

Pilgrim's Path (reviewed by Neulander)

A PILGRIM'S PATH: FREEMASONRY AND THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

By John G. Robinson

Reviewed by Bro. Michael Adam Neulander

A Pilgrim's Path: Freemasonry and the Religious Right, by John J. Robinson (1918-1996) is an important book that focuses on the anti-Masonic movement that rapidly spread rapidly in the 1980's through some fundamentalist Christian churches. The first half of Robinson's book laid out a detailed explanation of the anti-Masonic movement's accusations and his counter arguments to their claims. The second half of his book contains his advice on how Freemasonry should combat the anti-Masonic movement's accusations; so that they do not get gain traction among Christian clergy and church parishioners. I think that part of the power of Robinson's book was that at the time of its writing he was not a Freemason; however, he was a great student of the fraternity and gained critical acclaim for his first book *Born in Blood: the Lost Secrets of Freemasonry*. Thus, within the fraternity he was seen as a trusted objective student of Freemasonry who understood its guiding moral principles; as well as an astute researcher who was able to critically refute the anti-masonic argument. Robinson stated that his reason for why he had to write this book grew out of an exciting discovery he made in researching the origins of Freemasonry while writing his book *Born in Blood*. "It appeared that Freemasonry may well have pioneered the very concept of religious freedom, the individual right to worship God according to one's own conscience. That was a purpose far more important than the original purposes which Freemasons usually ascribed to themselves."[\[1\]](#) I found that the preceding quote neatly dove-tailed with Robinson's thesis in this book. His thesis is that since speculative Freemasonry had stressed religious freedom since its first constitution was published in 1723 it had become the enemy of some Christian sects. There are three major subjects of the book that I will write about in this paper which I found important to "illuminating the path of my Masonic journey:" first, Robinson's research concerning the Roman Catholic Church's 1884 encyclical against Freemasonry, second, the Reverend Pat Robertson's virulent anti-Masonic attacks, third, Robinson's advice on how Freemasons should fight these attacks and "shine a light" on how Freemasonry improves the lives of its members and society in general.

The history of Europe and South America during the 19th century is replete with revolutionary uprisings that gave birth to new democratic governments which wound up weakening the political as well as the financial hold over much of the Roman Catholic world. Robinson perceptively noted that the Mexican uprising (1862-67), led by Benito Juárez, the South American revolutions (1807-25), led by Simón Bolívar, and General José de San Martín and the Italian revolution (1859-60), led by Giuseppe Garibaldi all had two factors in common. First, these revolutionary leaders were all Freemasons. Second, all these revolutions brought about religious freedom in former Papal controlled territory and took away vast sums of wealth from the Papal coffers. The Italian Revolution led by Garibaldi really must have especially "raised the hackles" of Pope Leo XIII since it literally took place right outside of the Vatican walls. These uprisings whose leaders were all Freemasons no doubt brought the Craft to Pope Leo's attention when he decided to lash out in 1884 by publishing an encyclical entitled *Humanum Genus*. Robinson pointed out that there were two main accusations against Freemasonry in the encyclical which made Pope Leo view Freemasonry as

working in league with Satan. The first accusation had to do with the danger Pope Leo perceived in allowing Roman Catholics to mix with men of other religious sects in lodge meetings. Pope Leo harbored several fears regarding Freemasonry's acceptance of men from different religions. He was afraid that Roman Catholics being in close social discourse with non-Catholics might cause them to question their own beliefs. More importantly, he feared that Freemasonry was practicing a form of Deism in their lodges. The second activity the Pope found abhorrent in his encyclical was that Freemasons had the freedom to elect their own lodge leaders. Pope Leo was convinced that Masonic religious freedom was "infecting" society as a whole. Thus, Pope Leo drew a direct connection between the Masonic religious freedom as practiced in its lodges and the right of citizens being allowed to vote for political leaders who advocated for the separation of Church. Therefore, Pope Leo saw religious freedom as a danger that had to be eradicated. Robinson argued, and I agree as a fellow historian, that Pope Leo was lashing out against Freemasonry over the diminished power and finances it suffered at the hand of all the democratic movements of the 19th century. Finally, the loss over nations who had formerly been led by Roman Catholic monarchies was too bitter a pill for the Pope to swallow; therefore, democracy and Freemasonry became enemies of the Church.[2]

The second aspect of Robinson's book that grabbed my interest was his chapter *The Media Mogul*; which is devoted to the Rev. Pat Robertson's attacks on Freemasonry. Robertson's anti-Masonic diatribe in his 1991 book, *The New World Order*, is well known to me and other Virginia Freemasons since his "700 Club" headquarters is in Virginia Beach, just a twenty minute drive from where I used to live for over twenty years. Robinson noted that Robertson rehashed in his book one of the oldest canards against Freemasonry; which was, Freemasonry was in league with several other institutions looking to create a "New World Order." "There are several villains involved, including the United Nations and the U. S. Federal Reserve Bank." [3] The real target of Robertson's anti-Masonry was Albert Pike's writings in his book, *Morals and Dogma*. Robinson noted that Robertson's anti-Masonic attacks focused on a few lines written by Pike about the Legend of the Egyptian deity Osiris in the Southern Jurisdiction of Scottish Rite Masonry's 24th degree. Thus, Robertson accused the Scottish Rite of promoting pagan religious beliefs to their membership. Robinson accurately refuted this accusation and asserted that Pike's writings were misinterpreted and taken out of context by Robertson's "expert" research staff. It was apparent to Robinson that Robertson really did not do the actual research for the book but actually just "lent" his name to a book written by ghost writers; thus, giving it the possibility of a much wider readership. As a trained historian, it was easy for Robinson to recognize the sloppy work of historical research. Unfortunately, to the untrained reader Robertson's reputation and celebrity in Christian fundamentalist circles would cause readers to simply accept his accusations as "gospel." In fact, Robertson's book was the number one best-selling Christian book in 1991. [4] Having lived in close proximity to the "700 Club" headquarters; I am reminded how Robertson was viewed almost daily on television by millions of people who "religiously" watched his show. In addition, he was quite a political force in his own right having run in the Republican presidential primary in 1987. However, what I and other Freemasons of Virginia found most ironic was that Robertson's accusations against Freemasons in general, and Scottish Rite members in particular, of being in league with Satanic forces; thus, causing him to accuse his own deceased father, Absalom Willis Robertson, of these vile practices. Robertson's father had been a U.S. Senator and was also an active Freemason in his Masonic lodge and was a 32nd degree Scottish Rite Mason as well. Of course, we just shook our heads in disbelief when his

book was published with these “cheap and ugly” accusations.”

As I stated at the beginning of this book review, Robinson gained a great deal of notoriety, especially in Masonic circles, after the publication of his book “Born in Blood.” The thesis of his book was that Freemasonry grew out of the Knights Templar order which had fell out of favor with the Roman Catholic Church in the 14th century. Interestingly, he became a popular speaker to Masonic meetings because of the popularity of his book and the fact that he was a “defender” of the Craft without being a member. He was happy to “wear the mantle” as a “defender” of Freemasonry; because, while conducting his in depth research about the origins of Freemasonry he became pleasantly surprised by learning that Freemasonry was a great “force for good” in society.[\[5\]](#) Thus, the second half of Robinson’s book is devoted to advising Freemasons on how to “sell” themselves to non-members by pointing out what a “force for good” they had been since their “modern” origins in the 18th century. Examples that Robinson delineates in his book are how many men who are revered by society were members of the Craft. A quick list includes some of America’s great “Founding Fathers,” or men who went on to start other worthwhile organizations that benefited society; such as, the Boy Scouts, Kiwanis, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Rotary International.[\[6\]](#) In addition, Robinson tells Freemasons to “shine a light” on their own good works conducted by the members of the many thousands of Masonic lodges and appendant bodies throughout the world. For example, many non-members have heard of and have a positive opinion of the Shriner’s children’s hospitals; however, few people outside of Freemasonry know that Shriners are Freemasons.[\[7\]](#) I found that Robinson’s most prescient advice to members of the Craft was to understand that we are not a “secret” organization; but rather, “an organization that has a few secrets.” Robinson relates a conversation he had with the wife of a young and new Freemason. When she asked her husband what he did at lodge meetings she was told by her him that he was sworn to secrecy from telling anyone, including his wife, about what took place at his lodge meetings. Saddened by her story, Robinson, who was not a member of the Craft at the time, educated this woman on some of “the great moral principles” of Freemasonry and informed her about the many good works Freemasonry conducted on a daily basis.[\[8\]](#)

In essence, what Freemasons only swear to keep secret is certain: “grips,” “signs of recognition,” and “passwords.” For years I have often been saddened at the thought of our great fraternity missing the chance of initiating hundreds of thousands of men due to our own ignorance about what we can divulge about our Craft to the un-initiated; especially our sons, grandsons, nephews, and close friends. It is for this reason as much as Robinson’s well-articulated defense of Freemasonry that I recommend this book should be read not only by Freemasons; but, their family members, and their clergy as well.

1. John J. Robinson, *A Pilgrim’s Path: Freemasonry and the Religious Right*, (New York: M. Evans and Co., Inc., 1993:), 3.
2. Ibid., 24-32.
3. Ibid., 62.
4. Ibid., 62-72.
5. Ibid., 1-9.
6. Ibid., 138-147.

7. Ibid., 161-163.

8. Ibid., 120-127.