

The Cross and the Compass - Compromise and Conflict

by

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Introduction

The cross and the compass. What do they represent? What are the conflicts? Is it possible for one man, one country to embrace them both? And if so, why? These are questions I wish to explore, specifically as they pertain to Mexico, a country with a Roman Catholic heritage and a country which early welcomed Freemasonry, a secret society condemned by nine Papal Bulls.¹ I want to set forth the differences clearly, in order to better evaluate the conflict or the compromise, as the case may be. In order to do this I will briefly look at the historical foundations of Freemasonry, as well as its philosophy and beliefs. I will also discuss the Roman Catholic opposition to these beliefs, both generally and more specifically in Mexico.

After posing the central differences, I will trace the path of Freemasonry from England, its birthplace, through France and Spain to Mexico. Upon its arrival in Mexico, the picture becomes somewhat muddled, with many opposing factions and political maneuverings. It will be impossible in a paper of this scope to sort these out, but a brief look will give some idea of the motivations and men in the period of early Independence. The men who founded Freemasonry in Mexico were often Catholic priests, which raises some fascinating questions.

What was the position of the Catholic Church at this time? Why did there appear to be little opposition and why was Freemasonry so willingly accepted by many in Catholicism? I will attempt to deal with these questions realizing that more research is needed. In conclusion, I hope to suggest areas of further research.

The Compass – Freemasonry Defined

Its historical roots and philosophy

Webster's New World Dictionary (1956) defined Freemasonry as "the principles, rituals, etc. of Freemasons." A Freemason is further defined in Webster's as "A member of an international secret society having as its principles brotherliness, charity, and mutual aid." Albert G. Mackey, a Masonic historian, defined Masonry as "a beautiful system of morals, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols."²

Although there has been much speculation about ancient origins of Freemasonry, some going back as far as Adam and many claiming Solomon as its progenitor, most agree that Freemasonry, as it is known today, had its beginnings in England in 1717.³ Jack Harris, a former Worshipful Master, who renounced Freemasonry and became an ardent Christian, thought that Freemasonry stemmed from the tower of Babel when men attempted to achieve heaven by their own efforts. He also spoke of Egyptian and Phoenician stonemasons whose religious rites and pagan mysteries were handed down throughout the ages.⁴

The word “mason” is a French word, introduced in England by the Normans. These masons, or stone-cutters, important in medieval Europe, built the great cathedrals and abbeys of the time. They joined together to form guilds somewhat similar to the secret societies of today’s Freemasonry. Their workshops were commonly called lodges. Utilizing a system of passwords enable them to be set apart from common workers.⁵ Little information about these societies is available before the 11th Century, although there are references dating back to the 9th century. Some of their practices were to pray for the dead, to attend funerals of guildsmen as well as periodical banquets, to take solemn entrance oaths, to contribute to a common purse and to provide assistance in distress.⁶

There is disagreement about the meaning of the word “Freemason.” It may have meant either a mason with superior skills or else one who was free to travel from guild to guild. Some Masons feel it means freedom from intellectual bondage.⁷

It is difficult to know when the union occurred between philosophic principles and the practices of operative or craft masons. When cathedral building declined after the Reformation, some lodges began to admit honorary members to increase their membership. Society in 18th Century England was in a state of moral decline. The frequency of religious wars discouraged looking to the church as a source of guidance. Enlightenment thought, deism and Protestantism ruled the day. The founding of Freemasonry brought the hope of a new intellectual religion.⁸

In London, on June 24th, 1717, four lodges joined, founding one Grand Lodge.⁹ John Theophilus Desaguliers, a French Huguenot minister educated at Oxford, was elected Grand Master. Using his influence to create a center of enlightenment, he and Rev. James Anderson, a Scotsman, took the tools of the builders trade, applying symbolic meanings. They disguised in Biblical terminology the ancient pagan mysteries of Egypt and other rites used in Masonic rituals.¹⁰

The problem was to find a three-fold formula that would satisfy the intellectuals, who were attracted by heterodox mysticism; the ecclesiastics, who were anxious to preserve the traditional morality, the social framework of the church and dogma of Christianity; and the nobleman, eager for something new, indifferent to the idea of divinity...¹¹

José A. Ferrar Benimeli felt it was important to understand the 18th Century with its love of philosophy and desire for tolerance, peace, and fraternity. People loved meetings, societies and clubs, especially those with an emphasis on humanism and philanthropy.¹² This ambiance, combined with the disillusionment toward the established church, made Freemasonry especially attractive. Elizabeth N. Mills said that in an age of Catholic and Protestant division, an age of reason, Freemasonry became a unifying force for non-conformists, substituting religious orthodoxy for a belief in the power of the human spirit, of reason and the value of science.¹³

What are the teachings of Freemasonry? James Carter spoke of an ancient code of ethics (1390) which contained the “philosophic concept of the perfectability of the human race...the basic idea of progress.” Masons progressed in skills from the common laborer to the skilled stone mason to the architect (master masons). Carter also stated that there was no endorsement of original sin which concept “had held European society in bondage for over 1000 years.”¹⁴ Man’s instincts to build, to organize, to symbolize and to shroud his activities and thoughts in mysterious secrecy are the forces in his nature upon which the institution of Masonry is built.”¹⁵

Albert G. Mackey, in the Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, said that some have made the mistake of calling Masonry Christian. Although it taught the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, it was universal in scope and could be home to the Jew, the Moslem, the Brahman and the Buddhist. Disciples of every faith could subscribe to its creed.¹⁶ The doctrine of resurrection existed from an early period in all nations, among the Egyptians, the Buddhists, the Greeks and Romans.¹⁷ Freemasonry is a “society of Speculative Architects engaged in the construction of spiritual temples.”¹⁸ The Bible was used among Masons as a symbol of the will of God, but whatever expresses the will of the divine could be used. It could be the Koran, the Old Testament, the Vedas. Masonry taught religious truth but didn’t intend to supersede any other system of faith.¹⁹

Its religion is that general one of nature and primitive revelation – handed to us from some ancient and patriarchal priesthood – in which all men may agree and in which no men can differ. It inculcates the practice of virtue, but it supplies no scheme of

redemption for sin.²⁰

Masons claimed to have drawn from religious faiths of all eras. They believed that the mysteries denied to the general mass of people had been handed down through an elect group. These included the Crusaders, disciples of Ithras and Eleusis, the Druids and Dionysians, The Knights Templars, the Essenes, to name but a few.²¹ They emphasized their moral duties to God, neighbor and self. The principle of brotherly love and mutual help was especially important, and it was said that Masonic affiliation took precedence over any other bond.

It can be seen immediately that Freemasonry comes into conflict with basic Christian beliefs. Most important would be the denial of the sinful nature of man and the belief in the Atonement of Jesus Christ to pay for that sin. Secondly, it admits all religions. None can claim to be the sole truth, and all form some sort of mystical whole. Christian symbols are used but given a different meaning. Before looking at the path Masonry traveled from England to Mexico, we will briefly examine the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Cross – Roman Catholic Opposition

The Roman church was not slow in responding to this new development. By 1738 the first Papal Bull against Freemasonry was forthcoming. Clement XII spoke of the associations of certain men who swore on the Bible, promising, under the threat of terrible penalty, not to disclose the secret practices of their society. He declared that not only were the faithful suspicious of these groups, but the secular power had been forced to condemn them, as they were endangering the safety of the state. Condemnation and prohibition of these societies, whatever they might be named, was imperative. He asked for the faithful to comply under penalty of excommunication.

In 1751, Benedict XIV affirmed the Bull of Excommunication and in 1821 Pius VII followed suit, stating that these Masons were the same as the “Carbonarios” of Italy. This bull said they created a religion according to their own fantasy with ceremonies profaning the passion of Jesus Christ, scorning the sacraments of the church, while inventing new sacraments and inciting rebellion against kings.

In 1826 Leon XII spoke of a group called “universitaria” which was an attempt to Masons to indoctrinate the youth. He declared that Masons sometimes denied the existence of God and also believed the soul died with the body. He implored Catholic rulers to support the Papal Bulls, as the cause of religion was intimately related to the wellbeing of society. Masons were against the union of church and state,

desiring to see a change in the form of government. Pius the VIII in 1828 warned that Masons preferred secular education and those teachers who would conduct the youth to the paths of Baal. Other popes, Gregory XVI in 1832, and Pius IX in 1869 affirmed the above thoughts and excommunications.

On April 20, 1884 Pope Leon XIII elaborated further. He lamented that Masons hid their objectives from even their own members. They pretended to be wise literary men that met for scientific purposes, continually speaking of improving civilization. Those who joined gave blind obedience to their leaders and were prepared to obey under penalty of death.²² In 1885 a Spanish priest, Félix Sardá y Salvany, elaborated on the encyclical of Leon XIII in a small book entitled, "Masonry and Catholicism." I have included a good deal of what he has to say, as it was the broadest Roman Catholic anti-Masonic view that I encountered.

He chose the word "Masonismo" rather than "Masonería" wishing to refer to the pervasive nature of Masonry into all society and illustrating how it had become popular even with those not officially members. He commended the Pope for his bravery in speaking out against the crowned Masons of Prussia and England as well as the democratic and aristocratic revolutionaries of the time. He felt the new encyclical was timely. Although Masonry had been seen for what it was, Satanic and anti-Christian, the doctrines and their consequences had not been fully known. It was time to speak out. In one and a half centuries Freemasonry had made incredible progress, invading society at all levels, acquiring sovereignty in many states.²³

Sardá continued by saying that the idea of being a fraternal, charitable organization was merely a disguise, enabling Masonry to hide its true character from the naïve who saw only the externals. It was true that they helped each other with their careers, despite differences of race and nationality. They had affiliations in many places, and often the best recommendation one could have was to be a Mason. The modern state had become Masonic, and its representatives were Masons. Because society was now so dependent on the state the worst type of absolutism existed....almost all of the public careers were dependent on Masonry. The military was heavily infiltrated. Even the literary world was involved. Drama and novels that otherwise would have received little acclaim became immediate successes.²⁴

He remembered that Catholicism had formerly been dominant. Hospitals, orphanages, and asylums had formerly been run by the church and charitable orders. By means of the laws removing property from church ownership, Masons had robbed the charitable works of centuries, removing the poor from the influence of the church. Masonismo had subtly accomplished this, erasing from the world the image of Christ, substituting that of Lucifer. The world would surely end up as one big lodge!²⁵

Sardá continued ...what was Masonry? It was nothing more than naturalism. They taught that man did not fall into sin and didn't need redemption. Perhaps Masons believed in a creator, but surely not a redeemer. According to them Jesus was a man and the church merely a deception. The rational being was perfect, without need of supernatural help to achieve objectives. Man had within himself the ability to gain all he needed, and his free will was completely capable.

Society was also capable, according to the Masons, not inclined to evil. The ultimate end of this was to deny the church, Jesus Christ, and even God. Man and society were perfect, contrary to the evidence of centuries. Masonry spoke of mutual respect and equality, without Christ. It believed that religion was personal and internal. Man was free to worship and serve God as he desired. No one could obligate him as he possessed freedom of conscience. Catholicism disagreed. The revelation of God was obligatory for man and nations. To lack faith and profess opinions against the faith was not a right of the free man but a disgrace of the lazy man.²⁶

Sardá added that the state did not have the right of freedom of religion, even though diverse opinions existed. This was not progress! The state should not be independent, subject only to its own laws. Masons denied that the state was the origin of authority, the instigator of the family, the author of law, the director of education. The state became God. According to Rousseau the state was the sum of everyone's will. Whatever the majority willed was good. Whatever the majority defined as true was true.

This actually resulted in degrading service for all those who depended on the state. The state could become a horrible despot. If there were no principles superior to mankind, what right, said Sardá, did the state have to rule over man? Catholicism taught that man was created to live in society and through it to reach his final end. This was not a social pact, but a creation of God. Society had a divine right. The first foundation was authority; legitimate authority was a divine right. This did not mean to say that kings had some kind of sacred halo...it could be bestowed on the aristocracy or the people themselves, but it was not in its own name or the name of people but in the name of God.²⁷

Undoubtedly the ideas that Sardá y Salvany ascribed to Masonry were not original with secret societies, but the lodges were influential in dispersing this thought. It becomes understandable that many Catholics equated Masonry with Protestantism. Although Protestants could hardly have agreed with all the Freemasonry taught, they emphasized individualism, personal salvation and opposed the authority of the Roman Church, as did Masons.

A more recent author, Martin Barraza, writing in Bogotá in 1960, enlightened us further on the opposition of Catholicism to Freemasonry. Freemasons are not supposed to be atheists. They believe in the

immortality of the soul and a supreme being, referred to as the Great Architect of the Universe. He felt Freemasonry was based on the false premise that all religions are the same, the concept of the Great Architect encompassing all notions of God, be they Christian, Jewish, Pantheistic, etc.²⁸ He noted that not all lodges were agreed, and some disliked the idea of a Great Architect. French lodges rejected this belief in 1929, and The Grand Lodge of England immediately withdrew recognition.²⁹ It was not unusual for Freemasons to speak with a captivating and apparent anointing. The mystical tendencies of the spirit were satisfied. According to Barraza, human pride was also served as Freemasons claimed they received the essence of wisdom from all ages.³⁰

The Papal Bulls are still in effect today, although legislation in 1917 allowed Catholics to withdraw from secret societies without being excommunicated, if they had joined in ignorance. This was quite a deviation from former times when one could be excommunicated by merely helping Masons or reading their writings.³¹

Barraza noted that Masons taught that original sin, grace, sacraments and prayer were myth. The individual could believe in these, but the state should not. He noted, as did Sardá y Salvany, that according to Masonry, the authority of the state was from the people, not from God. Masonry used liturgical symbols and Christian resources, applying meanings contrary to the Christian faith. On Holy Thursday Los Caballeros de Rosa-Cruz celebrated a mystical banquet, a burlesque of the Last Supper, and the Resurrection, igniting lights which had been extinguished on Holy Thursday and pronouncing these words:

Yes, my dear brothers, despotism has been conquered. Liberty, equality and fraternity, have overcome. Ignorance, superstition, and fanaticism are being driven from this world. The cross is for us the symbol of victory with which we can destroy all usurpation.³²

The New Catholic Encyclopedia has an interesting article on Freemasonry. The author comments that Freemasonry possesses all the elements of religion, despite claiming that it is not a religion. It has temples, altars, prayers, vestments, feast days, a hierarchy as well as a moral code. Additionally, there is a ritual of worship, including initiation and burial rites, and reward or punishment in an afterlife. The appointment of chaplains gives the false impression that Freemasonry is Christian. Christian doctrines are not considered proper to discuss, as they are divisive. The Masonic candidate seeks light. He is assured that the lodge will provide the light of spiritual instruction he is unable to receive in the church. If he lives and dies according to Masonic principles, he will reach the haven of the celestial lodge.³³

Dr. Töhötöm Nagy in 1963 wrote with a different viewpoint. As a Jesuit, he decided to infiltrate the lodge in Argentina, with the pope's permission! He did so with trepidation, realizing that if Masons were as bad as reported, he might easily lose his life. At least he would gain some insights! It took him six months to locate an entrance path. This search was simply solved by locating an address in the phone book. He still had to wait three months for an invitation. He had to be accepted by all the lodges in Argentina, and one blackball could have denied membership.³⁴

Nagy also tells of the Mystical Last Supper. The taking of the bread and wine united Masons as brothers, helping them to love each other. The wine was a symbol of intelligence and the bread of strength. The final benediction was "Peace be with you. Go and spread the virtue that is born of faith and charity." He commented that this might seem comic, but was done with faith!³⁵

He concluded by defending both institutions. Although the majority of men in Masonry were anticlerical, the institution was not. He felt one could also say that Catholicism wasn't religious. Many Catholics didn't believe in hell or the Trinity and read condemned books. He found the following similarities between Masonry and Catholicism: faith in God and moral principles, individual responsibility, international mission, persecution by dictators, emphasis on world peace, progressivism, and struggle against tradition.

He remarked that the Jesuits were the freethinkers in the church and therefore closer to Masons than the rest of the church! It was difficult to enter both orders; discipline and obedience were important; the degrees of both were similar, as ascent depended on behavior and demanded intellectual merit. Finally, he wrote a letter to Pope Paul VI. He hoped to show his holiness that Masonry was worthwhile and should be accepted as a step in realizing universal peace. He believed the condemnations of the church were absolutely without basis. His letter to the pope was signed, the faithful servant of your holiness in Christ.³⁶

This is a sampling of Roman Catholic viewpoints. Papal bulls, the New Catholic Encyclopedia, Sarda and Barranza are in the majority, condemning Freemasonry as anti-Christian and anti-Catholic. Nagy is its lone supporter, perhaps reflecting a more liberal Catholicism.

It appears the basic conflict is in the teaching on the nature of man. Christianity teaches that man is sinful, in need of redemption. Masonry denies this and has an optimistic view of both man and society, feeling that man has within himself the seeds of perfection, which are brought to fruition through time and progress. Another obvious conflict is the inclusive nature of Masonry, a belief that all religions have

contributed their best to the fraternity, amalgamated into some kind of glorious whole. Christianity, on the other hand, believes that God has provided no other salvation for mankind than His own Son, Jesus Christ.

Spanish Masonry

Masonry in Spain may have existed as early as 1621, according to Lillian Fisher who stated that there was evidence of Masonry in Salamanca at this time.³⁷ It is hard to say what type of Masonry this could have been. This would have been earlier than the date of 1717 commonly ascribed to the English origin of speculative Masonry. The Grand Orient of Spain in Madrid did not begin, however, until 1726. Lord Wharton was its founder, and it proved attractive to the nobility and the educated middle class.³⁸ In 1769 the Spanish established an independent Grand Lodge.³⁹

French Masonry was introduced a bit later with the arrival of French troops during the Napoleonic invasion. Although it has not been proved conclusively that Napoleon Bonaparte was a Mason, eight of his family members belonged to Masonry: his father and all his brothers. Almost all regiments of his army had a military lodge. In 1804 Joseph Bonaparte was named Grand Master of the Grand Orient of France.⁴⁰

..no other regiment in Europe was so responsible in the development and founding of Masonry....almost always when the troops departed, a new lodge had been established.....the French military Masonry of the first empire planted lodges throughout Europe...an invention of Napoleon to be a powerful arm winning converts for his imperial cause of European domination.⁴¹

French Masonry had a somewhat different character than that introduced by the English. The York Rite (originating in York, England) attracted the aristocracy whereas the Scottish Rite (tradition says that it traveled to France with Scottish refugees following James II into exile)⁴² was popular with the troops and the common people.⁴³

In 1814, despite the restoration of Ferdinand VII to the Spanish throne and the consequent prohibition of Freemasonry, liberal ideas proliferated. They were especially popular among army officers active in the 1820 rebellion led by Colonel Rafael Riego, Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Spain. The success of the rebellion enabled the reinstatement of the Constitution of 1812, placing severe restrictions on the clergy and

the army, threatening their privileges.⁴⁴ Masonry was instrumental in establishing governing juntas and in compelling the king to convoke the Cortes in 1820.⁴⁵

Elizabeth Mills quotes Comin Colomer who claimed that a lodge in Charleston, South Carolina, influenced Spanish Lodges. Among the lodges of Spain was one called “Sociedad de Americanos.” One of its prominent members was Mexican deputy Fray Servando Teresa de Mier. Mexicans Ramos Arizpe and Michelena may also have been members.⁴⁶

These Spanish secret societies met in cafes in Madrid, imitating the clubs that met in cafes in France. Government officials thought it necessary to join in order to keep and obtain positions. Some joined out of curiosity and to be in style. “..a thousand anecdotes were told in Madrid about the ridiculous ceremony of initiation.”⁴⁷ Although the Inquisition outlawed Masonry in 1751, they were allowed to continue under the jurisdiction of local societies.⁴⁸

Richard E. Greenleaf commented on the need for serious study of the complicated political commitments which were held by Spanish Masons during the Napoleonic Era. Undoubtedly the divisions between liberal and conservative Masons, as well as the influence of French and English lodges in Spain, were reflected in the political Masonry of Mexico.⁴⁹ Some felt that the Spanish Cortes was dominated by Masons.⁵⁰ There was an important lodge in Cádiz with many wealthy Spaniards, as well as many influential in the Spanish Navy. This lodge was the head of Spanish Masonry from 1809-1812, in opposition to the Lodge in Madrid, where French influence was predominant. No doubt American deputies in the Cortes were involved in Masonry.⁵¹

Early Masonry in Mexico – Before 1825

The early record is sparse and somewhat confused, but Masonry in Mexico is acknowledged in Inquisition records. Before 1785 three cases had been tried in Mexico. An Italian and two Frenchmen had been accused of being Masons.⁵²

During the time of the French Revolution there were many Frenchmen immigrating to Mexico. Viceroy Juan Vicente de Güemes Pacheco y Padilla (1789-94) brought some in his retinue. Among them were Pedro Burdales, a barber, and Juan Laussel, his cook. Meetings were held in the home of a watchmaker named Laroche, allowing the forbidden books of the encyclopedia to be read. Montesquieu, Filangieri, and Vatel were among authors avidly discussed. Censure was ignored; the interesting questions of political

rights and the natural rights of man were debated.⁵³ Records of this first lodge have considerable validity as they are found in the General Archive of Mexico.⁵⁴

Pedro Burdales, the barber, was involved in Masonry. He claimed that Archbishop don Alonso de Haro Y Peralta was also a member, lending financial support and providing a meeting room in the palace. Historian don Nicolás Rangel agreed this was very possible as the Archbishop was a man of considerable learning, having spent time in Italy among the socially elite, among whom the lodge was fashionable. Burdales was never called before the Inquisition so records are not available in his case. Laroche, however, was not so fortunate and had to appear before the Holy Office. He burned his books, possibly including Masonic manuals. Undoubtedly his association with the secret societies was responsible for his trial, because these societies were teaching the destruction of the Papacy and the Inquisition, as well as advocating doing away with royal privileges. Juan Laussel was also condemned by the Inquisition in 1795 and was exiled to Africa for three years. Apparently Viceroy Branciforte was not as tolerant of Freemasonry as was his predecessor.⁵⁵

During the years 1796-1811 there are no recorded investigations of Masons in Mexico. Francophobia had lessened and the French Masons were tolerated. Viceroy José Miguel de Arana (1798-1806) was an important Spanish Mason. From the years 1808-1813 the Mexican Holy Order of the Inquisition was subordinate to the Cortes and found it hard to prosecute Masons as many of the deputies were Masons. During the years 1811-1820 there was again a renewal of inquisition activity. On July 15, 1815 the Mexican Holy Office issued a decree prohibiting Freemasonry. Dossiers were collected but generally the decree was ignored. Policies of Ferdinand VII caused the migration of many Spanish liberals to Mexico. By 1812 there were lodges with insurrectionist political ideas in Jalapa and Veracruz. Another lodge was established in Mexico City by 1816. The Caballeros Racionales (rational gentlemen) of Jalapa were linked with the Society of Americanists in Cádiz, despite Fray Servando de Mier's denial of any Masonic connection. He called attention to the fact that one had to be a monarchist and a Catholic to enjoy membership. This society was thought to be deeply involved in the Independence movement.⁵⁶

Many sources discussed the possibility of the Masonic affiliation of Father Hidalgo. José Maria Mateos spoke of a lodge in Mexico City on Ratas Street, number 5, although he admitted no founding document existed. He proceeded to name the members, among whom were D. Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and D. Ignacio Allende.⁵⁷ Chism believed this lodge was a York Rite Lodge. Rites may have been learned in Spain as there was a York lodge in Cádiz founded in 1728. Zalce said "Brother Mateos" account must be

given credibility as he was a contemporary. Furthermore, he was honest enough to say that he knew of no original document. However, the Inquisition records did not show Hidalgo as a Mason and that made his membership questionable. He was a man of considerable notoriety, and his Masonry would not be lightly overlooked.⁵⁸ MacLeish, a Masonic librarian, claimed that the Inquisition made a raid on this lodge, but Hidalgo and Allende left the city before the raid. The Inquisitors had to content themselves with excommunicating them as devil worshippers. They were never able to catch the promoters of “light and life and liberty...doctrines they knew too well would eventually mean the overturning of the established order, the crushing forever of the SYSTEM, and the ending of clericalism as an active force in Mexican politics.”⁵⁹

Masonry also entered Mexico as Spanish troops arrived in 1806 to protect Mexico against an English invasion. Many of these troops were from the Scottish Rite, of liberal tendencies, supporting the constitutional movement, a representative government, and clerical reform. The few Mexicans that were admitted belonged to noble families. In 1821 there was a division in the lodges. General Bravo began new lodges which were purely Mexican.⁶⁰

The reinforcement of Spanish troops to oppose Hidalgo’s uprising brought more lodges into being. They were composed of army officers, resident Spaniards and Mexicans who supported Spain. One of their goals was the establishment of a representative system of government in the mother country. Another was the familiar cry of clerical reform.⁶¹ Spanish Masons had come out of an atmosphere of agitation. Their clubs were full of politicians. According to Zalce this precedent had a detrimental effect on Mexican masonry. Although Masonry is not supposed to be involved with politics, the seed had been planted.⁶²

The arrival of O-Donojú, the last Spanish viceroy, provided further impetus to Masonry. He lived only ten days after arriving in Mexico. However, those that accompanied him, especially a medical doctor named D. Manuel Codornú, were active in founding new lodges and strengthening old ones. Codornú was editor of the paper “El Sol” whose object was to support the Plan of Iguala and to spread the liberal principles established in Spain. One major goal was to exclude the clergy from providing education, especially for youth. They wanted to make sure that religion was not the basis for instruction and according to Alamán, their ideas were responsible for the persecution of the Jesuits and the forming of Lancaster schools.⁶³

Iturbide was initially supported by Masonry; however, his support diminished as he proclaimed himself emperor. When he dissolved congress, he became especially unpopular.⁶⁴ Masons realized that “a native monarchy would violate their principles as readily in Mexico as in Spain.” They saw Iturbide as a

violater of the Plan of Iguala.⁶⁵ Masons were thought to be involved in the Plan of Casa Mata. They wanted to call a new congress having national representation. According to Alamán this was how Masons changed the plan of the revolution, realizing that they would be able to dominate the new congress. Those who were leaders in Masonry at the time, Ramos Arispe and Michelena, had been deputies in the Spanish Cortes and were opposed to the Plan of Iguala.⁶⁶ Some feel that when Iturbide sent Echáverri to fight against Santa Ana, he played into the hands of a Masonic plot. Because Echáverri and Santa Ana were Masonic brothers they made a secret pact.

One signal is sufficient to prevent death, combatants put down their arms, share a fraternal embrace and become friends and brothers, as they are sworn to do.⁶⁷

Although during this early period, it appears that lodges were used primarily for political purposes, it can also be seen that the principles of Masonry, the principles of liberty, progress, the perfectability of man as well as strident anticlericalism, have remained constant no matter what the country or age. These principles were introduced by enlightenment thought and adopted by English Masons. They traveled to Spain through English and French influence, arriving in Mexico through various channels, the earliest being French, later through Mexican deputies arriving home from Spain and finally, through Spanish troops arriving to do battle.

Yorkinos and other Masonic Groups

Although lodges existed prior to 1825, it was not until that date that a Mexican Grand Lodge was established with authority to organize and control Mexican lodges. There has been a good deal of discussion about the role of the first American ambassador to Mexico, Joel Poinsett. Some have accused him of engineering the idea in order to gain influence for the United States, wresting control from European interests. Members were principally composed of Spaniards and others who sympathized with Spain, favoring centralism and monarchy.⁶⁸

According to José Fuentes Mares, the National archive in Washington, D.C., contains a letter written by Poinsett that reads as follows:

...with the object of counteracting the fanatical party in Mexico City and, if it is possible, to encourage the spreading of liberal principles among those who are in a position to govern, I aided and encouraged a number of respectable people, men of high standing, to form a Masonic York Grand Lodge...⁶⁹

Others disagree concerning the centrality of Poinsett's role and claim that several lodges agreed to introduce the York Rite in Mexico. These lodges hoped to provide a good meeting place to discuss political plans, as well as an alternative for those less inclined to the traditional Spanish way of thinking. All Poinsett did, according to this line of thought, was to enable the York Rite to be founded in Mexico. A founding charter was needed and this he was able to provide.⁷⁰

Poinsett, a well-traveled man, fluent in several languages, was an attractive figure in the early years of the young nation. George Fisher, who was a member of the "Independence" Lodge, one of the first lodges founded, of which Lorenzo de Zavala was Worthy Master, tells how Poinsett held weekly "tertulias" every Thursday at his home. These were very popular with the elite who gathered to dance, converse, and play cards.

Those interested in state affairs often withdrew from the festivities to better discuss matters at hand. He claims that Poinsett himself was not affiliated with any lodge and did not visit them. He only provided the authority from New York. He did, however, "give Masonic instruction to those who called on him as his mansion."⁷¹

Mateos, founder of the Mexican National Rite in 1825, writes that thirty-six Masons, disillusioned with the Scottish Rite, met together to consider founding a new Rite. These men were especially discouraged because Iturbide had proclaimed himself Emperor and dissolved the Congress. They much favored a federal system with the provinces sharing considerable influence. They hoped the York Rite would gain the freedom they desired and would aid in promoting federalism. The idea to begin a new rite was principally that of D. José María Alpuche é Infante, a priest and senator from Tabasco. He was supported by Ignacio Esteva, the Minister of the Treasury, Miguel Ramón Arispe, Dean of the Cathedral in Puebla and Minister of Justice, and José Antonio Mejía. President D. Guadalupe Victoria was also involved. After five lodges were established, Poinsett was approached and asked to supply the necessary authority from the Grand Lodge of New York. Mateos claimed this was all that he did and that he was unjustly accused of political intrigue.⁷²

Zavala mentioned the same five as being the founders, whereas Carter included the names of Zavala and Guerrero. Alamán named Zavala, Alpuche, Victoria, Esteva and Ramos Arispe as the originators of the new party.⁷³

Mateos clearly spoke of the political purposes of the York Rite. However, Richard Chism, an American Mason involved in Mexican lodges, wrote that the initial intention of the York Lodges was to reform Masonry and to avoid the political tendencies which had dominated the Scottish Rite. Generals, colonels and other army officers as well as senators, deputies, clergy, government employees, businessmen and artisans flocked to join the new lodges. Although at first limited to works of charity, they soon became involved in politics, due to opposition from the Scottish Rite.⁷⁴ Alamán commented that little attention was paid to ceremony and benevolent works. The most evident purposes were directing affairs of state and placing their partisans in influential positions. People joined who wanted to gain favor and be free from persecution. Many deserted the Scottish Rite to join the York Rite and as Esteva was Minister of the Treasury, funds were readily available.⁷⁵

The new Masonic Order soon became powerful. Many saw it as a means to destroy the Masons. According to Alfonso Toro, Ramos Arispe remembered the evils of the Scottish Rite in Spain and wanted to “get rid of those secret societies by a kind of homeopathic politics.”⁷⁶

These new lodges were especially appealing to the enlightened middle class, eager to see social and economic change. Administration changes were made and the numbers of lodges increased. By 1828 over one hundred lodges had been formed, many in the army. The York Rite was anxious to gain members and according to Mateos sufficient care was not given to verify that new members were worthy of being Masons. Members were received from all classes and conditions, often without the legal requirements considered necessary by Masons.⁷⁷

The new Mexican bourgeoisie was anxious to take over, anxious to change the patterns set by the old aristocracy, the propertied class. Lancaster Schools were founded to support secular education.⁷⁸ Some believed that these schools were used to diffuse Protestantism.⁷⁹ There was a hope to use primary education to spread enlightened ideas.

A speech given by D. Juan Rodriguez Puebla in Chapultepec Park in June 1826, at the installation of the lodge “India Azteca,” demonstrated tenets of the new Rite.

Today even though religious intolerance remains, Masonic societies multiply. The day will come when due to the efforts of the lodges peace will be established in all nations and there will be universal friendship among all men. Praise will go up to the great Jehovah and the eternal geometry will be adored in the temple he has build...the altar of which is the heart of the sensible man who has never soiled his hands in sin, never oppressed the innocent...we are tied to the Aztecs...all good men must conspire against the country of Cortés, Alvarado and Ferdinand...this land

(Spain) should disappear from the globe..they have been so complacent in the destruction of their own species...we are known as apostles of religious tolerance and freedom for all peoples.⁸⁰

Although the Scottish Rite also desired clerical reform, they were less radical and wished to preserve many privileges. Many of them yearned to see the Spanish regime restored. The Scottish Rite continued to have influence in the congress and in government. They had been losing ground, but the new competition seemed to cause a revival. It soon became a center for men to unite with their vested interests, hoping to check the influence of the new liberals.⁸¹

The York Rite was unhappy with the Constitution of 1824. Although it granted freedom of thought and press, religious intolerance remained. Roman Catholicism was named as the sole state religion. Legal equality was stressed but the rights of the privileged classes, the church and the military were untouched.⁸² Many felt that these early Masonic organizations formed the basis for the liberal and conservative parties in Mexico. The York Rite with emphasis on federalism, religious tolerance, and equality was in opposition to the Scottish Rite which favored a central form of government, retaining some privileges for the aristocracy and clergy.

According to one North American viewpoint, Mexicans didn't appreciate the true spirit of Masonry although they "were captivated by the forms, ceremonies, the ritual and the imposing and costly paraphernalia of the lodges." The Grand Lodge in Mexico city cost over \$3000 and was similar to the Roman Catholic Cathedral.⁸³

As the Yorkinos rapidly grew and newspaper attacks on the Escoceses increased, the Escoceses saw cause for alarm. On May 2, 1826, José Manuel Ceballos and other Escoceses recommended the need for a law to restrain or outlaw all secret societies. He had few facts to support his concern, and so after a brief discussion, the motion was dismissed. However, a recommendation was made to poll the states as to the presence and influence of secret societies. The states were also to be asked for their opinion regarding the continuance of these societies.⁸⁴

By the following November the report was ready. Chiapas, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Oajaca, Puebla, Sonora, Tabasco, Zacatecas, Colima and Tlaxcala all declared they had no knowledge of existing lodges. This was curious, as most of the governors were from the York Rite! Others reported animosity between the York Rite and the Scottish Rite and admitted that Masons had tried

to gain influence in areas of employment. Coahuila and Texas expressed concern about the lodge being involved in electing deputies to the general congress. Tabasco said that most citizens disliked Masons because they were considered to be irreligious. States which would like to see the Masons disbanded were Tamaulipas, Veracruz, D.F., Michoacán, Puebla, Sonora, Coahuila and Texas, San Luis Potosí, and México.⁸⁵

Again in December of 1826 Senator Ceballos brought forth the proposal to outlaw secret societies, pleading that in time there would be deep regret about the lack of action. He felt these groups would work against the republic, and he enumerated penalties to enforce the law. Senator Cañedo protested, saying he saw no need for such severe action. The matter was again dropped.⁸⁶

Other groups were formed during this time. Opposition from the Catholic Church might have been responsible for the renaming of the York Rite, who at one point called themselves the “Guadalupanos” and called their society, “Aguila Negra” (Black Eagle). It’s unclear whether this was in reference to Guadalupe Victoria or to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Perhaps it referred to both! The Scottish Rite, not to be outdone, formed the “Novenarios.” Mateos said that clergy who had formerly been antagonistic toward the Scottish Rite now joined, fearful of the growing power of the York Rite.

Both groups actively denounced the others, crying heretic. Each had priests within their ranks, prevailing upon their leaders to observe feasts in honor of their Virgin. The Scottish Rite had festivals to honor the Virgen del Pilar and Santiago de Galicia while the York Rite honored the Virgen de Guadalupe. Sermons were preached. In the capital there were processions complete with Masonic emblems, candles and the regalia of the Catholic Church. Scripture passages decrying the impiety of the opposing orders were hurled from rooftops. Violence increased even to the point of murder.⁸⁷ McLeish, a Mason from Ohio, writing in 1918, lamented, “Ignoring these little courtesies, the church officially from its pulpits anathematized Masons of all Rites.”⁸⁸

Masonic influence continued to be on the uprise. An incident which became inflamed heightened the tension. On January 18, 1827, Joaquín Arenas, a Spaniard and a member of the religious order of St. James, invited Ignacio Mora to participate in a revolution restoring Spanish power. Mora, the general commander of the Federal District and State of México, was alarmed and informed President Victoria, who directed him to meet again with Arenas. Witnesses secretly observed the interaction. Mora claimed he needed more details, before he could acquiesce. As

Arena described the plan, one of the witnesses, Francisco Molinos del Campos was so overcome with emotion that he could not restrain himself, and revealed his presence with a violent outburst of temper. Arenas realized he had been betrayed and, aware of the penalty, declared that he was glad to be a martyr for his religion and country.⁸⁹

The York Rite held the Scottish Rite responsible for the plot to restore Spanish supremacy. The old antagonisms toward native Spaniards were awakened. On May 19, 1827, a law was passed stating that no Spaniard could hold a civil or military post until Spain recognized independence. The plan was not enforced until two years later.⁹⁰

Squabbling continued between the two groups. The situation became grave when Bravo, the Mexican Vice President and Grand Master of the Scottish Rite, led a rebellion against the government on December 23, 1827. He sought the suppression of secret societies and the expulsion of Poinsett, as well as a change of personnel in the government. The Scottish Rite was devastated by the increase in power and number of York Rite members. The most feasible solution seemed to be getting rid of both groups along with Poinsett, the instigator of the York Rite.⁹¹ Bravo's rebellion was defeated, and the power of the Scottish Rite was broken.

By September of 1828, the concern had spread. The Scottish Rite was no longer the only group worried about the intrusion of the secret societies into the political scene. *La Aguila Mexicana*, (the Mexican Eagle) on September 17, 1828, published the platform for the York Rite. This platform asked all lodges to support certain nominations for deputies, both for the general congress and for the state legislatures. These would be enlightened men of the York Rite. There would be a five man commission overseeing lodge activity, and this commission would aid in states which did not have a York Rite.

The simple reading of this curious document shows the damage those Masonic Rites are capable of causing, taking over the right of the sovereignty of the people. They are having secret meetings to elect state and national representatives...they say they have to be York Rite? Whose glory are they working for? True patriots have deserted this Rite..it is composed of ignorant and useless people who should not be directing the affairs of the nation. We can expect to see the destruction of the federal system...they must obey or they will be replaced by someone more obedient. To obey and be quiet...this is the sign of a perfect Mason. Their lodges remain in submission to eh Grand Lodge In D.F. and also to foreign influence. The work during the obscurity of night...many have been seduced. They have renounced reason, losing their personal freedom. For reasonable men these ridiculous ceremonies, symbols and stories are the object of laughter and scorn. But not these men! They are so

deceived that they speak of a Masonic procession, a royal arch, a high priest, triple oaths and the teacher Hiram. They are persuaded and talk of it with great respect. When men get to this point they can easily be manipulated. They certainly have no right to direct the affairs of the nation. What right do they have to add to the constitution the qualification of being in the York Rite! This is either the extreme of audacity or stupidity. It will bring the destruction of the federal system. This is centralization! Mexicans! Forbid these reunions! They will be our ruin as they were in Europe!⁹²

Finally the Mexicans had enough, and on October 25, 1828, a law was passed outlawing secret societies. Mateos and others believed that the Scottish Rite was mainly responsible for this law as they had a majority in both houses. The idea behind the law, according to Mateos, was to destroy the York Rite and to rid the country of the foreign influence. The above quote from La Aguila Mexicana, condensed and printed in El Sol a few days later, suggested others besides the Scottish Rite were disgusted with the maneuverings of the secret societies.⁹³ Attached to this law was the Papal Bull of Leon XII of May 13, 1826.

The lodges were driven underground at this point. Violent political activities, the antagonism of the Roman Catholic Church and governmental opposition had all taken their toll.⁹⁴ Lodges were denounced to the government. Secret lists were published. It is likely that the lodges became more active, even though less public, often changing names to escape persecution.⁹⁵

A lodge that has received little notoriety was founded by José María Mateos in 1825, El Rito Nacional Mexicano. This group, according to its founder, began shortly after the founding of the Scottish Rite. The nine founders were concerned about the intrusion of partisan politics and religion into Masonry. A further concern was the admission of many members to the lodges without legal Masonic requirements. They disliked the requirement of the York Rite and Scottish Rite, stating that members had to be Roman Catholics. This clearly was not Masonry! It was not important that men belonged to a certain religion...how much better if they simply honored goodness, quality and sincerity. They desired to see Masonry restored as a humanitarian institution, one which would adopt a program of progress, promoting happiness for all men, perfecting mankind.⁹⁶

The problem that emerged concerned their charter. A new rite must be founded by an already existing order. Finally the solution was found. They concluded that every rite had to have a beginning. What better time to begin than in the infancy of the country! The Scottish Rite and the

York Rite objected to the irregular founding. Mateos claimed their objection was due to concern about upsetting the delicate balance of political influence. The York Rite objected least, as they were the reformers. Many of their members joined.⁹⁷

Freedom of religious belief was emphasized. This rite disliked Roman Catholic dominance controlling the consciences of thousands. A state subjected to the church was clearly against progress. El Rito Nacional Mexicano believed radical reform was imperative, as the Romanizing tendencies of the other two parties were disgusting.⁹⁸

Shortly after the government suspension of secret societies, the York Grand Lodge issued a proclamation dissolving lodges under its jurisdiction. Some refused, and the Grand Lodge of New York on June 8, 1832, decided to transfer its jurisdiction to the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Mexico. Organized masonry continued.⁹⁹ Members of both the Scottish and York Rite joined the Rito Nacional Mexicano, which the police, for some reason, did not bother.¹⁰⁰

With the merging of the lodges into the Rito Nacional Mexicano, came the need to establish some principles. In 1833 a program of reform was adopted which the Masons wished to bring to congress, encouraging their members to take an active role in its support. The principles set forth by Sr. José María Luis Mora were as follows: freedom of opinion and press, abolition of privileges of the clergy and military, suppression of monastic orders, prohibition of clerical control of civil institutions such as marriage and public education, abolition of capital punishment except in the case of premeditated murder, guarantee of the integrity of the territory, creation of colonies that used the Mexican language and customs.

Women were encouraged to join (something unheard of in Masonry) so that they might teach children Masonic values. At least no Mason would have children subjected to superstitious religious education! Unfortunately, said Mateos, Gómez Farías, the spokesman of the party, met opposition within the ranks. Rodríguez Puebla, proud of his Aztec ancestry, wanted to guard the ancient privileges of the Indians. His intimate friend Pedraza supported him, which encouraged the lovers of the “fueros” (privileges), together with President Santa Anna, to organize an opposing faction. This brought half a century of decline, according to Mateos.¹⁰¹

Many of the Roman Catholic clergy were deeply entrenched in Masonry, perhaps for reasons of personal gain or political advancement, rather than because they espoused the principles of Masonry. Those who were members of the Scottish Rite were especially jealous of their privileges.

The York Rite priests may have been more aligned with Masonic principles, desiring clerical reform.

The Cross – Opposition in Mexico

The material on Roman Catholic opposition to Freemasonry in Mexico during the 19th Century is remarkably sparse. It is not difficult to find sermons, newspaper articles, essays and other materials opposed to the ideas promoted by Freemasonry, but there are few sources directly attacking the secret societies by name. This is puzzling, especially in view of the strong stand of the Roman Church, which published nine Papal Bulls condemning Freemasonry between 1728 and 1884. I will briefly comment on the few pamphlets and sermons that I did find.

An early pamphlet by S. Simón-López, entitled *Despertador Cristiano-político* (Christian political alarm) was published in 1809. Simón-López claimed that “not all the philosophers are Freemasons, but all the Freemasons are philosophers.” According to him, Masons were concerned regarding ignorance prevalent in past centuries. They emphasized the double slavery of superstition and despotism. Superstition was seen as the revealed revelation of Scriptures, and being deists, they believed the New and Old Testaments were merely fables.

Simón-López continued, explaining that by despotism, Masons meant monarchy. Freemasons were responsible for the French Revolution, for the extinction of the Bourbons and following apostasy. “Oliver Cromwell laid the egg. Callostro hatched it; the French Revolution brought it to light in 1790. Napoleon is the rooster, and when the rooster sings Peter cries!”¹⁰²

Another pamphlet in 1822 was entitled Perhaps the Congress will become like a Sunburned Bull (referring to a bullfight in which the bull was actually a sheep in disguise!). This author was concerned about the elections and the success of the liberal deputies whom he classified as Freemasons, Lutherans, devils, Jacobins. They all attracted female followers, which only proved their lack of trustworthiness. He worried that Mexico was following the same path traveled by Spain and France. If God failed to intervene, Mexicans would also become victims of heresy. Perhaps, on the other hand, he said, there was no need for such cancers because supposedly the Mexican government was based on the Catholic religion. Vigilance couldn't be overdone, because Freemasonry was apt to extend liberal ideas, unbeknownst to the majority of people. Even Masons themselves were unsure of their brother's identity.¹⁰³

In 1822 ecclesiastical authorities, concerned about the progress of Freemasonry, published the Papal Bulls in Mexico. These were the Bulls of 1738 and 1781 which condemned Freemasonry.¹⁰⁴ This attracted the attention of Fernández de Lizardi, a young satirist living in Mexico City. Lizardi often spoke against the church, especially the Inquisition. Because his writings were of a general nature he had managed to escape censure, much to the chagrin of the church.¹⁰⁵

Upon the publication of the Papal Bulls in Mexico, Lizardi decided to defend the Freemasons. His pamphlet entitled “Defense of the Freemasons” was published February 13, 1822. He declared the Papal Bulls had unjustly condemned the secret societies without sufficient proof. Although Lizardi claimed he was not a Mason and had never attended their meetings, he felt called to defend them. He said they were good men, and their good works put Catholics to shame. He wondered how they could be blamed for simply keeping secrets. After all, they had sworn to God not to reveal their secrets! If secrecy were the issue, he said, could not one bring up the Inquisition? He also enumerated other inconsistencies with the Roman Church.¹⁰⁶

Lizardi was answered by a pamphleteer known simply as “the Papist,” who was shocked at Lizardi’s impudence and daring. He wondered how Lizardi dared to criticize the Pope. He stated that if the motives of the Freemasons were proper they would not have to hide. The decisions of the Pope did not need the false illustrations of the editors of El Sol, and he demanded an apology to the Mexican church from Lizardi.¹⁰⁷

Lizardi responded. He declared that it was ridiculous to say that one couldn’t make an observation on a law or be able to question that law. Simply to question didn’t mean that one questioned its authority. He felt he was fortunate to be born in the age of enlightenment, remarking that it was difficult to understand how one Pope could get ride of the Jesuits and another could reinstate them. Something must be wrong with the pope’s infallibility.

He claimed to respect the Papacy, but said there could very well be errors and contradictions in the papal bulls. He thought that if he were to be excommunicated for writing about a bull, Germany, France, Portugal and Spain should also be excommunicated!¹⁰⁸

However, the ecclesiastical authorities did not find his arguments convincing and on February 29th of 1822, Lizardi was excommunicated. He refused to submit, single-handedly taking on the Roman hierarchy. He petitioned Congress four times to come to his aid, with no response.

He and his family suffered a great deal. Excommunication was a serious action, bringing alienation from society in many ways, even to the extent that merchants refused to sell their wares to the excommunicated family. Few came to their support. Eventually he came to terms with the Catholic Church, although the conditions were never openly stated. In 1826 he again defended Freemasonry. His principle concern at that time was the lack of religious tolerance in the 3rd article of the 1824 Constitution.

Lizardi wrote pamphlets against Father Arenas in 1827, a Spanish priest opposed to Freemasonry, who attempted to lead a rebellion. In April of 1827 as his health deteriorated, Lizardi wrote his last testament, stating that he never doubted the dogmas of the church, but that he did not believe in the infallibility of the pope. He died on June 27, 1827.¹⁰⁹

Many doubted that Freemasonry was the true cause of Lizardi's excommunication. The church had been antagonized by his frequent attacks, and it appeared they now had a motive for revenge. Paul Radin believed that the real reason for the quick action on Lizardi had to do with the reactionary attitude of the higher clergy, who hoped to regain power during their alliance with Iturbide. The Spanish government had made no attempt to enforce the Papal Bulls prohibiting Freemasonry, so it was interesting that the Mexican government took the step of publishing the bulls.¹¹⁰

In 1827 a pamphlet entitled "Concerning Masons" was published in the form of a dialogue between Doña Tecia and D. Canuto. She recommended the return of the Inquisition to get rid of the troublesome Masons. He responded with horror, saying that when one contemplated all the dreadful actions of the Inquisition, it was unthinkable to consider its return. She disagreed and said the Masons had their own form of Inquisition and had been responsible for bloody, hateful wars. It was hard to know which group was the worst, the York Rite or the Scottish Rite. She noted that the York Rite defended liberty and independence. The Scottish Rite, on the other hand, defended order, as opposed to the anarchy of the York Rite. She wondered what could be done. One Inquisition didn't solve the problems. What would happen with two, and both of them in a heated struggle? Masons hid by night and were complete with oaths, threats, ceremonies, grimaces, and rites. Why did they do this if their only aim was charity? She thought it was most interesting that there was disdain for the old Inquisition and protection for those who wore another disguise!¹¹¹

Although there was reluctance to openly criticize the Masons, many were disgusted with their strange activities. In July of 1828 the newspaper El Defensor de La Religion, lamented the reading of condemned books, books by rebels such as Ovid, Voltaire and Rousseau. The Masons, who were surely aware of their unpopularity with the church, had attempted to change their names, The Scottish Rite became the Novenarios and the York Rite the Guadalupanos. Parades were held with banners and all the regalia of the Roman Church. Each sect had a patron saint. El Defensor unhappily remarked that Our Lady of Remedies and the Virgen of Guadalupe were being mocked and that conditions were such that if Luther and Calvin returned, they would object little to the happenings in Mexico. The form of government was not the concern, contrary to what the opponents of El Defensor might say. The main issue was the disdain for the religion of Jesus Christ.

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A sermon by D. Lázaro de la Garza y Ballesteros, Archbishop of Mexico in 1833, attacked the principles of Freemasonry, without actually naming the Masons. He said that men were in ignorance due to sin and had fallen from a holy and just state. Jesus was the true light that illumined every man. He continued that it was not strange that there was so little perfection and so much trouble in society as the Mexicans were only repeating the disobedience of their first fathers, and consequences were multiplied.

Some claimed that age brought perfection and obedience was unnecessary, because we were our own masters. Prestige and a good name were given great importance, and much was written about man's dignity, rights, interests and yet never had man been so far from happiness. He concluded by saying, "You need have no other Master than Jesus Christ."¹¹³

In 1877 the Bishop of Tulancingo wrote an interesting treatise concerning Protestantism and Freemasonry. He traced the problems back to Luther, whom he said was unhappy when Pope Leon X gave the Dominicans, rather than the Augustinians, the right to preach in favor of indulgences. Luther was so angry that he encouraged people to read the Bible! The Gospel was offered to the people without the benefit of commentary, and everyone interpreted it as they wished. This had only resulted in believing nothing.

The Bishop added that Protestants had opened the door giving the Frenchman, Voltaire, license to satirize the church. Because Spain was so close to France, these heresies became popular. Soon Mexico had also become infested by these ideas. Many deserted the faith and although

Viceroy Venegas in 1812 banned the Freemasons, it was too late. The seed had been sown. Nevertheless, God helped Iturbide to gain independence and allowed Mexico to be under religious influence. Remember this, he declared:

Mexico owes to the church her independence! Masons in the first congress wanted to nullify the influence of the church. They weren't completely successful, thanks to faithful Catholics who were present. However, there has been another invasion of Masons and we need to warn the faithful to beware of Protestantism and Masonry.¹¹⁴

Apart from scattered pamphlets, sermons and the excommunication of Lizardi, one wonders at the relative silence of the church. The main objections appeared to be the secrecy and political involvement of Masons. Also protected was their emphasis on freedom of thought and lack of obedience to the church. Some wrongly equated their beliefs with Protestantism. Only Archbishop Garza y Ballesteros spoke to the heart of the matter, and he was reluctant to refer specifically to the Masons.

Conclusions

I have questioned the ability of one man or one country being able to embrace both Christianity and Masonry. It is evident that this happened, not only in Mexico, but in many countries. Following are some tentative conclusions.

As José A. Ferrar Benimelli points out in his book, The Secret Vatican Archives and Masonry, it was customary in the 18th Century to find Catholics in lodges of all countries, both Catholic and non-Catholic. All of the Catholic religious orders were equally represented. In many cases the ecclesiastics were the very founders of these lodges, as can be seen in France, Belgium, Austria, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and Russia. Certainly Mexico was not unique!¹¹⁵

Benimelli was puzzled by the number of Catholics joining Freemasonry in spite of the Papal Bulls. One explanation was that each country had to give its official approval to papal documents. That approval was frequently denied in many Catholic countries as they saw no problem with Masonry. They simply ignored the prohibitions of the Holy See, believing that liberty, fraternity, and equality were Christian virtues. He noted that this rationale must be seen in the light of the 18th Century with its emphasis on philosophy, philanthropy and humanism. Desired were tolerance,

peace and fraternity. There was a sense that the church had failed to promote these ideals. People loved to join clubs and attend meetings. Benemilli believed that in the 18th Century Masons were not so irreligious, nor were Catholics as pious, as in the 19th and 20th Centuries.¹¹⁶

Perhaps the failure to publish the Papal Bulls says much concerning the priority of the Papacy in relationship to the priority of national sovereignty. Benemilli's explanations are helpful, but not completely adequate. Obviously there were some who remained true to their Catholic beliefs and did not compromise by joining lodges. It appears that there was an inability, or perhaps a lack of desire, to examine Masonic beliefs. In some cases there was a denial that one held two opposing creeds, and in the case of the York Rite governors who, when the 1826 poll was taken, denied that Masonry existed in their states!

Catholics, both lay and clergy, who joined the York Rite were often men beginning to question the authority of the church. Lorenzo de Zavala may have been such a man. Zavala attended the Seminary of San Ildefonso in Mérida and was influenced by his teacher, Don Pablo Moreno. Moreno was a sceptic who doubted the veracity of the Bible. He emphasized analysis and decried unquestioning support of dogma. Zavala was encouraged to read forbidden books and to think for himself, to question even the writings of St. Thomas.¹¹⁷ No doubt the example of the United States and the association with men like Poinsett caused further questioning.

An example of the thought of the time was Vicente Rocafuerte's essay on religious tolerance. Rocafuerte appeared to have unmitigated admiration for Protestants. He noted that when Germans discovered the abuses of the Roman clergy, freedom of conscience was birthed. Freedom of conscience was a necessary ingredient of political liberty. Rocafuerte believed the federal system was an important contribution to enlightened thinking, freeing people from the fetters of a Gothic education. He felt religious, political and economic freedom were the three elements of modern civilization.¹¹⁸

He continued by noting that every dominant religion was oppressive. Religion should be invisible and only known for its effects on morality. Admiring the United States, he commented that the application of freedom and intelligence to the study of the Scripture was the basis for North American happiness. Their government allowed the church to be independent of the state and did not financially support religion. Rocafuerte believed those countries best governed were those with free circulation of Bibles and religious literature; their prosperity was directly related to the degree

of religious tolerance allowed in the constitution. Spain began to decay when she instituted the Inquisition and expelled the Moors.¹¹⁹

Rocafuerte appeared a Protestant up to this point, albeit a Protestant with certain political biases! He then commenced to sound more like a Mason, writing that God wanted us to look at all brothers as sons of the same father, without distinction, whether Jewish, Gentile, barbarian or Turk. We should be able to live in perfect harmony and peace. With the passing of time we would progress, becoming tolerant and more loving, whether we were “yorkinos, escoceses, novenarios, guerreistas, pedracistas, borbonistas., etc.”¹²⁰

I found no evidence that Rocafuerte was a Mason. If he was he was probably of the York Rite. Those who were members of the Scottish Rite before Independence were usually Spaniards with strong Spanish ties. They may have been mildly anticlerical, but their main interest was to maintain connections with Spain and to support a centralist monarchy. As the York Rite gained in numbers and popularity, the Scottish Rite realized a need for a balance of power. The York Rite attracted men who were strongly anticlerical, supporting states rights and religious tolerance. Many priests were drawn into the Scottish Rite in an attempt to counteract these ideas. Although some may have done so for selfish reasons, fearing economical and political loss, others probably believed that the downfall of the church would be the downfall of the nation. They were aware of the many charitable works of the church, which required financial support to continue.

The opposition of the Roman Church at this time was weak and inadequate. Even the Papal Bulls brought forth little Scriptural support, focusing mainly on the secret nature of the societies and the danger to the state and the faithful. The church expected faithful Catholics to obey, and in an age of enlightened examination, many were unwilling to do so.

At this time the church was often sidetracked, blaming Protestants for the increase of Freemasonry. Although Protestants believed in the ability of each person to interpret and read Scriptures, that did not mean the Scriptures were open to question, selecting and discarding sections at will. Protestants emphasized a personal relationship with God as opposed to a relationship with God through the church, but it was the God of the Bible, not any God.

Writing as late as 1960, Martín Meléndez Barraza was still blaming Protestants. He claimed Masonry was influenced by other sects, especially Protestants. No doubt in the middle and late 1800's there was increasing interaction between Masons and Protestants as they worked together to

gain common goals, particularly freedom of belief for those not of the Roman Catholic faith. Barraza stated that Masonry was born in England and bore the stamp of Anglican heresy.¹²¹

While it is true that some Protestant denominations did not outlaw Freemasonry as Catholics have done, many Protestants were simply ignorant concerning the teachings of Freemasonry. They joined without realizing it was anything more than a fraternal organization. Some Masons even believed their Rites were connected to Protestantism! Zalce wrongly stated that the York Rite was a continuation of the teachings of Protestantism in its multiple forms.¹²²

Another possible factor in the rapid growth of the secret societies was the comparative weakness of the Catholic Church in Mexico. When Iturbide fell, the archbishop departed for Spain. Only four bishops remained, six dioceses were vacant. By April of 1829 there was only one bishop left, as the Papacy had not granted permission to fill vacancies. The Papacy was concerned about Spanish reaction and Ferdinand VII opposed naming bishops and pastors in America as he didn't want to recognize Mexican independence.¹²³ However, the weakness of the church could not have been decisive, as other countries experienced a strong Masonic influence, despite a healthy Roman Catholic presence.

Undoubtedly there were a variety of motives for becoming involved with secret societies. One cannot discount purely selfish motives, the possibility for personal gain through making connections with the right people, the power plays in balancing one sect against another to achieve one's own ends. There were more altruistic motives also. Whereas one might question the ethics of joining an organization simply because the end justified the means, many joined to promote what they considered to be worthwhile values.

In my opinion, the two most important reasons for the increase of Masonry were first, the lack of Roman Catholic appeal to the scriptures as a basis for rejecting Freemasonry and secondly, the strong desire on the part of liberals to find a structure to compete with the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church. Many saw Masonry as just such an organization. The secrecy of its meetings made it an ideal and attractive instrument to carry out opposition.

There is much discussion about whether Freemasonry is a religion. Certainly the trappings are there: the vestments, the altar, the ritual, the burial rites and a fairly uniform system of belief. Nevertheless, as stated earlier, people joined for other than religious reasons, including political, social, and personal gain. Nevertheless, it seemed to become a religion to many Mexicans, men who

left the Catholic church. In Freemasonry they found fellowship and brotherhood, a belief in the innate goodness and capability of man, enveloped with a mysterious, secret ritualistic aura. As they progressed from degree to degree they looked forward to a final ascent to the Grand Lodge on High. Catholics also are often taught they have some responsibility for working out their own salvation. However, much of Masonic teaching is contrary to Catholicism.

Compromise? Conflict? It seemed to me there was more of the former than the latter in Mexico, especially in the early period following Independence. This is a fascinating period, a time when the young nation was gathering ideas from many directions, a time in which Mexico was seeking to establish her own identity. Masonry is but one factor and needs to be seen in light of the intellectual currents of the time. The conflict between the cross and the compass is a conflict with many facets, deserving of further study.

¹ Jesús Gutiérrez García [Felix Navarrette] Masonry in the History and the Laws of Mexico (México: Editorial Jus, S.A., 1957) pp. 212-214.

² Albert Mackey, cited by James D. Carter, "Freemasonry in Texas" (PhD dissertation, University of Texas, 1954), p. 2.

³ Elizabeth N. Mills, "Don Valentin Gómez Farías and the Development of his Political Ideas," (Thesis, UNAM, 1957), p. 196.

⁴ Jack Harris, Freemasonry: The Invisible Cult in our Midst (Towson, Maryland: By the Author, 1983), pp. 22-23.

⁵ Jesús Gutiérrez García [Felix Navarrette] Masonry in the History and the Laws of Mexico (México: Editorial Jus, S.A., 1957) p. 10.

⁶ Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th Ed., s.v. "Guilds," by Charles Gross.

⁷ Catholic Encyclopaedia, 1967, s.v. "Freemasonry," by W. J. Whalen.

⁸ Mills, "Don Valentín Gómez Farías," p. 197.

⁹ Jesús Gutiérrez García [Felix Navarrette] Masonry in the History and the Laws of Mexico (México: Editorial Jus, S.A., 1957) p. 10.

¹⁰ Harris, Freemasonry: the Invisible Cult in our Midst, p. 23.

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- ¹¹ Carter, "Freemasonry in Texas," p. 21.
- ¹² José A. Ferrar Benimelli, The Secret Vatican Archives and Masonry, (Caracas: Catholic University, "Andrés Bellos," 1976), p. 721.
- ¹³ Mills, "Don Valentín Gómez Farías," p. 197.
- ¹⁴ Carter, "Freemasonry in Texas," pp. 9-10.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 5.
- ¹⁶ An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, 1916, s.v., "Christianization," Albert G. Mackey.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., "Resurrection," A.G. Mackey.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., "Antiquity of Freemasonry," A.G. Mackey.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., "Bible," A.G. Mackey.
- ²⁰ Ibid., "Religion of Masonry," A.G. Mackey.
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- ²² Gutiérrez, Masonry in History, pp. 212-214.
- ²³ D. Félix Sardá y Salvany, Masonry and Catholicism (Barcelona: Librería y Tipografía Católica, 1885), pp. 6-16.
- ²⁴ Ibid., pp. 22-37.
- ²⁵ Ibid., pp. 39-54.
- ²⁷ Ibid., pp. 55-63.
- ²⁸ Manual de la masonería, (Manual of Masonry) p. 37, as cited in Martín Meléndez Barraza, La masonería y su situación canónica, (Masonry and its canonical situation)(Bogotá: Edit. Voto Nacional, 1960), p. 47.
- ²⁹ Barraza, La masonería y su situación canónica, (Masonry and its canonical situation p. 52.
- ³⁰ Dictionaire de la Foi Catholique, (Dictionary of the Catholic faith) II, P. 124, as cited in Barraza, p. 51.
- ³¹ Barraza, La masonería y su situación canónica, (Masonry and its canonical situation pp. 87-89.

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- ³² Ibid., pp. 107-108.
- ³³ Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, s.v., “Freemasonry,” by W. J. Whalen.
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- ³⁵ Ibid., pp. 393-394.
- ³⁶ Ibid., pp. 482-499.
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- ⁴³ Lillian E. Fisher, “Early Masonry in Mexico, 1806-1828,” Southwestern Historical Quarterly 42 (January 1939), p. 198.
- ⁴⁴ Carter, James, Freemasonry in Texas, pp. 261, 270.
- ⁴⁵ Lucas Alamán, Historia de Méjico, (History of Mexico) edited by Carlos Pereyra (México: editorial Jus, 1942), p. 21
- ⁴⁶ Mills, Don Valentín Gómez Farías, p. 198.
- ⁴⁷ Alamán, Historia de Méjico, p.38.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 40
- ⁴⁹ Richard E. Greenleaf, “The Mexican Inquisition and the Masonic Movement: 1751-1820,” New Mexico Historical Review 44, no. 2 (April 1969), p. 108.
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- ⁵¹ Gutiérrez, La Masonería en la historia, (Masonry in history) p. 26.

⁵² Carter, “Freemasonry in Texas,” from his personal collection, Elesio Paredes, “La masonería Matamorese en la historia y la leyenda.”(Matamoras Masonry in history and legend)

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⁵⁴ Lorenzo de Zavala, Ensayo historico de las revoluciones de México desde 1808-1830 (Historical essay of the revolutions of Mexico from 1808-1830)(México: M.N. de la Vega, 1845), p. 21.

⁵⁵ Zalce, Apuntes para la historia, ,(Notes for the history of Masonry) pp. 3-5.

⁵⁶ Greenleaf, Richard E., “The Mexican Inquisition and the Masonic Movement,” pp. 107-111.

⁵⁷ José María Mateos, Historia de la masonería de México, desde 1806 hasta 1884,(History of Masonry in Mexico from 1806-1884) (México, 1884), p. 9.

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⁶⁰ José María Luis Mora, Obras sueltas,(miscellaneous writings) (México: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1963), pp. 7-9.

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⁶³ Alamán, Historia de Méjico, pp. 383-384.

⁶⁴ Mateos, Historia de la masonería, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Carter, “Freemasonry in Texas, p. 272.

⁶⁶ Alamán, Historia de Méjico, p. 657.

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⁶⁹ José Fuentes Mares, Historia de una gran intriga, (History of a great intrigue) (México, Ediciones Oceano, S.A., 1982), p. 99.

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- ⁷⁶ Dos constituyentes del año 1824, (Two constituents from the year 1824) as cited in Lillian Fisher, "Early Masonry in Mexico," p. 206.
- ⁷⁷ Mateos, Historia de la masonería, pp. 21, 39
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- ⁷⁹ Gutiérrez, La masonería en la historia, pp. 56-57.
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- ⁸⁶ El Sol, Dec. 9, 1826.
- ⁸⁷ See Carter, "Freemasonry in Texas," p. 281; Guzmán, "Proscripción de sociedades secretas," (Outlawing of secret societies in 1828) p. 697; Lillian Fisher, "Early Masonry in Mexico," p. 211; Chism, Una contribución a la histórica masónica, p. 18,; and Mateos, Historia de la masonería, pp. 29-31.
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- ⁸⁹ Michael P. Costeloe, La primera republica federal de México (The first federal republic of Mexico) (New York: Vantage Press, 1976), pp. 89-91.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99
- ⁹¹ Alfonso Junco, "La masonería condenado por los prohombres de la independendencia," (Masonry condemned by the leaders of independence) Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, 30 (1952): p. 22.

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- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-48.
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- ¹⁰⁰ See Chism, Una contribución a la histórica masónica, (A contribution to Mexican history) p. 19; and Mateos, Historia de la Masonería en México, (History of Masonry in Mexico) p. 54.
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- ¹⁰⁴ Jefferson Rea Spell, The Life and Works of José Joaquin Fernández de Lizardi (University of Pennsylvania: Ph.D. dissertation, 1931), p. 38.
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- ¹⁰⁶ José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, "Defensa de los Francmasones" (Defense of Freemasons) (México: J.J.M. Benavente y socios, 1822), pp. 2-7.
- ¹⁰⁷ El papista (pseudo.), "Cascabeles al gato." (Bells on the cat) (México: D. Mariano Ontiveros, 1822), pp. 1-7.
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