knights Templar; and Knights of Malta. A critique follows each of these rituals.

It is impossible in this article to discuss in detail these "Christian" rituals. Each has its own peculiar structure, pageantry, dramatic action, and significance. Careful reading of them leaves a variety of impressions, chief among them a feeling of utter perplexity. One hardly trusts his eyes to read prayers spoken in the name of Christ. In the Rose Croix degree appears the collect for the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity with a minor variation at the close. The candidate for this degree is expected to "profess the Trinitarian Christian Faith and, if he is willing, to take an Obligation in the Name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity" (p. 120). Isaiah 53 and a part of 1 Corinthians 13 are read. When the candidate for this degree is invested, he is told, "The Pelican is a symbol of Christ, our Redeemer; for, as it was reputed to feed its young with its own blood to save them from death, so our Saviour shed His blood to save us from death eternal." . . . "The Eagle reminds us that the Saviour is God Himself." . . . "The Cross represents the Cross of Calvary, red with the Precious Blood" (p. 131). The purpose of the Rose Croix of Heredom appears to be to inculcate the virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

The degree of Grand Elected Knight Kadosh has only few Christian elements. The prayer closes with "through Jesus Christ our Lord." But God is referred to as "Great Architect of the Universe." "The entire

ritual breathes the spirit of old-fashioned liberalism, of salvation through ethical enlightenment" (p. 156).

In the Knight Templar degree prayers are offered to the "Holy, Blessed and Glorious Trinity" and "in the name of Christ our Prophet, Christ our Priest, Christ our King" (p. 170). Jesus is addressed as "our blessed Saviour" (p. 173). Eph. 6:10-17; 1 Peter 2:11-17; and Psalm 122 are read.

The Knights of Malta degree offers up prayers "through Jesus Christ our Lord" and confesses the Holy Trinity (p. 188). Long sections from Acts 27 and 28 are read.

It cannot be denied therefore that the "Christian" degrees contain distinctive Christian elements. And yet they are not Christian in the full and true sense. In everyone there are features which are from the Christian point of view decidedly objectionable. Our chief concerns regarding these degrees are:

1. They are conferred only on full-fledged Masons, that is, on Masons who have been raised in the first three degrees and have therefore obligated themselves on a deity which is an idol; have completely ignored Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life; have pledged themselves to a limited morality; and have taken blasphemous oaths. Regardless of how many "Christian" degrees a candidate might take, he will never by that token succeed in exonerating himself from having taken the obligations in the first three degrees.

2. These "Christian" degrees set up altars independent of the church, refuse to disclose their teachings and their rituals to the church, and are determined to remain religious bodies outside the church. "They are therefore blatantly schismatic." (Page 135 f.)

3. All these "Christian" degrees fundamentally revert to Gnosticism. "Gnosticism is a difficult term to define precisely, as it covered many sects and mysteries based on *gnosis* or enlightenment. It was a theosophical philosophy, and in so far as it claimed to be Christian, it professed to reveal to an inner *élite* of initiates esoteric teachings concealed from the many." (P. 140.)

4. Granting that the "Christian" degrees in the English rituals may rightfully lay claim to be orthodox and Christian, the Southern Jurisdiction of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in America specifically repudiates such a claim. It states:

All the Degrees of Scottish Masonry can be received by good men of every race and religious faith; and any Degree that cannot be so received is not Masonry, which is universal, but some other thing, that is exclusive, and therefore intolerant. All our degrees have,

in that, one object. Each inculcates toleration, and the union of men of all faiths; and each erects a platform on which the Mohammedan, the Israelite, and the Christian may stand side by side and hand in hand, as true Brethren. (Page 136.)

III

Concluding Observations

In *Christian by Degrees* as well as in *Darkness Visible* Rev. Hannah is primarily concerned about bringing into the open the true character of English Freemasonry. As he suggests here and there in both books, American Freemasonry differs in some respects from English Freemasonry. See especially *Darkness Visible*, pp. 193 ff. Nevertheless a caution is in order against exaggerating these differences. In their essential features and objectives English and American Freemasonry are alike.

The history of American Freemasonry is succinctly presented in a recent book bearing the title *The Pocket History of Freemasonry* and published by the Philosophical Library, New York. This book is of special value because it records the early history of each of the forty-nine Grand Lodges and Grand Chapters in the United States. The book closes with the important reminder: "The essentials of Freemasonry lie within the three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason, including the Royal Arch" (p. 279).

Statistical information regarding Freemasonry in the United States and in other countries is available in *Statistics Fraternal Societies 1954* (p. 233). According to figures there given, the total membership of Freemasonry in the United States is 3,872,155. Total number of Royal Arch Masons in the United States is 692,574; Royal and Select Masters 271,049; Knights Templar 350,000; Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Masons, Northern Jurisdiction, 442,051; Southern Jurisdiction, 405,964. The membership of the Mystic Order Veiled Prophets of the Enchanted Realm totals 95,976; Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine over 689,678 (though these two Orders are not Masonic bodies, their membership is composed strictly of Masons; the Shriners are Masons who have reached the 32° of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite or who are Knights Templar in good standing). Freemasonry in Canada numbers 237,571; in Latin America, 60,000; in Australasia, 339,687; in the Philippines, 8,367; in England and Wales, 550,000; in Scotland, 400,000; in Ireland, 47,000; in Continental Europe, 100,000. According to recent newspaper releases, Freemasonry is again well established in Germany, where there are at

present 230 lodges, with a total membership of 11,000. The Grand Lodge of Germany, which in 1909 was recognized by only four Grand Lodges in foreign countries, is now recognized by 113. Total Masonic membership in the world is about 5,600,000.

In the school year 1952—53, W. W. Warmann of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, examined the lodge question—therefore not only Freemasonry—as viewed by the churches affiliated with the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America (NCCCUSA). He received information from chief officials of each of the thirty member churches in the NCCCUSA. According to his findings, which he submitted in a B. D. dissertation (1953), fifteen churches in the Council do not object to membership in lodges; one disapproves of its clergy holding membership; seven forbid membership to both their clergy and their laymen; seven take a compromising position. The official attitude of Lutheran bodies in our country toward fraternal organizations was brought to the attention of our people by the *Lutheran Witness* in an article titled "To Join or not to Join" (July 10 and 24, 1951). The Roman Catholic Church declares the Masonic system to be such that no member of this church may belong to it. For a clear and explicit statement detailing the attitude of the Roman Catholic church toward Freemasonry, the reader is referred to *Catholics and Freemasonry*, a booklet of thirty-two pages. This may be obtained from Fathers Rumble & Carty, Radio Replies Press, St. Paul 1, Minn.

In its history of more than a century our Synod has repeatedly taken the lodge question, including Freemasonry, under advisement. Our church has always taken the position that the religion of secret fraternal organizations operating on rituals is incompatible with the Christian faith. Section XIV of the *Synodical Handbook* clearly and forcefully sets forth the position of our church. Some weeks ago one of our pastors in Pittsburgh sent us a leaflet titled *A Practical Application of Synod's Position Concerning Lodges*. In this leaflet the author makes an eloquent plea that all our pastors take most seriously the paragraphs in the *Handbook* dealing with lodges, and he carefully analyzes these paragraphs. Recently Concordia Publishing House placed on the market an excellent investigation of Freemasonry. It bears the title *Masonry in the Light of the Bible*. Our pastors may also find useful *A Threefold Indictment of Secret Orders* by Adam Murrman (National Christian Association, Chicago, Ill.).

Letters from pastors and laymen in our church make it evident that the lodge problem is still with us. One pastor writes:

Thank the Lord for what He has done with a church that only a generation or two ago was hemmed in by all kinds of nationalistic and sociological inhibitions. But now a new danger arises: the church is not only to spread the Word, but this Word must be held in its purity and obeyed! Here is where the matter of lodges comes in, as a vital matter of parish practice, Christian witness, and pastoral honesty and integrity. I have a suspicion that some among us would make "missionary" work just a little easier than the Lord has made it by failing to mention the matter of lodges and Christless religion and worship. . . . If the early Church had held to this weak and cowardly position, there would have been no martyrs, no church discipline, and no sincere witness to the true worship and against the false.

A few final observations:

Rev. Hannah's books deserve to be studied and discussed in pastoral conferences. They contain a vast amount of material on Freemasonry not accessible elsewhere. They also register our most basic objection to Freemasonry and related orders: the shameful disregard, if not denial, of the one and only Savior Jesus Christ.

Apparently some Lutheran bodies in our country no longer make an issue of Freemasonry and related orders. There is evidence also which points in the direction that there are Lutheran ministers who hold membership in Freemasonry. Recently a pastor in an executive position in our church wrote me:

A fortnight ago I led a discussion on the lodge on invitation of our . . . University student group. At the close of the discussion several ULCA and Augustana students wanted to know what they should do with their home pastors who are 32° Masons.

It is most difficult to convince a lodge member that the "god" of secret fraternal organizations is an idol and not the God whom Christians adore. It is equally difficult in many instances to make clear to lodge members on the basis of Scripture that Christians are to "confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 10:9). Masons frequently indulge in an argument like the following:

To say that we reject Christ because we do not mention Him would be as unreasonable as to say that we reject the prophecies of Isaiah because we do not mention them. It is the glory of Masonry that a man who believes implicitly in the deity of Christ, and a man who says that he cannot go that far, can meet as brothers in their acknowledgment of the sovereignty of the Supreme Being, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, and in acknowledgement of their duty to love Him with heart and mind and soul and strength (quoted from article

"Freemasonry Under Attack," by Thomas S. Roy, Grand Master of Massachusetts, in *Masonry in Manitoba*, Vol. 10 [June, 1954], No. 6).

Another Mason writes:

It is definitely not wrong to be a member of any masonic lodge anywhere in the world. The only possible wrong that could exist would be for an individual to be a member of and attend any masonic lodge and be *without Jesus Christ in his heart and not have Jesus Christ in his heart at all times*. Therefore, if any mason leaves God out of his heart while in a lodge room or anywhere else, he is the wrongdoer; but this certainly should not be reflected against the lodge nor its members.

To the above we reply: The fact that Masons often fail to understand our objections on Scriptural grounds to their religious and moral principles does not permit us to excuse and tolerate their lack of comprehension and to make Christianity easy and comfortable for them.

The paragraphs in the *Handbook* are concerned about protecting the integrity of Holy Communion. Rightly so! For we need constantly to bear in mind the mystery of the fellowships in Holy Communion: (a) the fellowship of the bread and wine in the body and blood of the Lord; (b) the fellowship in the body of Christ entered into by those who commune; (c) the resulting fellowship with one another of those who commune. How dare we admit individuals to Holy Communion who fail to grasp in faith the singular glory of Jesus Christ, who do not regard it their greatest privilege to live *in* Him and *for* Him, to exalt His precious name above every name that can be named, and to confess Him in the face of those who are ashamed of Him, or who ignore Him, or who deliberately deny and reject Him?

Freemasonry is a religious and moral force in the modern world with which the church must reckon. The church can make its peace with Freemasonry. This would be tantamount to abdication. This is what the Church of England and some American churches have done. Or the church can follow the pattern of the Roman Catholic Church, which issues encyclicals and pastoral letters condemning Freemasonry and excommunicating every Roman Catholic who joins it. This is the way of the Law. But the church can also—and this is the Scriptural way—make painstaking efforts when dealing with lodge members to have them realize the incompatibility of membership in a society which ignores or even denies Jesus Christ and in a society which confesses and worships Him as the Savior of lost mankind and as the King of kings and Lord of lords. To that end the church of Jesus Christ employs as its instrument the living Word of the living God,

both Law and Gospel. It trusts absolutely in the power of the Holy Spirit present in that Word. In its dealings with lodge members it is patient and considerate but also firm and never evasive. It does not in legalistic fashion force a decision, but it makes, if necessary, countless efforts to have the individual make a decision in harmony with God's Word. As the steward of the mysteries of God, the church must be concerned that only those participate in Holy Communion who have manifested an awareness of the intimate fellowships involved in Holy Communion. So to deal with members of a lodge like Freemasonry as we have tried to suggest is a trying and difficult task. But it is the only God-pleasing way. It is that because it is the way of the Lord Jesus Christ and the way prescribed in His Word.

St. Louis, Mo.