



Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

Heavens Above

'Heavens Above!'

You are enjoying a quiet sip of Scottish nectar at the Lodge Bar (for medicinal purposes, of course) when two rather senior Lodge members nearby strike up an apparently innocent conversation.

Charlie mused: *I'm thinking of proposing my nephew into the Lodge, Fred. He's happily married, in a good job, kids growing up... He'll make a good Mason'.*

Fred agreed: *'Nice young chap from what I remember'.* After a pause he asked: *'Does he believe in God though?'*

Charlie gave it some thought: *'Doubt it. He's never been a 'God-Botherer'. Just like other young men really - always preferred to kick a ball about on Sundays. Does it really matter these days?'*

Fred's reply was cautious: *'Well Charlie....the Book of Constitutions does say the first condition of membership is a belief in a Supreme Being and admits of no compromise. You can't argue with that surely?'* He also added: *'And a vague acceptance of 'perhaps there is something else' is not really enough, is it? And don't forget the DC needs to know a man's Faith so the correct VSL can be in place for the Obligation.'*

Charlie merely shrugged: *'Come on, Fred, be realistic That Gallup Poll last year showed fewer than 30% of all Britons believe in God – for young men it was only 25%. It means 75% of us chaps now live in a secular society where God plays no part.'* For good measure he added: *'Look Fred - if Masonic membership continues dropping at its current rate we'll have to reduce the number of lodges in every Province and the per capita costs of Great Queen Street will go sky high. If we want Freemasonry to thrive and Lodge numbers to go up we can't possibly ignore the talent in the other 75% of the population. We may need to consider modifying the God bit - just a little if we are to attract them.'*

After a lengthy sip Charlie then suggested: *'Surely, Fred, we want chaps to share our Masonic principles and live their lives by them – and have a thundering good time in the Lodge. In the meanwhile they can only see who we are and where we are going if they are actually in 'the Temple' watching the rituals. We simply have to get them through the Lodge door first.'*

Charlie paused to make his final pitch: *'Surely it is better that we encourage all 100% to believe in a Supreme Being by their life's end rather than just restrict it to the 25% who slip in at the start? Come on, Fred, you know what I'm saying makes sense.'*

Fred slowly shook his head. *'Charlie, Freemasonry is not just a social club, it is a system of morality. We start our evenings and our ritual with a prayer. We take our Obligations on a Holy book. We pray to Almighty God to keep us steadfast and we rely on The Great Architect to finally see us safely through to the Grand Lodge Above. God's response to the 75% non-believers might well be: 'Who are you? Have we met? Sorry, I only serve regular customers...' No. If a chap doesn't really believe in God in the first place he will just be play acting, mouthing prayers without believing in a single one. I won't call it Blasphemy but in my book it is something pretty close.'*

He then added: *'Another thing. When Gallup asks them, only 25% of blokes say they believe in God. When the Lodge Committee asks them all 100% express a faith. How do you account for that Charlie, eh? Has the Light miraculously dawned or was just it that hint by their proposers of the answer required? If we are so proud of our three principles - Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth - what value do we place on Truth if we encourage a man to start out his Masonic career with a fudge? Answer me that.'*

Charlie smiled ruefully: *'We might agree on one thing though, Fred. Grand Lodge is unlikely to change the Constitutions any time soon so we shall just have to make up our own minds'*.

Looking round they suddenly see you contemplating a last wee dram. *'Brother, you're on the Lodge Committee. In our secular society are you a stickler for the Constitutions and the need for a true belief before acceptance – or to swell our numbers have you been you tempted to turn a Nelsonian blind eye?'*

What might you reply?

Michael Lee

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