

The Trouble With Codies:



Dislodging the Codge at St. John's Baraboo

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The Trouble With Lodges: Dislodging the Lodge at St. John's Baraboo

When looking at most congregations within a church body one can almost expect to find a period of hard times and even controversy. This is the situation that St. John's Baraboo found itself in during the early nineties. Controversies are troubling to a church because the problems always seem to get in the way of the preaching of the Gospel.

One thing that all students of the Seminary are taught is that there can be no toleration of false doctrine or false practices within the church. Internal problems that are detrimental to the health and even the growth of a church must be dealt with. When false practices are allowed to continue, the stamping out of such practices becomes very difficult. This is the case in Baraboo. The trouble with the Elks in Baraboo came to a head during the early nineties, but the beginning of the problem stretches farther back into the history of the congregation.

The Problem

Since the founding of St. John's there were problems with lodge membership within the church. In the early 1960's Pastor Emil Toepel, the shepherd of the flock at St. John's went through the difficulty of dealing with the Masonic Lodge membership that some of those belonging to the church held.¹ As a result of his experience with the Masonic Lodge Pastor Toepel was not willing to continue with the difficult task of dealing with the Elks.

Pastor Toepel was well aware of the fact that there were Elks members within the church but he was not willing to deal with the issue directly. He called it "patient disapproval."² One reason that Pastor Toepel did not continue with the Elks is because he seemed to be "burned out." He was the only pastor for a congregation numbering

¹ St. John's Personal files

As part of my research I went to St. John's and collected some of the records that they had concerning the situation. Within the records were Bible classes, names and dates of some of the events that happened during the early 1990's.

² St. John's Personal Files

This is from a letter that Pastor Toepel sent out to the members who held membership within the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks, the BPOE. In the letter he encourages those who hold Elk membership to let their membership expire, but he does not say that he is really going to do anything about it.

about 2,000 souls.³ Pastor Toepel's character also had a lot to do with why he did not deal with the Elks when he dealt with the Masons. "He liked to be in control of all the things in the church, and he didn't want others telling him what he should do...he was just gliding because he didn't want to make waves. And he wanted to retire and have everyone like him. He was a very strong personality and a very strong leader in that whole community, he had a lot of pull."⁴

There is one record of Toepel attempting to deal with the Elks, and that is in a letter that was sent out to about 25-30 members of the church that were known to be members of the Elks. This letter begins by setting forth Biblical principle that speaks out against membership in a secret society such as a lodge. The first half does a good job of stating why there should be no lodge participation, but the second half that proposes how to deal with the issue falls short of having any real goals.

Letter Sent by Pastor Toepel on August 12, 1969:⁵

August 12, 1969

Dear Members of St. John's:

This letter is being sent to 25-30 of St. John's members who are also members of the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks.

The BPOE is a lodge! It calls itself a lodge. It fits the theological definition of a lodge: "A secret fraternal benefit society which has a printed ritual with prayers, altar, chaplain, burial ceremony, an oath, the claim of spiritual advancement, and the guarantee of heaven as a reward for following the principles of the order."

The constitution of St. John's, Article IV, Section B, forbids its members from holding lodge membership. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to which St. John's belongs forbids lodge membership...as do practically all Lutheran churches.

Why? For these reasons – and everyone of these reasons applies to BPOE:

1. Lodges are deistic organizations. A belief in a Supreme Being is required, but this Supreme Being is never defined. He can be any Supreme Being of any religion, Christian and non-Christian. The Bible teaches us that there is only one Supreme Being, THE TRIUNE GOD, and all others are Idols
2. All lodges prayers are ChristLESS! Any reference to Christ is omitted. But Jesus teaches us to pray "in His name." That's the only way we can pray. Without Jesus our prayers won't even reach God's ears. Our sins will block the way. Jesus said: "I am the

³ Interview with Pastor John Parlow 4-20-01

Pastor Parlow came in as the associate Pastor under Pastor Toepel.

⁴ Interview with Pastor John Parlow 4-20-01

⁵ St. John's Personal Files

Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man cometh to the Father but by Me” – and that includes prayer. Lodge prayers are ChristLESS because they have to be. Not all lodge members are Christians, therefore the prayers dare not be Christian

3. The guiding philosophy of all lodge ritual is salvation by one’s own merit (character). Heaven is offered as a reward for man’s own efforts. EXAMPLE: In the Elks memorial service this statement is made: “To teach my brothers that when their earthly accounts are closed, it will be their deeds on earth which will aid them in partaking of the treasures of the better world.” The Elks 11:00 o’clock toast states that “living or dead, an Elk is never forgotten, never forsaken.” Why??? Because he was an ELK!!! Because he lived up to the Elk moral code! - - This teaching and non-Christian hope of the Elks lodge is abhorrent to the sincere, humble Christian who believe he will not be forsaken and forgotten BECAUSE JESUS CHRIST HAS SUFFERED AND DIED FOR HIS SINS AND RISEN AGAIN TO ASSURE HIM OF ETERNAL LIFE IN HEAVEN.

In announcing the death of brother Elk, the vocalist or the quartet of the lodge will sing one stanza of “The Vacant Chair,” as follows: “We shall meet, but we shall miss him, there shall be the vacant chair...he has passed to realms on high.” How come “he passed to realms on high”?? Because he was a good Elk!! Whether Christ was his Savior or not does not seem to make any difference.

This idea that we will EARN heaven is naturally in all our hearts. The devil does his best to keep it there and to promote it. We need to fight against it all the time. Joining a lodge that promotes this non-Christian way of salvation is hardly fighting against it.

4. Lodges are secret societies. The Elk Exalted Ruler requires the new candidate to “take the solemn oath and obligation of the BPOE” in which the candidate swears “that I will never reveal any of the confidential matters of this order.” The Inner Guard and Tiler help to preserve this secrecy.

Jesus said: “In secret have I said nothing”...”I even spoke openly”... “I am the Light of the World, he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness.”

For ten years I have followed a policy of PATIENT DISAPPROVAL with regard to the men of St. John’s who belong to the BPOE. This policy has not been effective. Each new class initiated into Elkdom has some St. John’s men in it. The last class included, for the first time, a young man I confirmed in my children’s confirmation class. That’s hard to take.

I am now requesting your cooperation in the following points:

1. Please inform those people who do the recruiting for the BPOE to stop recruiting from St. John’s membership.
2. Restrict your membership to the social aspect and refrain from ritualistic involvement. This includes office holding.
3. Stop wearing your Elk rings and pins to church!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
4. Keep your name and picture out of the papers with regard to Elk Functions.
5. Give prayerful consideration to allowing your BPOE membership to expire. How can you really in good conscience belong to a secret, deistic, Christless, salvation-by-character organization? It completely contradicts your Christian faith.

Now you can react to this letter and its proposals in various ways:

1. You can quit St. John's and join St. Paul's. They will accept you with open arms, even as they accepted all the masons who left us. Be warned, however, that you will be subjected to the most liberal teaching in all of Lutheranism. In Sunday School your children will be taught that Adam and Eve never were real persons, that Noah and the Flood is a myth – as is the story of Jonah, that only parts of the Bible are God's Word which impress you with their divine quality, etc. --- What means more to you? Belonging to a church which by the grace of God still teaches that the Bible is the errorless Word of God, or belonging to a deistic, Christless lodge???
2. You can create a great disturbance at St. John's. You can make trouble for the pastor, even seek his ouster. Be assured you won't have to work too hard at it. Life is too short to spend it fighting. New pastorates are available. We like it here, but we can leave. I'd rather switch than fight!!!!
3. You can ignore the above listed requests. We'll have to see what happens if you do.
4. You can accept my requests, especially No. 5. We hope and pray for this. The Bible says: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls." Hebrews 13, 17.

Finally, please pass the word along to your "brother" Elks.

Hoping and praying, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

Pastor Toepel
(signature)

Following this letter there is no record of Pastor Toepel taking any action against the Elk members in the congregation. In fact Pastor Toepel sidestepped any attempt to deal with the issue when it was brought up.

In 1985-1986 Pastor John Parlow served his vicar year at St. John's in Baraboo, and already then it was common knowledge that there was membership within the Elks. "It was always my understanding that everyone knew that there was something that had to be done, they told me, when I was a vicar there that they had wanted to call me back as a pastor one day. But they said you know then you are going to have to deal with the lodge issue. I knew about the lodge issue and I remember asking Pastor Toepel about the lodge issue. To which he said, 'well that's not really much of your concern as a vicar.'"⁶

Pastor Parlow was not the only person to bring to question the lodge issue. In 1987⁷ Pastor Dan Balge was called to serve as the associate pastor at St. John's, at this time he too brought the lodge membership into question. Parlow comments, " I came

⁶ Interview with Pastor John Parlow 4-20-01

back to Seminary and when you come back your senior year as you know...the Dean was Professor Balge. Professor Balge had said to me, he asked me about my time, and I said about the lodge and so on and he said that his son Dan had then been called there. Dan then took the call at some point around that time. At some point Professor Balge made the comment to me, 'yea I always wondered how Dan was doing to handle it.' And Dan never did handle that, I guess Dan, according to those on the committee, had told me that Dan did confront Pastor Toepel, but Pastor Toepel said 'notice you're the associate pastor. You'll do what I allow you to do.'"⁸

Pastor Dan Balge was never able to deal with the issue, and in a year and a half he took a call to Germany. "The members there will tell you that one of the reasons that he took the call is because he and Toepel would not get along, and Dan wanted to do something with the Elks, but Toepel would not allow him to. And Dan wasn't of the personality makeup where he was willing to fight it."⁹ Pastor Toepel again found himself in the position that he wanted, a single pastor of a congregation, and in control.

Earlier comments by members proved to be true. They stated that one day they wanted to call John Parlow to serve as their pastor and that is what they did. On January 4, 1990 John Parlow was installed as associate pastor at St. John's, Baraboo. Pastor Toepel performed the installation.

The Solution

Pastor Parlow came into the situation at Baraboo knowing that he would indeed have to deal with the Elks issue. It was almost twenty-one years since Pastor Toepel sent out the letter concerning the Elks issue, now Pastor Parlow was there and he knew that the issue needed to be addressed. He states, "Already in April or May I am already starting to deal with the issue because people told me that I was going to have to deal with the issue."¹⁰ This is how everything started, Parlow knew that the issue needed to be confronted, and that is what he set out to do.

⁷ St. John's personal files

⁸ Interview with Pastor John Parlow 4-20-01

⁹ Interview with Pastor John Parlow 4-20-01

¹⁰ Interview with Pastor John Parlow 4-20-01

Pastor Parlow knew the job would not be easy, but he expected that he would receive some support from the senior pastor, but that was not the case. "Pastor Toepel had told me that 'if you want to deal with it that is fine, but understand that I am not going to back you up on it.' 'I told him listen, we have to work as a team for this is a Biblical issue', but he said 'yea I have been here a lot of years and you have to understand that I am not going to back you up on this issue.' I said 'I need some backing' and he said 'well it's your issue.'"¹¹ Pastor Parlow was in a position that no pastor wants to be. He knew he was going to have to deal with the issue and he knew he would have to deal with the issue without any support from the senior pastor.

So Pastor Parlow set out to correct St. John's concerning its false practices, and he does so with very little support. When asked why Toepel would not support him he states, "mostly in September and October there were a lot of meetings and so on, and he wasn't going to step in because he knew I was right. By me pursuing the issue he knew it would expose the fact that he knew he should have done that a long time ago."¹² Pastor Toepel did not support Pastor Parlow because he knew that dealing with the issue would show that he had neglected his duty for many years.

The Dates

Throughout the whole incident concerning the Elks, Pastor Parlow took his time and through great effort, he carefully taught his members about the Biblical principle of lodge membership. He made use of every opportunity available Bible classes, sermons, letters, and even personal counseling. During this time many references were made concerning the Elks issue. Pastor Parlow came to St. John's in January of 1990, the first few months the only Elks dealings consisted of simple references in his sermons and Bible classes. It was not until September of 1990 that he took the first big step in dealing with the Elks issue. The following lists of dates are the times when major milestones were reached.

October 25th, 1990 – On this day Pastor Parlow took the first major step to deal with the Elks issue. During the previous days he carefully studied the issues and wrote a

¹¹ Interview with Pastor John Parlow 4-20-01

¹² Interview with Pastor John Parlow 4-20-01

Bible class with which he was going to begin an in-depth study with the congregation. On Friday, October 26th 1990 with a letter dated October 25th Pastor Parlow went to the Elks lodge in Baraboo to hand deliver the letter and a Bible class, one that he would use to instruct his members.¹³ Parlow recalls the incident. "I also had gone over and hand delivered the letter to them on a Friday night at the Elks Lodge, walking into the Elks Lodge which is kind of an unnerving thing. I said can I see the leaders please, and they said they are in the middle of this social thing. And I said, hi my name is John Parlow I would like to make sure that this gets to the head Elk, I would like you to make sure that gets to him please, would you make sure that happens."¹⁴

10-25-90 letter to the Elks Lodge¹⁵

John M. Parlow
Pastor-Teacher
624 East St.
Baraboo, WI. 53913

The Elks Club
623 Broadway
Baraboo, WI. 53913

Dear Sirs:

Enclosed is a copy of a Bible study that will be presented and studied at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Baraboo on Sunday, October 28th and Sunday, November 4th. The reason I have enclosed the study is two-fold. First, I wish to represent the B.P.O.E. accurately and honestly. While reviewing the study, if you discover any inaccuracy, please bring this to my attention so that I may in turn bring it to the attention of my people. In doing so I would request written proof of the error. Secondly, I myself wish to be accurately represented. Rumor and slander do not benefit your organization or the Church.

Let me make it clear that I admire some of the principles that the Elks lodge sets forth (i.e. fraternalism, loyalty, patriotism, etc.). But I have two strong objections with the Elks. One is the religion of the Elks is in direct opposition to the religion of the Holy Scriptures. For that reason I will continue to encourage my members not to be affiliated in any manner with the lodge. Secondly, apart from the anti-Biblical philosophies, your discriminatory practices are unfortunate, to say the least.

¹³ The Bible class that was taught on 10-28-90 is included in addenda to the paper. The Bible class is entitled The Lodge – A Biblical Perspective.

¹⁴ Interview with Pastor John Parlow 4-20-01

¹⁵ Pastor John Parlow's Personal Files

On April 20, 2001 I met with Pastor Parlow and conducted an interview with him. At that time he gave me his personal files from his time at St. John's which dealt with the matter on the Elks. He gave me permission to copy what I needed and to include whatever I felt was necessary for the paper.

It is my prayer that the B.P.O.E. would reconsider their religious aspects and discriminatory practices thereby making the Elks lodge an acceptable organization for the devout Christian. If you have any questions or comments please contact me.

Sincerely,

John M. Parlow
Pastor-teacher

October 25th, 1990

This Bible class that was given to the Elks to look over was used to begin instruction within the congregation that following Sunday (October 28th 1990). Since the class was designed to be in-depth, it was finished on the following Sunday (November 4th 1990). With this first major step taken, the weekly education of the church members also continued.

Fall 1990 – Pastor Parlow took every step to properly educate the members of St. John’s. Not only did he teach the Bible classes, but he also provided them with different material that they could take home and study on their own. During the fall 1990 there was a self-study Bible class provided for all the members who wished to know more about the Elks. This Bible class was printed and left on a table in the narthex for all those who wished to take a copy. This class was entitled “Why the Wisconsin Synod and our Congregation object to the Lodge.”¹⁶

For the next ten months there were more Bible classes and sermon comments to follow. While the records contain many of the Bible classes there were no dates listed for the times that they were used.¹⁷

March/April, 1991 - During this time WELS Paris Assistance did a diagnostic study on St. John’s and in the report it urges the to take action concerning the lodge membership. “However long years of not applying the confessional Lutheran doctrine of church fellowship to membership in the lodge have left some confusion...Make no mistakes, the congregation’s future – like its past – will be determined chiefly by its commitment and understanding of scripture.”¹⁸

¹⁶ St. John’s Personal Files

This Bible class is included as part of the addenda.

¹⁷ Two of the Bible classes that were used during this period of time are included in the addenda.

¹⁸ St. John’s Personal A Diagnostic Analysis and Recommendation for St. John’s Ev. Lutheran Church

June 30th 1991 – Earlier in 1991 Pastor Emil Toepel retired from the ministry for cause. This is not a subject that this paper will deal with because the details do not have to do with the Elks. It is on this date in June that Pastor Myron Schwanke is installed as the associate pastor of St. John’s. Now Pastor Parlow would have the support of the church’s other pastor as he deals with the Elks’ issue. Pastor Schwanke comments on his support, “When I came in, I knew of the Elks issue and I assured John that I agreed 100% with his format of dealing with it. He had laid the groundwork with Bible classes, mailings, sermons, open forums etc. I mainly was his support system in that he was not alone against the world.”¹⁹

September 1st 1991 – For almost a year Pastor Parlow took the time to patiently teach his congregation in light of Scripture concerning the Lodge issue. As the saying goes all things must come to an end. This is the position that Baraboo found itself in during the month of September. The patient teaching now came to an end. It was time to take action against those that remained in the lodge and in their impenitence. During the month of September St. John’s included in its monthly newsletter an agenda listing how the church was now going to deal with those who refused to leave the Elks’ Lodge.²⁰ This agenda consists of five points. The first three points include Bible passages and explanations to once again instruct the erring members in the Biblical principles concerning lodge membership. Point four consists of a list of times that instruction took place. It is part five that is of special importance. Part five lists the actions that will now be taken with all of those who remain impenitent of their lodge membership.

Point 5²¹

5. Procedure

a. Each member of St. John’s who is currently a member of the Elk’s lodge #688 or any lodge will be requested to **immediately** terminate his/her membership in the lodge. After reviewing what Scripture states concerning lodgery and its false religiosity, each person will be given two weeks to make the decision concerning his/her lodge membership. Members who have decided to terminate their lodge membership are **strongly urged** to sign the letter provided by the church expressing this desire. The signing of the letter is in no way to indicate that a person’s word is not trusted, rather the reason for signed letter is to assure people that the church does not “play favorites” and holds all members accountable to the Word of God. Members who have decided to terminate their lodge membership by some other means other

¹⁹ E-mail correspondence with Pastor Myron Schwanke

²⁰ St. John’s Personal Files

²¹ Pastor John Parlow’s Personal Files

than the church letter are requested to notify the church of their actions, thus assuring accountability and accuracy. Those members who have previously terminated their lodge membership are pleased asked to notify the church of their actions again for the sake of accountability and accuracy.

b. Refusal to terminate lodge membership will indicate continued and manifest impenitence and a deliberate disobedience of God's Word which will result in immediate church discipline and official excommunication at the next quarterly meeting of the congregation – January 1992 (if impenitence is still present). (Matthew 18:17; I Corinthians 5:5; II Corinthians 13:2; I Timothy 1:20; Titus 3:10)

c. In the event that a person would indicate that he/she has terminated lodge membership and then secretly seek reinstatement in the lodge, such action would result IMMEDIATE church discipline and the loss of all Christian privileges (marriage, burial).

d. The person who has left the lodge is to be treated with Christian love and respect, not ridiculed or humiliated, but encouraged to grow in the faith he/she holds precious through regular use of the Means of Grace (Word and Sacrament).

e. Because it is impossible to assume that we would have 100% participation by all lodge members in our congregation, the following will occur if membership is discovered after the present three-step program (1. open meeting; 2. invitation meeting 3. personal meeting):

1. IMMEDIATE church discipline because of the sin of deception.
2. In the event that lodge membership is not discovered until the member's death, **Christian burial will be refused.**
3. This program of Biblical education and discipline concerning the lodge membership will be completed by **December 1st, 1991**. Any member of this congregation who retains his/her membership in the lodge and said membership is disclosed, points a and b will be carried out.
4. An excommunicated member can apply for reinstatement as a member of this church at the next congregational voter's meeting only if the offense to God's Word has been removed from his/her life.

f. Widows who are currently members of the lodge via the membership of their husbands are also asked to terminate membership in the Lodge in accordance with the word of God (II John 10, 11).

g. The next meeting concerning the Lodge issue will be held Tuesday, **November 5th** at 7 p.m. at the church. Known lodge members of the congregation will receive a letter urging them to attend the meeting. Those members of the Lodge who do not receive a letter, by virtue of their anonymity, are strongly urged to attend. There will be an opportunity at this meeting to ask questions but please keep in mind God's Word is not debatable nor negotiable.

There are some points in this list of procedures that need to be clarified. The first is the statement "After reviewing what Scripture states concerning lodgery and its false religiosity, each person will be given two weeks to make the decision concerning his/her lodge membership."²² This two-week period referred to two weeks following the meeting on Tuesday, November 5th. During these two weeks the Elks members would have the chance to prayerfully consider their membership, then action would be taken. Two weeks from the date does not match up with the December 1st cut off date. This date in

²² Pastor John Parlow's Personal Files

December was the day in which all matters were brought to an end and wrapped up. That is why the two-week period does not match.

The second point that needs to be cleared up is the three-step program “(1. open meeting; 2. invitation meeting 3. personal meeting).”²³ This three-step program refers to two more meetings at church (October 15th and November 5th) and a private meeting with individuals in person or on the phone. The two meetings at church will be covered at a later time in the paper.

The third point deals with the letter mentioned. “Members who have decided to terminate their lodge membership are **strongly urged** to sign the letter provided by the church expressing this desire.”²⁴ This was a letter that all lodge members were asked to fill out, which then would be sent to the Elks by St. John’s. This letter was given to all of the known Elks members.

Lodge Letter²⁵

The Elks Lodge #688
623 Broadway
Baraboo, Wisconsin 53913

Dear Sirs:

Motivated by my love for Jesus Christ and His Word and my conscience bearing witness, I sincerely and respectfully request that my name be removed from the membership roster of the Elk’s Lodge #688 in Baraboo, Wisconsin and that my membership be terminated by means of a dimit. It is my understanding that termination by means of a dimit means 1) that I am no longer a member (or considered to be) of the lodge, 2) that I no longer support or identify with the Elk’s lodge in any way, 3) that I no longer wish to receive any Elk’s Lodge publications, and 4) that in the event that National organization of the B.P.O.E. should ever officially and totally remove the religiosity of the Elk’s lodge, I then would be allowed to rejoin the lodge if I wish, the offenses having been removed, and not lose the seniority that was established by my previous membership.

In the event, that you will not terminate my membership by means of a dimit, I would still ask that you release me from membership in the Elk’s Lodge # 688.

Sincerely,

Signed _____
Printed _____

Date _____

²³ Pastor John Parlow’s Personal Files

²⁴ Pastor John Parlow’s Personal Files

Those who were members of the lodge and still wanted to remain a member at St. John's were expected to sign this letter.

October 15, 1991 – On this day St. John's began the first part of the three-point program and held an open forum at church. During this meeting Pastor Parlow provided those present with more instruction and also offered them the chance to ask questions. Pastor Parlow recalls one of those questions, "One of them stood up and said, 'have you ever been to the Elk's Lodge.' And I said no I haven't been to the Elk's lodge. To which he said, 'how do you know what we teach?' I said because one of the members who used to be an Elks Lodge member gave me your handbook and so I am taking it directly from your handbook. He said, 'well, maybe we don't teach the same thing.' And I picked up the handbook and said is this the handbook that you use it says 1990? And he said 'yea'. And I said therefore I am going to let your Elks lodge speak for itself."²⁶

At this meeting there were 24 people present.²⁷

Of the twenty-four people that were present not all of them were members of the Lodge. Some of the men came to show their support for the pastors. Following this meeting the first stage of the three-step program was complete.

October 28th 1991 – On this day the pastors of St. John's took the second step in their three-step program. The second step refers to an invitation meeting. On October 28th a letter was sent out to all of the St. John's members who belonged to the Elks inviting them to a special meeting on November 5th at 7 p.m. at St. John's.

²⁵ St. John's Personal Files

²⁶ Interview with Pastor John Parlow 4-20-01

²⁷ Pastor John Parlow's Personal Files

Letter of Invitation²⁸

October 28th, 1991

Dear friend in Christ,

It has been brought to our attention that you are currently a member in the lodge. The pastors and elders would like you to meet with us on November 5th at 7 p.m. at the church. We will again view the issue of the lodge and its religiosity in the light of Holy Scripture. We would encourage you to alert your friends who are members of this church and members of the lodge of this important meeting.

If you are unable to attend the meeting, please call the church office to make a personal appointment with one of the pastors. Because of the spiritual seriousness of this matter, we would appreciate your Christian cooperation. In the event, you have recently dropped your lodge membership, please let us know. In such a case, you are not asked to attend the meeting.

In Christ's Service,

Pastor John M. Parlow

Pastor Myron L. Schwanke

With this letter came one of the few responses on record which concerns the incident. Bev and Ron Federman reply, "We feel or thought this is a free country, that we are adults and should be free to do what we want and not be dictated to. We feel the Elks have done as much to help people young + old, as maybe you have and I feel also that if the Elks is so bad the good Lord would have saw that the Elks no longer would. We only hope you and the church are so understanding as all other religions are."²⁹

It is a sad thing to see that even with all of the education that was provided for the people some still seem to completely miss the point. Pastor Schwanke comments on this sentiment, "The Elks issue was a hot topic as most people didn't understand why it was wrong to belong. For them the Elks was a social outing and the Elks did a lot of good for the community. Also their friends from other churches in town could belong and have no problem."³⁰

November 5th 1991 – The Elks members who to this date have not signed the release request were invited to come to the final public meeting at the church. At this meeting there were ten members in attendance.³¹

The format of this meeting was conducted along the same lines as the meeting on October 15th. This meeting consisted of a period of instruction and a session of questions

²⁸ St. John's Personal Files

²⁹ St. John's Personal Files

³⁰ E-mail correspondence with Pastor Myron Schwanke

³¹ Pastor John Parlow's Personal Files

and answers. Following the meeting those present were given the letter that requested their release from the lodge. From this day all lodge members were given the two-week period to prayerfully consider their lodge membership.

In essence the line was drawn in sand. It was now up to the people to decide if they wanted to be members of St. John's or the Elks.

The days following November 5th – During the days after the final meeting at church both Pastor Parlow and Pastor Schwanke put the third and final step of their three-step program into practice. This step consisted of the personal meetings.

“We had a couple of meetings where we had a question and answer format and then asked the Elk members to sign a dimit if they desired to remain a member of St. John's. They had a deadline by which to do this. If we did not receive a response from them, we gave them a personal call (using the speaker phone) to find out what they decided to do. (We divided up the list and each made the calls in the presence of the other so that there was validity. That way we had verification of the call and their response. If they did not give us an answer then, they were given a deadline to respond, and if none, then they would be removed from membership to their own spiritual welfare.”³²

December 1991 – In the month of December St. John's included in their newsletter another article that tried to answer some questions and clear up some misconceptions. This article came under the heading “So That All May Know...the truth.”³³

So That All May Know ...the truth³⁴

I've heard that we can't have friends outside of our own church or who are in the lodge, is that true?

It is imperative that you understand that all Scripture passages that teach on the subject of “church fellowship principles” or “guilt by association principles” are only applied to religious situations and cases involving people who claim to be Christians living in direct disobedience to God's Word. The Bible's teaching of “guilt by association” **does not** mean you cannot have friends who belong to other churches or the lodge, as some are erroneously reporting; (if that were the case how would you share the Truth with a friend or the Gospel message with an unbeliever?); it simply means you never want to give your friends the impression that you are in agreement with or support their beliefs or those of their churches or lodge if they are contrary to Scripture. Friendship itself **does not** compromise the truth of God's Word; promotion of, identification with and support of false doctrine **does**.

³² E-mail correspondence with Pastor Myron Schwanke.

The first part of the quote is in reference to the two meetings previously mentioned.

³³ St. John's Personal Files

³⁴ St. John's Personal Files

Is it true that Pastor Parlow said only Wisconsin Synod members are going to heaven?

Wisconsin Lutheran Synod members **will not** be the only ones in heaven. He never said that. He has never implied that. In fact, in the sermon series entitled, "Handed over to Satan" which was taught in September 1990 he said that if you think you are saved because you are a member of St. John's or the WELS, you are foolish, you are wrong. The Bible teaches it is faith alone in Jesus Christ, not your church membership that saves you. That precious faith comes by hearing the message of Christ preached (Romans 10:17). Christ commands us to teach and obey every Word of the Bible (Matthew 28:18-20). By doing so you build up in the faith and you show you really love God (John 8:31; 1 John 5:1-5). Consequently, Christians are commanded by Christ and His Word to worship in churches where the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and flee any error or false teaching because it can steal away saving faith. To hold membership in any organization or church that denies, conditions, and compromises Jesus Christ and His Word is to deny Christ's command of faithfulness to his Word (John 8:31). By the grace of God, the Wisconsin Synod is a church body that teaches God's Word in its truth and purity. We thank God that we are part of a church body that is still faithful to **all** of God's Word. WELS members, **if they trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord**, will be in heaven but some WELS members **may not** because they are hypocrites, saying one thing and living another, confessing Christ as Lord of their lives but living for self and the world. Such people Jesus warns will not be in heaven (Matthew 7:21). We say all of that to say this: it is faith alone in Jesus that saves, not your church membership.

Have you heard the report that certain individuals have allegedly contacted the Wisconsin Synod President Carl Mischke concerning the Lodge issue at St. John's???

Allegedly it has been reported that President Mischke and others in his office have said that lodge membership is permissible and that St. John's pastors and leadership are acting on their own. **THIS IS NOT TRUE!!**

First, note that the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod Model Constitution states concerning membership in a lodge – Article V, Section 2: "Our God has implanted within us who are Christians the new man, who desires to live righteously (II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:24). Consequently, members of His church will... 3) refuse to hold membership in any organization whose teachings and practices conflict with the Word of God (for example, lodges)."

Secondly, we would strongly encourage any one who had concerns and questions concerning the lodge issue to contact the Synod office to verify St. John's and the Synod's position.

December 1st, 1991 – On the first of December the deadline came. As stated, "This program of Biblical education and discipline concerning the lodge membership will be completed by December 1st, 1991. Any member of this congregation who retains his/her membership in the lodge and said membership is disclosed, points a and b will be carried out."³⁵ Points A and B are in reference to church discipline and a suspension of church privileges (marriage and burial). The people who held membership in the Elks had three choices and that is shown in their actions. Some terminated their membership with the Elks, some removed themselves from membership at St. John's and went to St. Paul's (ELCA) and others did not do a single thing, waiting to see if the church was going to do what it said it would. Those who waited, thinking that no action would come were mistaken in their thinking. Action did come.

³⁵ St. John's Personal Files

The first step was taken on December 9, 1991. On that day 42 people were released from membership. This number is of those who chose to do nothing and see what actions St. John's would take. There were also fifteen more people who were released to their own spiritual welfare by their own request.

Over the span of a year and a half there were many members that did terminate their lodge membership or leave the church. The names listed above are of those who chose to remain members and do nothing about their lodge membership. The official end of the issue came at the Voters Meeting in January 1992 where the voting members made the final vote concerning those who were to be removed from membership on the 9th of December 1991.

The Numbers

Synod's 1991 statistical report shows the numbers of those who left St. John's during the whole Elks issue. The report states that in 1991 there were 29 people who transferred out of St. John's, 55 people joined other churches, and 52 people were removed from membership. That is a grand total of 136 people who left the church in one way or another in 1991. It is difficult to prove that every single person left because of the Elks issue. Church records show that the majority of people did leave because they did not want to leave the Elks. As great as this number is, there were many more that left St. John's prior to 1991. Those that left for the most part either joined St. Paul's the ELCA church in town, or left the church all together.

"In the wake of the disciplinary action against the Elks, a number of people who were not associated with the Elks but did not understand or agree with the action chose to leave. Among couples who were in their 30s and 40s, the wife often left because her husband belonged to the Elks, and he was not about to give up his membership in the lodge. She simply wanted to attend church where he did. The departure of these members was not always bad. Of the members who left St. John's, about 25% were active, and their loss was felt keenly. But most of the others were not active. Some left because it was an easy "out" for them, and they currently are not attending any church whatsoever."³⁶

³⁶ E-mail correspondence with Pastor Tom Fricke

The Following Bitterness

St. John's congregation experienced a very difficult time as it tried to deal with the Elks' issue. With all of the education that took place it is hard to understand why the people would perceive the issue as confusing. Once again this goes back to the days of Pastor Toepel. For many years he did not say anything about the Elks issue, and now Pastor Parlow was coming in saying that you could not be a member. Gerry Krueger³⁷ comments, "If it is so bad, then why did Pastor Toepel allow it? And if Pastor Toepel allowed it, then why did Pastor Parlow tell them that they'd be subject to church discipline if they refused to leave the Elks?"³⁸ The confusion came because people at St. John's never really understood the basic issue even with all of the education that took place.

The polarization of the congregation was, in my opinion, the most painful cost. The whole atmosphere at St. John's was tense. Some who were emotionally more fragile could not let go, and they never got over it. For some, to forgive became difficult. There were some, who strongly supported Pastor Parlow, who assumed a rudely pietistic attitude toward their fellow members. In some cases these members did not want to receive communion with certain of the "Toepelites" (as they called them) and did not associate with them. Some of these members soured on the entire experience and found something to be disappointed with in seemingly every WELS clergyman they encountered. There were others, who strongly supported Pastor Toepel, who pushed a more "liberal" kind of agenda. They expressed a yearning for a looser practice in the area of church discipline, church fellowship, and women in the church. They desired a greater civic-mindedness on the part of the congregation, and a more social kind of interaction with the community, choosing to ignore fellowship implications. Still others, who did not take sides, became disillusioned with the church. They felt the hurt of the experience and deplored what they called the "lack of love" among the congregation members. They yearned for the factions to be reconciled. Too often their yearning for peace overrode their concern for proper doctrine and practice.³⁹

This quote from Pastor Fricke sums up the true bitterness that followed the whole ordeal.

Pastor Fricke is the current head pastor at St. John's. While he was never involved with the issue concerning the Elks he has some experience on the issue just through conversations and looking at church records.

³⁷ Gerry Krueger has faithfully served as the church secretary from when Pastor Toepel was still at St. John's and still currently serves in that position.

³⁸ E-mail correspondence with Pastor Tom Fricke

I asked Pastor Fricke some questions through e-mail and he in turn asked for some additional information from Gerry Krueger.

A Personal Perspective

I served my vicar year at St. John's in 1999-2000. Even though the Elks issue happened almost ten years previously there was still some bitterness within the congregation. I recall shut-in visits where people would say bad things about Pastor Toepel and say nothing but good things about Pastor Parlow, and there were other visits where the exact opposite was said. All those who talked about the Elks blamed either Pastor Toepel or Pastor Parlow for everything that happened. In their minds these men were to blame, the fact that the church was not practicing Biblical fellowship had nothing to do with it in their eyes.

While there is bitterness there is also healing. Under the strong leadership of Pastor Fricke and Pastor Schwanke St. John's is once again a church that is known for its doctrinal stance.

A Current Perspective

As a result of dealing with the lodge issue Pastor Parlow found it very difficult to continue his ministry at St. John's. In August 1994 Pastor Parlow accepted a call to St. Mark in Green Bay where he continues to serve as pastor. Pastor Tom Fricke accepted the call to serve as the head pastor of St. John's.

The Elks issue purified St. John's congregation. As they went through their hardship they also became a stronger congregation.

A firm confessional stand now seems to be better established and more greatly appreciated among the members of the congregation. At least it is no longer outwardly and directly opposed. When I arrived as a new pastor—gifted with a different personality and less obvious abilities from Pastors Parlow and Toepel—the congregation received me warmly, if somewhat tentatively at first. (It was always my observation that I was granted one year's full immunity from criticism because of the circumstances.) This situation proved to be fertile soil for an ongoing educational process. Whereas the initial "purge" was something that took place in a relatively short period of time, now the time was ripe for a lengthier process of education and nurturing. The losses of membership, while painful, allowed some who were not willing to submit to the truth to attend elsewhere. Those who remained and continued to be skeptical of a strong confessional position eventually lost their influence and their will to push toward doctrinal laxity.

³⁹ E-mail correspondence with Pastor Tom Fricke

An external unity accompanies the unity in doctrine. People seem to have a sense of optimism. They are no longer ashamed to say they are members at this church. Bible study opportunities are growing. The congregation seems to have recovered a sense of mission that is closer to a Biblical vision for a Christian congregation. Opportunities for evangelism are increasing, and a firmly confessional position does not seem to be a deterrent to many.⁴⁰

This is not only the observation of Pastor Fricke, but also that of Pastor Schwanke. “I believe we now stand out in the community as a church that stands for something. We are the strict (conservative) church and I believe that people who don't have the same position as the WELS realize they don't really belong and go elsewhere. Therefore I believe that our membership is becoming more "one in faith". And we have people coming to us now because they are looking for a more Bible - based Church. What a breath of fresh air!”⁴¹

The Lord truly brought St. John's through its difficult times. Without his help there is no telling where the congregation could be doctrinally to this day. It is his guiding hand that brought them into this new period of confessionalism. And it is the Lord's hand that will see them through in the future.

⁴⁰ E-mail correspondence with Pastor Tom Fricke

⁴¹ E-mail correspondence with Pastor Myron Schwanke

Addenda

- I. The Codge – A Biblical Perspective
Bible Class Presented: October 28th, 1990
- II. Why The Wisconsin Synod and our Congregation Object to Codge Membership
This Bible class was placed on the narthex table for the members to take and study at home.
- III. Fellowship with a Christian Congregation
- IV. Dislodging the Codge
Taken from Mark Braun's BIC course entitled Where We Stand

THE LODGE - A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church

October 28th, 1990

So what does the Bible say about the lodge? Several months ago we addressed that question in a rather brief format. In doing so we learned that there are really two questions that need to be addressed in such a study. Two questions that need to be answered in order to give a fair and honest testimony. The first question that needs to be addressed is "What does the Bible say about the **lodge**?", expressing the opinion that there is no connection between the Bible (or religion) and the lodge organizations. Some may be more interested in asking a second question, "So what **does** the Bible say about the lodge?", believing that God's Word will give us a clear reference and guide to lodge positions and practices.

This study proposes to answer both variants of that all important question. In answer to the assumption that there is no connection between religion and the lodges, we must let the lodge, specifically the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, to speak for themselves. Their own authors, public practices, and rituals will reveal whether or not they are religious.

The more informed person who acknowledges at least some similarity of the lodges with religion, may be interested to read that the Bible actually speaks against lodgery as a system, not to mention many individual and particular lodge practices and teachings.

When we "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (I John 4:1), we will see that the faithful Christian and pastor-teacher faces a dilemma when dealing with the lodge member, often because of ignorance on both sides. By using the information at hand, it is my prayer that we can answer effectively when asked, "So what does the Bible say about the Lodge?"

What We Can Learn from the Lodge

There are many good things about the lodge to which your attention is first called.

First, fraternalism. Americans are joiners. No matter what interests a person may have, someone, somewhere has organized the right organization for him or her. This is because we Americans want to be a part of people and movements. The lodge provides a close-knit group of people with similar backgrounds and interests. It works hard to build a feeling of brotherhood among its members. True concern for each other is often expressed in a variety of ways, such as defending each other, aiding each other in all ways, caring for families, and knowing that all members of the lodge will come to your support.

Loyalty is another admirable quality of the lodge. Seldom, if ever, do you hear a lodge member "bad mouth" his organization, his leaders, or his fellow members. They really stick together, and any differences they may have are handled discreetly. We Christians could learn much here. We not only find reason to "knock" our pastor and fellow members, but our entire church body--and openly, too, as in the public press. Our troubles too could be handled more discreetly.

Patriotism is another admirable quality of the lodge. We are living in an era in American history that tends to look at patriotism as support of "the establishment." Lodges always endeavor to instill patriotism in their members, considering it a part of their total purpose. We admire them for their emphasis, and urge them to increase their efforts.

Moral teachings can also be praised within the lodge. With the sinking of public morality, we must admire anyone who will still teach and inculcate a moral upright life. If the lodge wants to use symbolic tools to teach morals, we have no objection. In fact, the only objection we have with their teaching of morals is that they claim that by these morals they can earn eternal life--which is work righteousness.

We would also like to praise the lodge for its humanitarianism. Hospitals, homes for aged, circuses, post-season football games, and the like are magnificent gestures of human compassion. We thank God for these works and acts of charity, knowing all along that we Christian churches could be doing so much more than we are. (How To Respond to The Lodge, by L. James Rongstad, p.27)

So what does the Bible say about the lodge? Is the lodge religious?

Many countless lodge members do not know what their organizations actually believe, or at least refuse to talk about it if they do.' For this reason, it is necessary for you to be informed so that you know what you are supporting and propagating with your membership. Is it really accurate when lodge members say there is simply no connection between their lodge and God's written revelation to man? To judge fairly, we will need to let the lodges themselves tell us what they stand for. The Elks Lodge will be our main focal point.

The B.P.O.E. was formed in 1866 in New York in order to help members of the acting profession evade the strict Sunday liquor laws then in force. Originally the group of actors called themselves "The Jolly Corks", either in allusion to corks flying from the liquor bottles, or an allusion to the theatrical profession. Seeking a distinctly American name after they were organized, a name to reflect their growing interest in benevolence, they chose the name Elks, because the Elk is a purely American animal "fleet of foot, timorous of wrong, but ever ready to combat in defense of self or the female of the species." (James R. Nicholson, History of the Order of Elks, p.13, quoted in LC-MS, "Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks" p.7.)

Membership in the Order is limited to male American citizens at least twenty-one years of age, who believe in the existence of God. There are no branches or degrees of membership and no auxiliary organizations, except for State Associations, Past Exalted Rulers Associations, and the Grand Lodge.

The ritual of the Elks bears several marks of Masonry, including the aprons, and several references to "quarry." However, none of the ritual is known to be standardized except the special services, such as memorial, and burial services. (Graebner, Handbook of Organizations, pp. 85 & 90.)

Social memberships are known to exist, whereby a person may obtain the use of lodge facilities for a fee, without actual membership. Such practice, however, is

repeatedly condemned by the national organization, as in this letter from a national officer:

Let me assure you very positively that we do not and never will permit any candidate to become a member of the Elks without the full initiation ceremony prescribed by our ritual, and neither do we permit, nor will we tolerate, any so-called social membership, and if any of us in positions of authority learn of any officer of any Lodge granting so-called social memberships, or permitting candidates to be classified as members without the full initiation ceremony, then you may be assured that such officers will be promptly

removed from office, and if the Lodge itself is at fault, the charter will be revoked. (LC-MS, Brotherly Protective Order of the Elks, pp. 64.)

"Official" Membership of initiated members is currently over 2 million. The "Antlers", "Antlerettes", "Does", and "Lady Elks" generally accept the position of the lodge, but are not officially endorsed.

The purpose of the Elks has become much more social than some lodges like the Masons. The Elks purpose formally stated is:

To inculcate the principles of Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love and Fidelity; to promote the welfare and enhance the happiness of its members, to quicken the spirit of American patriotism; to cultivate good fellowship; to perpetuate itself as a fraternal organization; and to provide for its government. (Constitution and Statutes of the BPOE, Centennial Edition, 1868-1969, p. 7)

If this were all the further the Elks went we would find little to complain about. But when we delve into their rituals further, we find reason for the same basic objections which we see in other lodges.

As with other lodges there are several "religious" features. The order does apply a religious test, asking if the applicant believes in a "Supreme Being or God"; prayers and sacred music are employed in the rituals; the Bible must be placed on the altar before opening a meeting. (Ritual of the Subordinate Lodges, p. 22, in LC-MS, p. 4) The candidate swears, "And may God help me" to obey his vow of secrecy and fidelity to the Order. (Ritual of the Subordinate Lodges, p. 22, in LC-MS, p. 3; also see Appendix #1) Explanations of the resurrection in the funeral services also point to the religious character of this lodge. (Ritual of Special Services, p. 23-26, in LC-MS, p.4)

The Order is to be highly commended for its patriotic, civic, social, and benevolent contribution to society. But because it has obvious religious teachings also, we must include them in our evaluation of the Elks.

As with the other lodges the religion we find here is deistic. The Elks Lodge clearly teaches that "they question no man's religion." (To Be An Elk, p.5, LC-MS p.1.) This is because, as far as the Elks are concerned, all religions are the same. The Elks teach that Jesus Christ is not the only way to heaven, rather man can achieve heaven

traveling the path of work-righteousness or by means of some other false religious system. Note that universalism expressed in the following quote:

"The Altar has in all ages been regarded as most sacred. With us it typifies neither sect or creed, but a shrine erected to signify our belief in the Fatherhood of the Grand Exalted Ruler of all the universality of the Brotherhood of man." (Ritual of Special Services, p. 24, in Graebner, Handbook of Organizations, p.94.)

Beyond the general deistic attitude, we see specific practices which point to the "Fatherhood" of a general god which is non-Trinitarian and excludes Christ. In correspondence dated 1927, Mr. B. M. Holt was informed by the Managing Editor of Elk's Magazine, "The name of Jesus Christ is omitted from Elk Prayers." (Graebner, Handbook of Organizations, p.90) Through the decades since 1927, little has changed. In three out of three Elk prayers quoted in full in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Commission Article on the B.P.O.E., there is no reference to Jesus Christ and no mention of the Trinity. (Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, LC-MS, p.2,3,4)

The Trinity was also conspicuously absent from a doxology sung at an Elk memorial service. Notice the rewording of the last two lines.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures, here below;
Praise Him above for all that's good;
Praise God for our true brotherhood.
(Graebner, Handbook of Organizations, p. 86.)

The "god" of the Elks lodge is non-Trinitarian, it is by no stretch of the imagination the God of the Bible (Matt. 28:18-20). The prayers and the rituals of the Elks lodge are NOT directed specifically to the one true God but rather to any man's idea of "god". Note the description of God in non-Trinitarian terms in a common Elk hymn sung at regular meetings and gathering in the Elks Lodge:

Great Ruler of the universe
All-seeing and benign,
Look down upon and bless
And be all glory Thine;
May Charity as taught us here
Be ever borne in mind,
The Golden Rule our motto true,
For days of Auld Lang Syne.
(Ritual of the Subordinate Lodges. p. 23, in LC-MS, p.2)

"Great Ruler of the Universe" is a catch-phrase in almost every deistic Unitarian group. The Lord of Scripture, who says, "The soul that sins, it shall die.", is certainly not "benign." The Golden Rule" is certainly a fine guide for our conduct, as far as it goes; but can it be the motto of a Christian whose creed is, "A man is justified by faith apart from observing the law"?

Such confusion is natural when we consider the Elk's use of the Bible. Usually, it is just a piece of furniture, placed on the altar to identify the lodge as a religious meeting place. But when they do speak of it they miss half the message. Seeing only the Law they disregard the Gospel. The Grand Esteemed Loyal Knight called the Bible, at the dedication of a new hall, "the book of law, upon which is found justice." (Ritual of Special Services, p. 24, in Graebner, Handbook of Organizations, p.94.)

In the Elk's unbiblical theology, the resurrection unto eternal life in heaven is granted because of merit: merit earned by a virtuous, good life and Elk membership. We note this in the memorial services.

" . . . it will be their deeds on earth which will aid them in partaking of the treasures of a better world. (Ritual of Special Services, p. 6, in Graebner, Handbook of Organizations, p.91.)

" . . . so direct us in observing and advancing the principles upon which our fraternity is founded that we may ever wear the badge of thy fellowship and the crown of Thy approval. (Ritual of Special Services, p. 15, in Graebner, Handbook of Organizations, p.93.)

" . . . bless us in the benevolent and practical work of our order . . . that we may ever merit Thy blessings and approval. Amen." (Ritual of Special Services, p.26, in LC-MS, p.4)

Can this harmonize with the words

"For it is by grace you have been saved "?

Since they misunderstand God's Word and salvation by grace, we will not be surprised at their misguided efforts at benevolence. Blacks were at one time not allowed to join (recently there have been established Black Elk Lodges and an amendment has been added to The Elks Constitution; also see Appendix #2). Anyone with any kind of physical defect or chronic illness is barred. (So What Does The Bible Say About The Lodge?, p.23, WELS). Membership can be prohibited if only 3 members dislike the applicant. (Constitution and Statues, Title 3, Chapters 6, 8, 11, and 12. Quoted in Christian Cynosure, Aug. 1977, p. 17f.)

Finally, the universalism of the Elk religion must be questioned. They say of all Elk members, whether Christians or not, ". . . guide us across the uncharted spaces of death, and bring us at last where worlds unite in bonds of eternal peace. Amen." (Ritual of Special Services, p.23, in LC-MS, p.4)

Jesus said to such attitudes, "Not everyone who says to me Lord! Lord! will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21) Elsewhere He made it clear that our works and merit have nothing to do with salvation and that He is the **only** true God, the **only** way to salvation. "No one comes to the Father but by Me." (John 14:6)

So What Does The Bible Say About The Lodge?

Many specific beliefs and actions of the lodge are challenged by God's Word. The following groups of passages can help us to find very quickly where God deals with

specific problems, so that we can answer for ourselves, "What does the Bible say about the lodge?"

THE LODGE SAYS

the one God is not triune
any god is acceptable
any view of Christ is fine

"GOD"

Deut. 6:4/Matt. 28:19
Ps. 96:5/Jn. 14:6
Lk. 10:16

THE BIBLE SAYS

the one God is triune
any other god is no God
denying Christ denies God

the Bible is a showpiece
all "holy books" are good

"WORD"

II Tim. 3:15-16
Jn. 17:17

Bible is God's inspired Word
only the Bible is truth

"SALVATION"

God doesn't expect perfection
some can be virtuous
God provides illumination
to save us

Rom. 6:23/Matt. 5:48
Rom. 3:23
John 3:16

a just God punishes sin
all people sin
God sent His Son

Christ is only a good example
to set us on the right path
salvation must be earned

II Cor. 5:21
Is. 53
Jn. 19:30

Christ is our substitute
to suffer for sin
salvation is already
accomplished

man is basically good
man seeks god . . .
through symbol and allegory
to learn to "please" god by life
faith in a god plus good
works saves

"FAITH"

Rom. 1/Eph. 2:1
Jn. 3:5/ I Cor. 12:3
II Thess. 2:14/Rom. 10:17
Rom. 3:28/Eph. 2:8,9
Acts 4:12/John 14:6

man hates God by nature
God creates faith
faith comes through Word
faith alone accepts salvation
only faith in Jesus saves

"GOOD WORKS"

anything "good" is god-pleasing

Heb. 11:6/Mt. 15:9

civic righteousness - not
meritorious by itself

"SALVATION BY GRACE"

man saves himself

Eph. 2:8,9

God does all redeeming

praying adorns a ritual
any prayer is true prayer

"PRAYER"

Mt. 6:5-8
Jn. 16:23

prayer is real communication
Christ mediates prayer

teach only the physically
healthy
speak way of life only to

"WITNESSING"

Lk. 14:21
Gal. 3:26-28

witness to every person
witness to every person

lodge members		
women and blacks kept out	Mt. 28:19/I Tim. 2:4	witness to every person
don't challenge another	Ez. 33:8	warn every unbeliever
religion		
never reveal, conceal	Jn. 18:20/Mt. 10:26	speak Gospel openly
	I Peter 3:15	

"OATHS"

rituals usually require oaths	Ex. 20:7	don't misuse God's name
reworded rituals require a	James 5:12/Mt. 5:33-37	our simple answer is enough
promise made in presence		
of God		

swear to uphold what is	Lev. 5:4	thoughtless oaths condemn us
unknown		
oath is nothing to worry about	Lev. 5:5	confess thoughtless oath as sin

"FELLOWSHIP"

we can worship many gods	Mt. 12:30	we can be loyal to only One
lodge membership won't	II Jn. 10-11/Rev. 18:4	participation with sin
effect church participation		brings guilt
join indiscriminate worship	II Cor. 6:14-17/Rom. 16:17	avoid known sin
	James 4:4	
avoid religious debate	Eph. 5:11-12	reprove idolatry by avoidance

May God guide your use of these passages !

So how does this apply to me?

Common practices in all lodges forbids members to speak of Christ as the exclusive source of forgiveness and eternal life. Such practice, they say, is too narrow. This also is true in the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. Assuming that all lodge members comply with this, we find the lodge member in a precarious situation. "Whoever disowns me before men, " Jesus warns, "I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:33).

We will want to share God's warning against sinful lodge practices wherever we see the enticement of membership leading someone to a new, strange, deistic altar. We share what the Bible says about the lodge, so that once informed, lodge members in the church can leave the lodge and live in obedience to their Lord. Many in our congregation have already taken such a stand for Jesus Christ and the integrity of His Word. When someone is willing to compromise and join a lodge even when he isn't totally ignorant of the problems, it is probably because he doesn't accept the Bible's

position on fellowship with sin and unbelief. We need to realize that our membership in an organization is a confession of agreement with its official aims, purpose, and actions. (So What Does The Bible Say About The Lodge?, p.38-39, WELS). It is the obligation of a Christian to judge the organization carefully before becoming responsible for its actions by his/her membership.

With any organization we join, we make ourselves responsible for all the official actions of the organization. We are responsible because our membership is voluntary. No one forces us to do anything. That is why the lodge officials, including the chaplains are elected. By his vote the lodge member gives the lodge officers the right to represent him with their rulings and actions. Nor can we overlook the fact that lodge dues or annual memberships support lodge rituals, lodge lecturers, lodge printers . . . and thereby the lodge's philosophy. IMPORTANT: We share what the Bible says about the lodge, because God says that we can't have both.

Lodges are inherently religious. The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks is no exception. Therefore it is necessary for Christians to judge the lodge religion by the standard of God's Word alone. It is our duty as Christians (Ezek. 33:8) to help people do this. We share what the Bible says about the lodge, because failure to sound the warning will make us accountable. We share what the Bible says about the lodge because we are concerned with the spiritual welfare of people.

For Your Information

When asked, "What are the objections of St. John's to many of the lodges?, the following will be helpful as you answer the question.

The Ritual. The mere use of a ritual is not in itself objectionable. Liturgy is a form of ritual. Some State laws require fraternal organizations to have some kind of ritual or other binding statements of principles in order to qualify for certain tax benefits. It is the contents of its ritual, not the mere use of a ritual, that determines whether membership in an organization is objectionable to the committed Christian or not.

Secrecy. Every organization is entitled to keep its affairs confidential if it desires. Secrecy, however, becomes morally and ethically objectionable when an organization declares that it possesses knowledge that is beneficial to all mankind, but shares it only with those who meet its standards for membership. Secrecy becomes more blatantly objectionable when an organization requires that its members support or defend something in which they have not been instructed or that has not yet been revealed to them.

Closed Membership. There are valid reasons for an organization to limit its membership to people who are in sympathy with its purposes. A hobby club, for example, could quickly lose its purpose if it admitted into membership people who were not the least bit interested in the hobby about which it gathers. Closed membership, on the other hand, becomes objectionable from the Christian point of view when an organization declares, for example, that it stands for the highest ideals

of brotherhood," but at the same time excludes certain races. The Christian cannot consent to such "highest ideals" when he knows of a brotherhood far higher.

Oaths. All calling upon God as a witness cannot be condemned. Such an act becomes objectionable, however, when little or no thought is given to the implications of the oath. An oath or pledge taken in God's name can never be "a mere form you must go through" in order to gain certain social, recreational, or business advantages.

A Common Approach . . . to reach out to a lodge member in Christian love.

Question: It is my understanding that the lodge prides itself in its educational and humanitarian programs.

Answer: Yes, we do require our members to know a few things.

Question: Would you share a little with me?

Answer: Well, I can't tell you much, but if you care to join you would learn it all.

Question: Is what you learn in the lodge important to you?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Well, then, it should be important to me also? Why must I join first in order to learn something that will help me? Shouldn't everyone be told?

Question: Is the lodge a religion to you?

Answer: Absolutely not!

Question: Do you pray in the lodge?

Answer: Yes, but only at our meetings.

Question: Do you pray to God?

Answer: Of course we do.

Question: Who does the lodge say God is?

Answer: We don't tell any member who God is, each person is free to think of god as he wants.

Question: Is that what the Bible teaches?

Answer: Not all members believe the way Christians do.

Question: If you were leading the lodge in prayer, would you use the name of the Triune god, ending it with "This we pray in Jesus name"?

Answer: Well, we are suppose to use the prayers in our book.

(How To Respond to The Lodge, by L. James Rongstad, p.29)

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APPENDIXES

#1 A sample of the initiation rite in the Elks Lodge

#2 How Benevolent are the Elks? copy of the article

#3 What's at Stake for the Christian? from the Lutheran Witness, LC-MS.

#4 Dislodging the Lodge from the Northwestern Lutheran, WELS.

#5 A sample of the Memorial Service and Funeral Service of the Elks Lodge

#6 A copy of St. John's Congregational Constitution

Dislodging the Lodge

The Bible says that Christian faith is not only a matter of what you believe but also where you stand. Jesus said, "Whoever will confess me before other people, him will I confess before my Father in heaven. Whoever will deny me before others, him will I deny before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:32,33). Paul said, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

To show people where we stand, the Wisconsin Synod has often had to work at *dislodging the lodge*.

The outstanding example of the lodge movement is Freemasonry, but there are dozens of similar lodges and fraternal organizations. Exhaustive research could be offered about the distinctive policies and practices of these many groups. At bottom, however, is a basic question: Can a person take his stand as a Christian and still belong to a lodge?

Christians believe there is "one God" (1 Timothy 2:5) who has revealed himself as "the Father . . . the Son . . . and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Christians believe "there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:6), who is true God, equal to the Father. Can a Christian then join an organization which calls God "the Nameless One of a hundred names" or "the Grand Warden of Heaven"? Can Christians agree with the philosophy expressed in this poem?

The one great God looked down and smiled
And counted each his loving child,
For Turk and Brahman, Monk and Jew
Had reached him through the God they knew.

Christians believe that human beings are sinners destined to spend an eternity separated from God, if left to themselves. But the Son of God took on a human body and lived and died as the perfect substitute for all humanity. Salvation is not something men and women can earn or bargain for; it is a gift from God through faith in Jesus. Does a Christian show where he stands if he also becomes a member of a lodge which announces that it "does not teach salvation by faith, nor the vicarious atonement. . . . Boldly do I claim that this doctrine does not make Christians, but it does make criminals" — by making sinning easy.

Christians believe God wants us to "preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15), to "proclaim [the message] from the housetops" (Matthew 10:27), to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks" (1 Peter 3:15). Can a Christian in good conscience belong as well to a fraternal society that requires that its rites and rituals be shrouded in secrecy? Can a Christian willingly take an oath that if he reveals any of the secrets of his lodge, he is prepared to "have [his] throat cut from ear to ear, [his] tongue torn out by its roots, . . . [his] left breast torn open, [his] heart plucked out . . . , [his] body severed in twain, [his] bowels taken from thence and burned to ashes, the ashes scattered to the four winds of heaven"?

The battle of *dislodging the lodges* is not a battle the Wisconsin Synod must fight alone. LCMS Prof. Walter A. Maier, Jr., in a tract entitled, *Should I Join a Fraternal Society?* wrote, "It should go without saying . . . that no consecrated follower of Christ ought to join the Masonic lodge and associate himself with the tenets of the 'primitive' Masonic faith." The Roman Catholic Church recently renewed its historic stand against Masonry. The Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore*, on February 22, 1985, reported, "Christianity and Masonry are essentially incompatible, so that joining one means to separate oneself from the other." Last summer the British Methodist Conference stated, "There is a danger that the Christian who becomes a Freemason will find himself compromising his Christian beliefs or his allegiance to Christ, perhaps without realizing it."

In reply, Robert L. Dillard, Jr., a high official of the Scottish Rite of Masons in Dallas, said, "A lot of Methodist bishops and pastors are Masons, [as well as] Baptist preachers. We have Disciples of Christ ministers, Church of Christ, and Presbyterians."

How can Christian ministers preach on Sunday that "salvation is found in no one else" than Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12) yet belong to an organization which says it "invites to its altars men of all faiths, knowing that, if they use different names . . . they are yet praying to the one God and Father of all"? How can Christians proclaim that we are saved "by grace . . . through faith . . . not by works" (Ephesians 2:8,9), yet hold membership in a society that says, "Every soul must work out his own salvation"? How can Christian ministers take two such contradictory stands at the same time?

You'll have to ask them.

TO THINK ABOUT AND TALK ABOUT

1. Why do people join lodges?

2. How would you deal with the following lodge situations?

A man has joined your congregation by profession of faith from a Lutheran congregation not in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. After belonging to your congregation for several months, he mentions in casual conversation that he is a Freemason. Further discussion reveals that this man was never informed of the Wisconsin Synod's stand concerning lodge membership.

A family attends the Adult Bible Information Class in your congregation. After discussing the lodge question, the family accepts the biblical position and agrees to resign their lodge memberships. They ask, however, "Isn't Mr. _____ also a member of this church?" When you reply that he is, this family tells you that Mr. _____ has belonged to their lodge for at least the past 15 years. The congregation was never aware of this "secret" membership.

A former lodge member has been asked if he can return to the lodge, but only under a "social membership." It's a good opportunity, he tells you, to see other businessmen and enjoy evenings with his wife and family friends. He would not participate in any of the lodge's meetings or activities.

The Shrine Circus is in town, and some parents know their children would like to see it. These parents are concerned, however, that by attending the Shrine Circus they are compromising their Christian beliefs as well as giving financial support to a lodge.

3. Are you aware of a "double standard" between the stated position on lodges and the accepted practice

in your own congregation?

in other church bodies?

TO LEARN MORE

Walter A. Maier, in the tract *Should I Join a Fraternal Society?* (Concordia, 1961), exposes the nature of lodge membership and scriptural reasons for opposing it, as does the earlier pamphlet *Masonry in the Light of the Bible* (Concordia, 1954).

Reuel J. Schulz, *Idols — Dead or Alive?* (Northwestern, 1982) discusses American lodges in the context of the far larger phenomenon which he calls CARC — the Common American Religious Creed, pp. 108-119. The *Lutheran Cyclopedia* contains brief articles about “Freemasonry” and “Freemasonry and the Church” (pp. 313,314) and “Lodges” (p. 476).

J. W. Acker, *Strange Altars: A Scriptural Appraisal of the Lodge* (Concordia, 1959) not only describes the stands of various lodges and other fraternal organizations but also reviews the attitude of Christian churches toward lodges. The book also offers a recommended policy in dealing with lodge members. C. James Rongstad, in *How to Respond to . . . the Lodge*, (Concordia, 1977), includes a section on “How to Witness to the Lodge” (pp. 28-30).

The Shepherd Under Christ, chapter 14, “The Shepherd and Organizations,” talks about membership in fraternal societies and how the church is to respond in part II, “Organizations outside the church,” pp. 343-354.

APPENDIX V

FELLOWSHIPING WITH A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION

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It does make a difference to which Christian congregation we belong. Luke, writing about the early Christians, praised them because "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42).

1. Jesus says:

"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples" (John 8:31).

"Go and make disciples . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20).

About the Pharisees He says: "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men" (Matthew 15:9).

2. From these passages we learn:

a. Christians should be faithful to the Word, and ought not be involved in any way adding to it, subtracting from it, or changing it.

b. Every denial of the Word is a denial of Christ, since it is *His* Word we are denying.

c. Christians should take care to affiliate themselves with a church which is consciously striving to teach *everything* Christ commanded.

d. While there will be Christians in every church in which Christ is still proclaimed to be the Son of God and our only Redeemer from sin, there is always a great danger in allowing any departure from God's Word. The Bible says: "A little yeast [of error] works through the whole batch of dough" (Galatians 5:9).

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God has given us His divine standard by which every Christian can and should test teachings and teachers — HIS WORD.

1. He counsels us in His Word:

"Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

"I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (Romans 16:17).

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

"[A Christian] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9).

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

2. From these passages we learn:

a. We are not to ignore religious differences. We are to judge *teachings* but, of course, we are not to judge the heart of any person who professes to trust in Jesus as the Son of God who has died to redeem us from sin.

b. Error in religious teaching must not be given the same status as the truth of God. Error, that is, teaching contrary to God's revealed Word, is not to be ignored, but is to be exposed and turned away from.

c. We are to test a congregation's or church body's published statements, public declarations and professions, etc., by comparing them with God's standard of truth — HIS INSPIRED WORD.

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