

Religion, Politics, and Civility



I eliminated television

from my household two years ago.

That's not to say that it's gone, we still have a television, of course. However, we only use it for movies occasionally, which comes in the form of rentals available for streaming over the internet. I no longer have to fall prey to commercials and incessant reality shows that are bombarded into our living rooms and distort our reality, while we stay tuned for the next hour. But that is an entirely different discussion.

When I say I eliminated television in my household, what I meant to say is that I eliminated being bombarded by the nastiest of the nasty things we all see on TV. Unfortunately, the nasty bombardment continues over every form of media we use.



If you turn on a radio, you get some nasty. If you log on to the internet to check your email, you're going to get some nasty in your inbox. Want to watch that YouTube video of the cat playing with the yarn? Sounds cute, but it's got some nasty little 30 second ad you have to wade through first. Want to see how your friends are doing on Facebook? They're upset, actually, because they're covered in nasty!

When I say nasty, I am referring to politics. Now, before I get too far into this discussion, I am not going to apply any of the standards of any of the American political parties. I will take no stance on any of the candidates, from the national elections, state elections, and even the local township elections in your area.

And while we are on the subject of Facebook, YouTube, and the Internet in general, I'd like to take a moment to point out that political strife and division is amplified in this area. There are people who manufacture articles of religious and political nature, for the sole purpose of getting you to "click" on these articles. These articles are emotionally driven, and are designed to frustrate and confuse people against their own better judgements.



These articles are created out of thin air, with no factual backing, in order to "get hits." The more people who "click" on these articles, the more "hits" the original poster makes. And they are paid per "hit." So, it stands to reason, that the more emotionally driven the articles are, the more people will "click" on it, and ultimately make the author more money.

Since these "writers" are not "journalists" in the

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traditional sense, they have no need to “fact-check” their information. Which leads to a new question: How do you check the facts to see if they are legitimate or not? I will refer you to the bottom of this paper, to a section called the bibliography.

From an observant point of view, I watched this “race” to become the next President of the United States of America, turn into one of the most egregious acts of incivility I have ever seen in my life! There was so much mudslinging, that no one was safe from getting dirty! But, again, I am taking no sides here; this is just an observant point of view. I also viewed this same situation happening within the State-level elections, and even my local elections. Mudslinging has pretty much become a standard within current political elections.



It's hard to argue with the many reasons why we do not discuss religion or politics within our lodge. It becomes easy to offend someone with a differing viewpoint on either subject. Quite frankly, it seems to me that the main purpose of religion and politics is not to resolve issues and educate, but to create a division between men. This division goes so far to the extreme, that people take political discourse to an insular level. Using words such as subhuman, disgusting, evil, stupid, unpatriotic, liars, thieves, deplorable, and even racist.

As Masons, we work to hold true to Psalm 133. The very first line is: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” And it is very good when we all get along. Psalm 133 continues: “It is

like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;” it's precious like oil! And we know the “oil of Joy” to be one of our wages.



In 1723, James Anderson wrote a Book of Constitutions for the Premier Grand Lodge of England, and these constitutions are still used as a reference for many lodges today. In Chapter 29/2, Section VI, 2 states:

Behaviour after the Lodge is over and the Brethren not gone. You may enjoy yourself with innocent Mirth, treating one another according

to Ability, but avoiding all Excess, or forcing any Brother to eat or drink beyond his Inclination, or hindering him from going when his Occasions call him, or doing or saying anything offensive, or that may forbid an easy and free Conversation, for that would blast our Harmony, and defeat our laudable Purposes.

Therefore no private Piques or Quarrels must be brought within the Door of the Lodge, far less any Quarrels about Religion, or Nations, or State Policy, we being only, as Masons, of the catholick Religion above mention'd, we are also of all Nations, Tongues, Kindreds, and Languages, and are resolv'd against all Politics, as what never yet conduct'd to the Welfare of the Lodge, nor ever will.

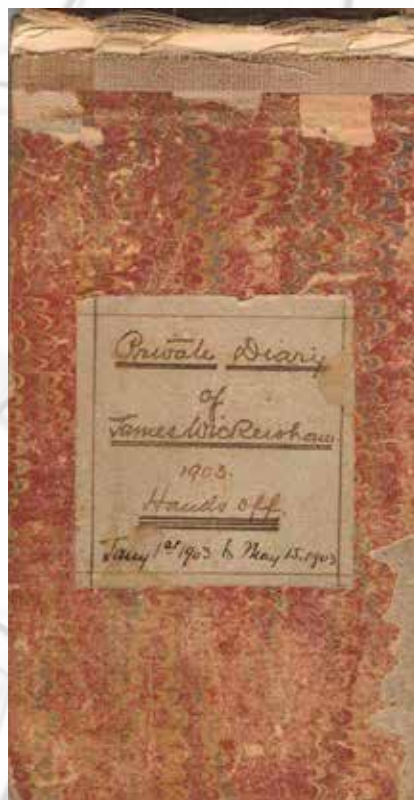
These topics are kept out of lodge to maintain peace and harmony during a meeting, and this rule has done a great job of that. Take a moment to realize that this political and religious situation has been realized almost 300 years ago. I'd venture to guess that political and religious situations in Europe during the 1700's were just as nasty as they are today. Anderson, it seems, had the foresight to put that into the original constitutions.

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So, we tend to keep these discussions out of our Lodges. But this was not always the case. It is a subject of debate whether or not the Masons who established the first lodges in the United States of America held fast to the original constitutions written by Anderson in 1723. Many Masons had political affiliations outside of the Lodge, and even assisted one another during political elections outside of the Lodge. As a matter of fact, one quite politically active Mason from the State of Alaska, wrote in his diary about this very situation.



James Wickersham (August 24, 1857 – October 24, 1939) was a district judge for Alaska, appointed by U.S. President William McKinley to the Third Judicial District in 1900. He resigned his post in 1908 and was subsequently elected as Alaska's delegate to Congress, serving until 1917 and then being re-elected in 1930. He was instrumental in the passage of the Organic Act of 1912, which granted Alaska territorial status, introduced the Alaska Railroad Bill, legislation to establish McKinley Park, and the first Alaska Statehood Bill in 1916. He was among those responsible for the creation of the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines, which later became the University of Alaska. A residence hall on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus is named in his honor.



In Wickersham's Diary, he writes: *November 2-4, 1924: Election Day: It was a beautiful sunny day - clear and cool and Dan's enemies did all the work. Our people had no organization while the Catholics, Masons, and Jews working together had things their own way. Every Republican Territorial official - Bone, Reed, Shoup, and all their clerks and appointees were active for Boyle & Roden! The Democratic candidates.*

March 29th, 1925: John Dunn, Clerk of Judge Reeds Court and others are organizing the Masons to fight the bill for Corporation Sole! At the last election in November 1924, John and these same Masons supported the Democratic ticket composed mostly of Catholics - but they now insist if the Corporation Sole bill shall be passed the Pope and the Catholics will used it to gather in too much property from people dying in their hospitals! - so they are doing their best to defeat it! I am a Mason - made a Mason in Springfield in Illinois, in 1882 - a Life Member of Tacoma Lodge!

Now, this was in 1925, and there is no information as to whether these discussions came up within the Tyled recesses of the Lodge Room. Chances are that Judge James Wickersham just made note of them in his diary for the sake of record. However, at this particular time, the establishment of specific standards was not in place. In 1956, a Conference of Grand Masters of Masons in North America was held. Many lodges attended, and worked together to revisit the old constitutions.

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Three main standards were adopted for use by the Commission for Information for Recognition of the Conference of Grand Masters of Masons in North America. These standards were Legitimacy of Origin, Territorial Sovereignty,

and Ancient Landmarks. These “ancient landmarks” were accepted by the Established Grand Lodges of Arizona, California, District of Columbia, Indiana, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming, in 1956. (Bessel, 1998-2012) Each of these Grand Lodges created their list of “Recognition Standards of Grand Lodges or other Masonic Groups” utilizing these three standards:

1. ***Monotheism*** - *An unalterable and continuing belief in God.*
2. ***The Volume of The Sacred Law*** - *an essential part of the furniture of the Lodge.*
3. ***Prohibition of the discussion of Religion and Politics.***

It should be noted that no Lodge or Grand Lodge speaks for all of Freemasonry. These particular Grand Lodges met to work together to establish certain standards within their own jurisdictions. This establishment may have carried over to other jurisdictions due to placement of Lodges, and new Grand Lodges being formed after this event.



In the 1700's, when the London Royal Society was formed there was tons of fighting over Catholicism and Anglicanism and such throughout the country. People were killing each other over the slightest variance in interpretation of the Bible, and in order to allow peace and brotherly love to prevail, these topics were outlawed. (Cody, 2014)

“Catholick” as mentioned in Anderson’s Constitutions, is not what it means by today’s standards. However the use of this word has a different meaning. The word catholick (with lowercase c; derived via Late Latin catholicus, from the Greek adjective καθολικός (katholikos), meaning “universal.” The word in English can mean either “of the Roman Catholic faith” or “relating to the historic doctrine and practice of the Western Church”. Many modern translations of Anderson’s Constitutions translates this word to “Universal.” In this particular case, Universal refers to a common belief in Deity.

“As above mentioned” refers to the very first charge, Concerning God and Religion. And it states:

A Mason is oblig'd by his Tenure, to obey the moral Law; and if he rightly understands the Art, he will never be a stupid Atheist, nor an irreligious Libertine. But though in ancient times Masons were charg'd in every Country to be of the Religion of that Country or Nation, whatever it was, yet 'tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that Religion in which all Men agree, leaving their particular Opinions to themselves; that is, to be good Men and true, or Men of Honour and Honesty, by whatever Denominations or Persuasions they may be distinguish'd; whereby Masonry becomes the Center of Union, and the Means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must else have remain'd at a perpetual Distance.

This may be why religion, or better explained as “Secular Religious Practices” are left out of the Masonic Lodge. While Freemasonry does not pretend to be a religion in a sectarian or denominational sense, it can, nevertheless, represent a means of enforcing and illustrating moral precepts and ethical principles.

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The Masonic Service Association of North America (MSANA) writes:

"Masons believe that there is one God and that people employ many different ways to seek, and to express what they know of God. Masonry primarily uses the appellation, "Grand Architect of the Universe," and other non-sectarian titles, to address the Deity. In this way, persons of different faiths may join together in prayer, concentrating on God, rather than differences among themselves. Masonry believes in religious freedom and that the relationship between the individual and God is personal, private, and sacred."

This makes great declaration of the sanctity of religious freedom within ones-self, as well as allowing these sacred beliefs to be personal and private. And as we may hold a personal aspect of these beliefs within ourselves, there exists an external source of understanding. And this source of understanding is a book that takes center stage in all of our Lodges.

The MSANA again writes:

"An open volume of the Sacred Law, "the rule and guide of life," is an essential part of every

Masonic meeting. The Volume of the Sacred Law in the Judeo/Christian tradition is the Bible; to Freemasons of other faiths, it is the book held holy by them."

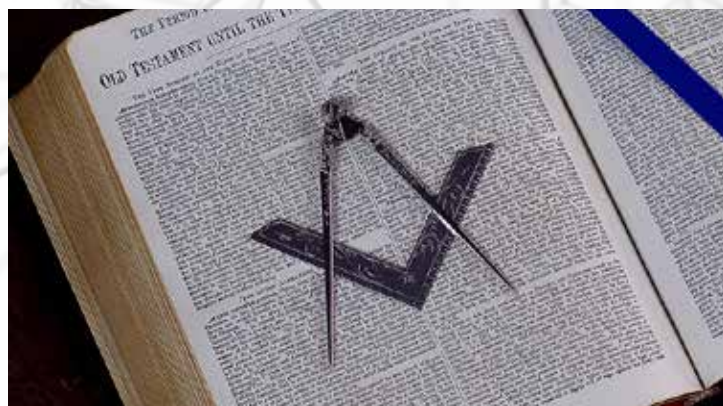
"The Rule and Guide of Life." This is the philosophic and practical lessons. Not only is it that, but it is the center point to which Masons derive the establishment of their faith. Keep in mind that "essential" means "absolutely necessary and indispensable."

The MSANA continues:

"The obligations taken by Freemasons are sworn on the Volume of the Sacred Law. They are undertakings to follow the principles of Freemasonry and to keep confidential a Freemason's means of recognition. The much discussed "penalties," judicial remnants from an earlier era, are symbolic, not literal. They refer only to the pain any honest man should feel at the thought of violating his word."

Freemasonry, is a philosophical system of morality and candidates are entitled to hold whatever religious principles and beliefs they choose. All that the order asks is that each candidate brings with him from his particular religion an essential belief in a Supreme Being - a Being who has been called Masonically, "The Grand Architect of the Universe."

Currently, when anyone mentions something of a spiritual nature, or a current event, even without the slightest intention of being religious or political, it can spark a heated debate. This also leads to changing the



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Causality, Consciousness, Choice, & Trivium



subject into something that it was never intended to be. And we worry that any discussion on or around these subjects will offend members of our lodges, and therefore we fear them.

But we as Masons have a higher responsibility to communicate with one another. In the center of all of our Lodges sits the Holy Bible. The Square and Compasses which remind us of our moral and spiritual obligations, sit upon the Holy Bible, open for all to gain the light from the wisdom within. Unfortunately, we have cultivated a fear of the wisdom inside. We may not physically, but we do symbolically close this Great Light, and the light we should receive, due to a fear of discussing religion.

I don't miss watching television. I don't miss political advertisements telling me things that may or may not be true about the other candidate. I don't miss hearing

political pundits screaming at each other their own viewpoint and how the opposing viewpoint is completely wrong. I don't miss candidates calling each other names, or interrupting each other in a who-can-talk-louder fashion.

I don't pay any attention to these ads on Facebook, YouTube, and the Internet in general anymore, either. I don't need to read a fictitious article just to agree or disagree with it. But I still enjoy talking with friends and family on Facebook. So a little bit of a filter is needed. And be thankful that we all have this filter. We spend the first part of our Masonic lives learning how to use this amazing filter, that not only filters out the junk we see spread across all different forms of media.

What is this amazing filter you ask? **It's our use of the Trivium.**

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I am not a journalist. But I have decided to go further than most do, and cite my sources in the bibliography at the end of this paper. Please take the time to follow through with these sources and “fact-check” my citations.

In the spirit of Masonry, I implore you: Use the Trivium to the full extent to criticize my opinions to the best of your ability. Grammar, rhetoric, and logic are our best friends when it comes to hearing, or reading something of a questionable nature. They help us to question what things make sense, and which ones do not. Not only does the Trivium assist us with understanding what we hear, read, or see, but it allows us to comprehend at a different level, and give a civil response.



Civility is currently a major focus within the organization of Freemasonry in the United States of America. Civility is something I haven't seen within the confines of the political election this last election year. As Masons, we have a responsibility to be civil, and to demonstrate the actions of a civil person. We have many different resources available throughout this fraternity to serve us in this manner. One resource specifically stands out though. And everybody knows where to find it. It's right in the middle of our Lodges.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable,

and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

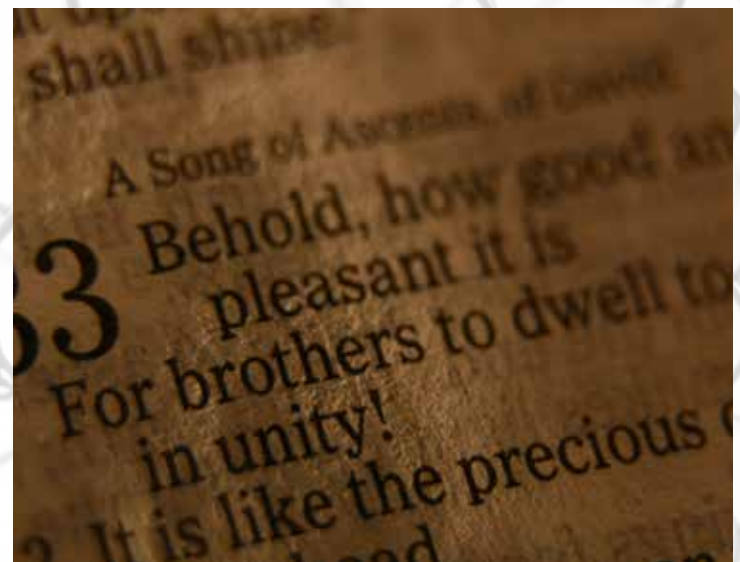
For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching;

Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

- Romans 12:1-10

“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.” That's a profound statement. It holds itself up, along with “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” And unity is what all of this is about.



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The divisive nature of religion and politics needs to stay out of the Masonic Lodge. Unity cannot exist with division between brethren. And I believe this was understood by many Masons during the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge of England, and the writing of Anderson's Constitutions. But we may need to reexamine our thoughts on what religion and politics actually are. We cannot remove the Bible from our Masonic Lodges just because it is used within a religion that we may or may not be a part of. We also cannot preclude current events taking place within our own communities, and affecting our lives directly, just because they are political in nature. There are many brethren out there, that I can have a civil conversation with regarding the nature of religion and politics, and unfortunately, there are others that I can not.



"I believe the media has perpetuated this culture. As Masons, we need to first free ourselves from it, and then set the example for humanity to follow."

- R.W. John D. May, SGW

"Free ourselves from it;" Therein lies the question. Can we free ourselves from this culture, in order to set the example for humanity to follow? More importantly, is there any other way to create unity?



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