

Chapter Three:

Early Concerns About HMB Freemasonry Study

On July 1, 1992, I wrote the first of a number of letters to all the trustees and staff of the HMB addressing the relationship between the HMB's study of Freemasonry and its responsibility to evangelize America. Charged with the evangelization of America, with promoting church growth, and with seeking revival among Southern Baptist churches, there is nothing more directly and specifically related to that responsibility than for the HMB to expose the true nature of Freemasonry. Nothing the HMB can do will contribute more to revival in the SBC than the encouragement of Southern Baptists to remove themselves from this occultic association, and to encourage the removal of those affiliated with this occultic association from leadership in SBC churches.

Even church-growth consultant, Peter Wagner, said:

"I believe (Freemasonry) is one of the Enemy's most subtle and pernicious front-line agencies of deception designed ultimately to keep lost souls from being saved." (Baptist Press Release)

The release of power within the SBC for the evangelization of the "hard-core" lost may await the Convention taking a strong stand against the Lodge. Wagner reported in Warfare Prayer that such was the case in Argentina.

Christians Are Never In A No-Win Situation

Immediately following the passage of the amended motion at Indianapolis commissioning the Freemasonry study, Dr. Larry Lewis declared:

"Any position we take — either pro Masons or against Masons or neutral — will generate a certain amount of ire and wrath and thus hurt missions." (Arkansas Baptist NewsMagazine, June 18, 1992, p. 15)

Privately Dr. Lewis said that the HMB was in a "no-win" situation, for if they find for the Lodge, they will lose the financial support of those who oppose Masonry; if they find against the Lodge, they will lose the financial support of Lodge members. The

fear behind this statement would significantly affect the carrying out of the study. Over a year later, Dr. Leazer expressed the same "no win" mentality, but for other reasons.

The truth is that Christians are always in a win-win situation. If they are faithful to the truth and obey God, they win. No matter what the consequences of their obedience and faithfulness is, they win.

Living As Under A Death Sentence

If Christian leaders are going to be courageous, they must focus upon faithfulness, not fruitfulness; they must love voicing a prophetic alert more than looking for professional advancement. In Lazarus, the third volume of his trilogy on the Vatican, Morris West tells the story of fictional Pope Leo XIV. The night before going into the hospital for coronary artery by-pass surgery, Leo, alone in his apartment, thinks over his life. West puts the following words into the Pontiff's mouth; speaking of Anton Cardinal Drexel, Dean of the Sacred College, Cardinal Bishop of Ostia, Leo said:

"He will always tell the truth, because it is his Master, not himself, who must bear the consequences."

Facing death, the Pope wishes he too, had been more courageous in speaking the truth, rather than, simply doing what would advance him in the church's hierarchy. This is a simple, yet profound truth. Related by a secular writer, it capsules for us the issue of Freemasonry in the SBC. The leadership of our Convention is responsible only to tell the truth; the consequences we must leave to God. Christians are only responsible for obeying; God Alone is responsible for the consequences of obedience.

What Would You Do If You Weren't Afraid?

On October 15, 1993, I wrote a minister friend about "living as under a death sentence." Most men would change their conduct if they knew they were about to die. Most men change their plans when they know they are going to die. I said:

"A friend's illness with leukemia, a pastor's illness with lymphoma, and another man's illness with cancer have encouraged me to live my life as if under a death sentence. This was brought home to me graphically when this last gentlemen was recently moved of God to take a courageous stand...(but) changed his

mind, saying, 'If I do that, I will lose all of my life-long friends.' My thought was, 'Within six months, you are going to stand before God, and give an account of your life. Your only concern then will be, 'How does God view my life?'"

Several years ago, as I watched the movie, "The Alamo", I was struck as men crossed a line, declaring that they were willing to die for what they believed. As I thought about that, the Lord said, "There is not a man alive today, who was even conceived when the Alamo fell." I thought to myself, "That's obvious." Then the Lord concluded the thought with the declaration, "You cannot live long enough to make it worth while to compromise your convictions." How long would one have to live; how much money would one have to make or collect, in order to make it worth while to compromise? God said, "You can't live that long, and you can't collect that much money!"

If Christian leaders would "die to self", thereby living as under a death sentence, knowing that the only event in life worthy of concern is the evaluation of their life by God, then they would be free to be courageous without concerns such as losing financial support because of standing for the truth.

Amaziah Learned To Obey Without Regard To Consequences

In my July 1, 1992 letter to the Trustees, I commented about the experience of Amaziah in II Chronicles 25. The Word of God relates the incident which took place when Amaziah, king of Judah, hired the men of Israel, to fight with him against the Edomites. The prophet of God said:

"O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee; for the Lord is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim (the Northern ten tribes)." (II Chronicles 25:8a)

God is concerned that His people employ no alliances with the enemies of God in fulfilling His will. (See II Chronicles 19:2) God would rather His people be defeated, than allow the enemy to boast that God needed help to achieve His purposes upon the earth. (See Genesis 14:22-24)

The truth is that believers who determine to obey God are always in a win-win situation. If a man obeys God and there are detrimental consequences, God's response is, "Well done, thou

good and faithful servant." If a man obeys and the consequences appear favorable in man's eyes, God's response is, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Jesus Christ did not say, "Well done, thou good and FRUITFUL servant"; He said, "Well done, thou good and FAITHFUL servant." Faithfulness is not a function of consequences; it is only a function of obedience. The believer, like Morris West's character, Anton Cardinal Drexel, can always tell the truth knowing, "it is his Master, not himself, who must bear the consequences."

What About The Money We Will Lose?

It is noteworthy that Amaziah's first concern was that expressed by the President of the HMB. Amaziah's immediate and first concern in response to the prophet's warning was, "what about all of the money that I am going to lose?" The Bible states:

"And Amaziah said to the man of God, but what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this."

God is always concerned that His people trust Him rather than circumstances. It may appear to human reasoning that the Masonic Lodge and its members can radically effect the funding of missions in the S.B.C. If that is the case, it is a work of man. If it is a work of God, and it is, then God will multiply the funds required to do His work, His Way, in His time. It is not a childish, unrealistic position to say, "Let's obey God and trust Him!" God will replace every penny any Mason might withdraw. But, more than that, God will bless immeasurably our faithfulness in obeying Him by separating ourselves from the occultism of the Lodge.

This is not a Pollyanna mentality of "everything's going to be alright by-and-by", and it is not a Scarlett O'Hara mentality of, "I'll worry about this or that tomorrow." It is a God-honoring, biblical imperative of trusting God regardless of what men say. It is the same mentality that the three Hebrew children expressed in Daniel 3:16-18.

The Cost Of Obedience

My letter to the trustees and staff of the HMB continued:

"...The world does not take it kindly when God's people separate themselves. The world will accuse the church of bigotry, fanaticism and demagoguery. There is no

question that Masons who have joined Southern Baptist churches will react angrily to the Convention taking a stand against Freemasonry. There is no question that they will attempt to ravage Southern Baptist churches. But, there is no question that our God is greater than the god of the Lodge. (See II Chronicles 32:7-8) In addition, practicality is never an acceptable alternative to obedience. Southern Baptists must never allow the fear of consequences to discourage them from obedience to God.

God wants a people who will be valiant for the truth, regardless of the risk. He desires for His people to love Him more than their own life. The only matter which should be a concern to the SBC is that we do not '(bring) the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be (our) gods.' (II Chronicles 25:14) Southern Baptists must not adopt the methods, the standards or the goals of the world."

This is the way every believer should conduct every day and every decision of his life. It is still my belief that the opportunity to take a strong stand against Freemasonry was and is an opportunity to enhance evangelism, and is an opportunity to prepare the way for revival among Southern Baptists.

Leazer Suggests Holly Questioned His Integrity

In a July 13, 1992 letter to me, Dr. Gary Leazer said:

"I was somewhat shocked at the report in the Baptist Press...which quotes you as suggesting that the (IFW) might not approach this study with integrity and honesty."

In a July 17, 1992 response, I asked Dr. Leazer to send me copies of any news reports which indicated that I questioned "the integrity and honesty of you or anyone at the HMB". (None were sent.) I implored Dr. Leazer not to see me as his enemy and identified our goals as the same, "the truth and revival among Southern Baptists". My concern with the amendment to send the Freemasonry study to the HMB "had to do with the HMB's record in dealing with this issue", and not with any question of honesty or integrity.

I then addressed Dr. Leazer's comment that he would "seek to present both sides of the issue fairly and accurately." That comment concerned me, not because of the fear that Masons would or

could contradict the facts about the Lodge, but because of its implications for the design of the study. I said to Dr. Leazer, "The motion does not address two sides; it addresses one issue, Freemasonry." Dr. Leazer's design of this study was always "to present both sides". It denoted a faulty understanding of the Convention's vote, which was to determine if Freemasonry is compatible with Christianity, and which did not intend that a study of "anti-Masons" be done.

Leazer's flawed design, virtually by itself, resulted in the poor study which is now presented to the SBC as A Study Of Freemasonry and "A Report On Freemasonry". The proper design of the study would have involved three questions: "What is Christianity?", "What is Freemasonry?", and "Are they compatible?" The study, produced by the HMB, could be more appropriately and accurately entitled, Why I Disagree With Anti-Masons, by Dr. Gary Leazer.

Dr. Larry Lewis Agrees With Dr. Larry Holly

In a letter to the Florida Baptist Witness in November, 1993, Dr. Larry Lewis restated my understanding of the nature of the study required by the SBC motion in Indianapolis, an understanding which I expressed to Drs. Leazer and Lewis in July, 1992, and an understanding which was systematically ignored by the HMB. Dr. Lewis said:

"The study was to focus on the beliefs and teachings of Freemasonry, not on what individuals claimed about Freemasonry."

Such a design would have resulted in a valid study. As will be seen in the review of his July 22, 1992 press statement, from the beginning, Dr. Leazer's study focused upon what "anti-Masons" and I had said about Freemasonry. By December of 1992, this had become such a preoccupation of the study, that I wrote Dr. Lewis on December 8, 1992, and said:

"It is my request that the IFW and the HMB redirect their focus from me and my booklet to the Masonic Lodge and their teachings. It is my counsel that the HMB's only hope of not precipitating a disaster in Houston is to bring a strong, factual and conclusive report to the SBC on the occultism of the Masonic Lodge."

If the HMB study had been pursued in this manner, the outcome would have been significantly different. If Dr. Leazer had focused his attention upon the substance of the teachings and practices of Freemasonry, rather than upon his personal offense toward "anti-Masons", the study could have been valuable to Southern Baptists. Unfortunately, Dr. Leazer appears to have been emulating the President of the HMB, who seemed more preoccupied with his feelings toward those who "forced the study on the SBC", than with faithfully fulfilling the charge given by the SBC.

Press Report Arouses Concerns About Freemasonry Study

My worst fears about the prejudice of Dr. Leazer and the lack of resolve of the HMB to do an objective and definitive study, were provoked when the July 22, 1992, Baptist Standard reported, in an article entitled, "Leazer to study Masons":

"Gary Leazer, director of the (IFW) since 1987, will be personally responsible for researching and writing the study," said Darrell Robinson, HMB vice president for evangelism. "He can involve others as he sees fit."

In September of 1992, Dr. Lewis said that he instructed Drs. Leazer and Robinson to involve all the members of the IFW in this study. In reality, events will reveal that essentially the only involvement of other members of the Department was in preparing a critique of The SBC and Freemasonry, Volume I. The Standard's article continued:

...The report will compare arguments by Holly and other Mason critics with responses by Mason advocates, Leazer said. After each debate point, Leazer will offer an analysis of both sides, he said."

This is a flawed design as will repeatedly be shown. The HMB has been instructed to study Freemasonry, not compare what Masons and "anti-Masons" say. No one at the HMB will comprehend that until Dr. Lewis admitted it in his November, 1993 letter to the Florida Baptist Witness after Dr. Leazer had resigned from the HMB. The July 22, 1992, Baptist Standard article continued:

"Leazer said he hopes to find whether modern Masons agree with the interpretations offered by Holly and other critics of Masonic writers from the 19th Century...."

This statement by Dr. Leazer seems disingenuous, because it is obvious that Masons do not agree with what "anti-Masons" say about them. If this were the intent of Dr. Leazer's study, and apparently it was, he could have saved the time, effort and money. Dr. Leazer conceived of the Freemasonry study as a forum through which the Masonic Lodge and its leaders could address the SBC. The Standard's report concluded:

'Modern (Masonic) writers have not been given the opportunity to respond, and I'm going to give that opportunity,' he said, 'It's going to be a balanced objective, scholarly study.'" (p. 4)

From the beginning, Dr. Leazer seemed to see his role as the defender of the Lodge. No one objected to balance in the study of the Masonic Lodge. But, from the beginning, Dr. Leazer saw his mission as that of giving "Modern Masonic writers...the opportunity to respond" to the accusations against them. This was not the instruction of the Convention, and would ultimately prove to undermine the intention of the motion passed by the SBC in Indianapolis. Because of his apparent prejudice, Dr. Leazer would employ the offices of the HMB to produce a document which attempts to obscure the anti-Christian nature of Freemasonry.

Dr. Leazer's design of this study, a design which was known and supervised by Drs. Darrell Robinson and Larry Lewis, and which was clearly and publicly acknowledged in this Baptist Standard article, contradicted the instruction of the SBC, and ultimately confounded the attempt to declare the truth about Freemasonry.

Lewis Asked To Intercede With Leazer

Alarmed by Dr. Leazer's statement and by his July 13, letter to me, I asked Dr. Lewis to assist me in dispelling Dr. Leazer's fears about my goals. In a July 23, 1992 letter, I asked Dr. Lewis to:

"...intercede with Dr. Leazer to let him know that I am not his enemy? The adversarial tone of his letter does not reflect any reality of which I am aware."

From the outset, Dr. Leazer's tone seemed adversarial and defensive toward the entire study, and anyone who was opposed to Freemasonry. I never threatened him and never made any demands of him. I did request to meet with him twice to examine this issue. Yet, even when Dr. Leazer refused to meet with me a

second time, I never attacked him. In January of 1993, Dr. Leazer wrote a Mason friend, and said that I was furious with him because he would not meet with me a second time. There is no question that I was anxious about Dr. Leazer's performance and had come to doubt his professionalism, but furious? Never!

Even when Dr. Leazer's conduct was so blatantly contrary to the best interests of the Kingdom of God, my only request of Dr. Lewis was to remove him as the head of the study. I never asked or demanded that he be fired from the HMB. In this July, 1992 correspondence, I asked Dr. Lewis to assist me in developing a positive relationship with Dr. Leazer. Subsequent events would demonstrate how impossible that was.

Design of Study Critical

In my July 23, 1992, letter, I also asked Dr. Lewis:

"...To consider allowing me to participate in the design stage of this project. If constructed as reported in the Baptist Standard, compromise will be the conclusion". (emphasis added)

The design of the project was everything. With the wrong design and methodology, the project would go off course from its inception. With the right design and methodology, the project would stay on course regardless of the pressure from Masons or "anti-Masons." My letter went on to say:

"The design of the study is critical. The design which is being discussed is flawed, not because it includes Masons — that is fair. It is flawed because it only purports to compare what I have said with what Masons say. The motion made and passed in Indianapolis calls for a study of Freemasonry, not of what I or others have said about Freemasonry. The study does not call for an examination of the 'good works' which Masons do; it calls for a study of what Masons teach and do in the Lodge." (emphasis in original)

If one man does this study, the study will be flawed. The entire rationale of an ad hoc committee was so that the conclusions of the study could have broad support.

Who Designed A Study Of Freemasonry?

The question of who wrote A Study Of Freemasonry has been dealt with in chapter two. But, the more fundamental question is "Who designed the study?" Dr. Leazer virtually designed this study by himself. In Dr. Leazer's July 17, 1992 letter to me, he said, "I plan to do most of the research myself."

Coupled with the July, 1992 press release, and a statement by his supervisor, Dr. Darrell Robinson, I became more and more concerned that if Dr. Leazer were to be the principle investigator, the design would be flawed and the decision of the HMB would be the same as it was in 1986 and in 1991. Unfortunately, Dr. Lewis did not listen, the design was flawed, and the result has been more confusion about the issue of Freemasonry than existed before the study began.

In an August 7, 1992 letter, in response to my July 23 letter, Dr. Lewis ignored my request to participate in the design of this study. Therefore, I raised the question with Dr. Leazer; in an August 12, 1992 letter, I said:

"The design of the study which you are undertaking is as important as the content...It is possible by designing a study in a certain way to dictate the conclusion which will result. If your study is to determine if Masons agree with my judgment about the Lodge, let me save you the trouble. They do not, and they will not. That does not 'objectively' deal with my charges, and that is not a 'scholarly' approach to the issue. (emphasis added)

If your study is going to determine if modern Masons agree with Albert Pike, then that is not a proper design of the study."

Throughout this study, Dr. Leazer seemed more attentive to the discrediting of "anti-Masons", than the determining of what Masons believe and practice. The design which Dr. Leazer proposed in his July 22, 1992 press statement was to remain unchanged throughout the study of Freemasonry.

Dr. Lewis Directs That Entire IFW Be Involved In Study

In chapter six, we will review a letter which Dr. Leazer wrote in August of 1992, which revealed his prejudice. In response to the

revelations of this letter, Dr. Lewis attempted to assuage my concerns about Dr. Leazer's bias by assuring me that others would be involved in the study other than Dr. Leazer. In a September 11, 1992 letter, Dr. Lewis stated:

"I received your letter requesting that Dr. Gary Leazer be removed from the study of Freemasonry ordered by the (SBC)...I have discussed your request with Dr. Darrell Robinson...and with Dr. Ron Phillips (then Chairman of the Trustees of the HMB)...

Since Dr. Leazer is director...it is his responsibility to lead the department in this endeavor. However, I have met with Dr. Robinson and Dr. Leazer and insisted that the entire staff of the Interfaith Witness Department be involved in this study, not just Dr. Leazer himself. I have insisted that at every stage the staff participate and that the entire staff be involved in the writing of the report. I personally intend to be involved at appropriate points to assure that the study, at least from my perspective, the report is honest, thorough, and fair."

At this critical stage in the development of the study (August and September of 1992), Dr. Leazer is still clearly in charge. The design of the study was developed by him and that design resulted in A Study Of Freemasonry, which is now being promoted as a valuable contribution to Christian apologetics.

Errors Caused By Design Cannot Be Corrected By Editing

A study developed on a flawed design cannot be corrected after it is completed. The design of a study so totally contributes to its conclusions, the only alternative is to discard the study and to start over. After Dr. Leazer was removed from the study in February of 1993, Dr. Lewis wrote me on April 13, 1993 and said:

"The IFW study on Freemasonry was drafted by Dr. Leazer, assisted by some of the IFW staff. Dr. Darrell Robinson and I suggested some revisions when it was first presented to us. Then this revised edition was shared with the Administrative Committee of the board of directors for their input. They spent the large part of an entire day going over the study line-by-line

and making further suggested revisions. It was then printed and sent to the board members the week prior to our March 17 board meeting."

Yet, with all of these "efforts" to correct what Dr. Leazer had done, the final product was not improved significantly. According to Dr. Lewis' November, 1993 letter to the Florida Baptist Witness some "potentially libelous" material about "anti-Masons" was removed. But, in truth, that should only have let Dr. Lewis know how flawed the document was, and how worthless it was.

Administrative Committee Line-By-Line Review

Without the primary, and as we shall see, secondary sources, available for review, the Administrative Committee's critique of this report would be useless. It would be interesting to know what "the large part of an entire day" means, as it is clear that if a committee went over a study line-by-line, which at that time was longer than the published 75-page version, it would have taken much longer than an entire day.

Dr. Lewis' contention that others significantly participated in the Freemasonry study is contradicted by Dr. Leazer's testimony, by the fact that there seems to have been little administrative supervision of the study until it was completed, and by the consistent prejudice which is seen in the selection of materials and in the interpretation of those materials in the study. The SBC would have been spared a great deal of distress over this issue, if Dr. Lewis would have acknowledged the prejudice of Dr. Leazer, which was pointed out to him early in the study, and if Dr. Lewis had assigned the responsibility to someone who could objectively study Freemasonry.

Without doubt, the dynamic involved in the production of A Study of Freemasonry and "The Report On Freemasonry" was multi-dimensional. Some aspects of this dynamic were contradictory and some were counterproductive; all worked together to produce a poor document. The first, and perhaps most, lethal error in this study was the refusal to submit the design to the scrutiny of anyone but those who were seemingly motivated to "keep the lid on the debate." Once that decision was made and carried out, compromise was inevitable.