

Why does the Catholic Church prohibit participation in the Masons?

There are two reasons for the prohibition against Catholics becoming Masons. The first is tied to the historical roots of Freemasonry and its origins in Europe as an anti-Catholic organization. For this reason, the 1917 Code of Canon Law imposed a penalty of excommunication for those that joined the Masons. The current 1983 Code of Canon Law no longer specifically refers to the Masons by name, but states: “*A person who joins an association which plots against the Church is to be punished with a just penalty.*” (Can. 1374) One could argue that the Masons in their current form in the United States no longer “plot against the Church,” and that this canon would no longer be applicable to those joining the Masons. The intentions of the upper levels of the Mason’s organization, however, are still unclear. Regardless of the current state of Freemasonry’s anti-Catholic activities, Catholics are still not allowed to join the Masons for a different reason.

The second reason that the Catholic Church does not allow her members to join the Masons, is that Freemasonry is in itself considered a naturalistic religion. Pope Leo XIII wrote in his encyclical against Freemasonry, *Humanum Genus*, about naturalistic religions: “*For they deny that anything has been taught by God; they allow no dogma of religion or truth which cannot be understood by human intelligence nor any teacher who ought to be believed by reason of his authority.*” In a letter issued by the U.S. Bishops in 1985, they point to some examples why Freemasonry is clearly a religion: “*Freemasonry has a creed and ritual, prayers to the Great Architect of the Universe, an altar and temples, feast days, chaplains, an initiation ceremony, a creed and a system of morality. As its funeral service makes plain, the lodge promises its members salvation and entry into the Grand Lodge Above if they follow the precepts of the craft.*” When a man joins the Masons, he is not just joining a social organization, he is being initiated into a second religion whose teachings are inconsistent with Catholic teachings. You can work with Masons and cooperate with them in charitable activities, just like you can with members of any other religion, but you can’t be a member of two religions. In 1983, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (who is now Pope Benedict XVI) as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document (*Quaesitum est*) to resolve questions about the changes in the new Code of Canon Law and the deletion of a specific reference to Masonic associations. In that document he states: “*Therefore, the Church’s negative judgment in regard to Masonic associations remains unchanged since their principles have always been considered irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Church and, therefore, membership in them remains forbidden. The faithful, who enroll in Masonic associations are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion.*”

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