



STATEMENT DM168

## Anglican Synod Concludes Freemasonry Is Heretical

Officials of the **Church of England** overwhelmingly accepted the results of a church inquiry which accused **Freemasonry** of being blasphemous and heretical. At their annual summer policymaking session in York, England, the General Synod approved the report by a vote of 394 to 52, with five synod delegates abstaining. The Synod decides church policy for the world's 70 million Anglicans (including American Episcopalians).

The 56-page report, "Freemasonry and Christianity: Are They Compatible?" was issued in June of 1987 by a seven member church committee — including two Masons — after a 16-month inquiry. The synod revealed that its five non-Mason committee members found a "number of very fundamental reasons to question the compatibility of Freemasons with Christianity." The report stated, "From the evidence we have received, it is clear that some Christians have found the impact of Masonic rituals disturbing and a few perceive them as positively evil." The chairman of the committee, sociologist **Margaret Hewitt**, said that Freemasonry has been a matter of concern to Christians both in this country and elsewhere for many years."

The religious aspects of Freemasonry, such as the use of ritual prayers, chaplains, and an unorthodox doctrine of works righteousness apart from God's grace, were cited by the Anglican Synod as matters of concern. The Synod's primary theological objection centered upon Masonry's use of the word "Jahbulon," which is the name used for deity in Masonic rituals, and is an amalgamation of Semitic, Hebrew, and Egyptian titles for God. The committee's report concluded that the Masonic rituals were "blasphemous" because God's name "must not be taken in vain, nor can it be replaced by an amalgam of the names of pagan deities." The report went on to say that many Christians have withdrawn from Masonic lodges "precisely because they perceive their membership of it as being in conflict with their Christian witness and belief."

Though the report accused Freemasonry of being blasphemous and heretical, it did not recommend that the church require members to jettison their association with Masonic lodges, but rather reiterated the fact that Christians who remain involved in Masonry face "clear difficulties." Several speakers were quick to point out that Masons should not be objects of persecution. **Bishop Stanley Booth-Clibborn** explained, "The important point ought to be that there should be no undue pressure on Christians who are Freemasons, and no witch hunt." **Archbishop of York John Habgood**, the second highest Anglican official, described Freemasonry as being a "fairly harmless eccentricity." Thus the Anglican position against Freemasonry was not as strong as that recently taken by the **Methodist Church in England**, which recommended that their members avoid Masonic lodges.

It is uncertain as to what effect this church decision will have on Freemasonry, but **Michael Higham**, the grand secretary of the **United Grand Lodge of England**, stated that they do plan further discussions with the church. But if changes in Masonic rituals are made, Higham said "we will do it at our own pace."

Freemasonry, which began as a secret society in the 17th century, claims an estimated worldwide membership of six million. The United Grand Lodge of England is the ruling body for the 8,260 Masonic lodges throughout the world. Freemasonry also claims that its rituals are rooted in medieval custom, and that Masonry "is not a religion or a substitute for religion."

— *Ken Samples*

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