

**MASONIC and S.R.I.C.F. PROMISES**  
by Frater James A. Marples, VIII<sup>o</sup>  
Life Member, Nebraska College S.R.I.C.F.

The noted Masonic scholar, Brother and Sir Knight Albert G. Mackey, considered widely as a prime authority on all Masonic matters stated: "PROMISES" are a "sacred covenant" and that the candidate makes a promise to the Order; conversely, the Order makes a promise to the candidate. These solemn promises, vows, and obligations usually end with the honorable oath or pledge: "So help me God." Bro.: Mackey clearly states that: "ALL Masonic declarations are given without equivocation or mental reservation whatsoever." He adds: "All voluntary promises are binding."

Mackey went the extra mile by postulating whether or not any Masonic promise could be broken. In the ordinary world of public affairs, sadly many promises were broken in Mackey's day, as well as in our own modern times. However, it is reassuring that Mackey separates fact from innuendo by clarity. He states each condition, step-by-step:

1. Every promise made at the altar of Masonry is possible to be performed.
2. No promise is exacted that is unlawful in its nature; for the candidate is expressly told that no promise exacted from him will interfere with which he owes to God and to his country.
3. A promise is voluntarily executed by the promiser, and that the expectation is that he will faithfully execute his part of the covenant.
4. No false condition is placed before the candidate, either as to the character of the Institution, or the nature of the duties which would be required of him.
5. Both parties to the promise, the candidate who makes it and the Craft to whom it is made, are moral agents, fully capable of entering into a **contract** or covenant."

**ON LIFE MEMBERSHIPS:**

Although The High Council of the S.R.I.C.F. has a Constitution currently silent on the subject of life memberships, Bro.: Mackey addresses the issue in the overall Masonic context. He notes: "It is the custom of some Lodges to permit a member to become a life member by the immediate payment of a sum of money, after which he is released from any subsequent payment of dues. Such a system is of advantage in a pecuniary sense to the Lodge...." He notes that if properly invested, the Lodge {or whichever Masonic entity} continues to benefit after the death of a member. While it is true that interest-rates on 'Savings' at banks and other financial institutions have been at near record-lows recently: any ordinary citizen {whether a Mason or a non-Mason} consents to his money being invested. As with an ordinary citizen who may choose a certificate-of-Deposit, the rate-of-return may be good in prosperous-times; and conversely not as good during a weaker Economy. However, **the risk has always been clearly known to both a Lodge as well as to a prospective Masonic member.** Nobody has ever been forced to purchase a "life membership." And...as a side note: no human-being knows when the exact time of their 'mortality' might come. In theory, a young man might purchase a life membership and unfortunately die the next day. **Yet, a contract is still a contract.** In nearly all Masonic-related groups the purchase of a life membership being non-refundable has always been made clear. **So the 'purchaser' took some risk.** In a similar vein, Lodges, too, knew that interest-rates



couldn't possibly climb higher and higher without dips in the percentage rate of return. **Lodges and other Masonic-related organizations likewise knew they were taking a risk and willingly assumed such risk.** As noted earlier: both sides were capable of entering into a binding-contract.

#### ON BANQUETS:

Throughout the centuries in Europe, England, and America, the Craft is usually "Called-off"...meaning "Called from Labor to Refreshment." At such time the basic aspects of "Lodge Work" is halted or suspended and a meal begins, usually with a Invocation prayer to Almighty God, who, has been respectfully referred to as "The Great Architect of the Universe." That term confuses many non-Masons who misconstrue the term. Quite simply, all Regular Freemasons believe in a "Supreme Being" or "Creator." It would be impossible to cite the many Masonic banquets held throughout the centuries. However, an account from the year 1772 refers to a "grand gala." Mackey speaks of "Table Lodges," which although can be eloquent in format -- he admits that they differ little in basic purpose from "Banquets" held by other societies whether civic, fraternal, family gatherings, or high school reunion banquets. Although speeches and symbolism play a role in Masonic Banquets, they do not constitute "Masonic Work." They are simply a meal, which can vary as widely and as elegantly as the participants who partake in, so desire.

#### ON LOCAL FRATERNAL INPUT:

Although Mackey concedes the right of every Grand Jurisdiction to be headed by its own distinct Grand Lodge; Grand Royal Arch Chapter, Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters, and Grand Commandery {with the latter three having national General Grand Bodies}; as well as Bodies such as The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite; Dr. Mackey also mentions allied groups such as The Royal Order of Scotland, The Red Cross Of Constantine, and Masonic Rosicrucianism {among others}. One thing that Mackey stresses is respectful allegiance to the Head of whatever Grand Body, and most especially The Grand Master of a Jurisdiction of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. It is significant, Mackey concedes that even the Latin phrase of "per-capita" roughly translates in the modern sense "for each person."

This Presentation is Dedicated to every Mason in Nebraska and to every Frater in Nebraska College S.R.I.C.F. Even in a non-Masonic sense of the phrase, the term is applied often as in "the per-capita productivity of workers;" "the per-capita incomes of a city's population," etc., etc. Mackey knew that Freemasonry is really a grassroots Fraternity. Without individual men petitioning for membership: we would have no Lodges. Without Lodges, there would be no need for State or jurisdictional Grand Lodges or other higher Supreme Bodies.

It has been said that: "Freemasonry takes good men and makes them better men." I agree. I also know men who have NEVER ATTENDED A GRAND LODGE SESSION IN THEIR LIVES, nor attended any cross-State conference, meeting, convention, or session. Therefore, **local input is essential to the success, prosperity, harmony, and growth of any Institution ---but more especially of ours.**



## ON RITUALISTIC RENDITION versus MASONIC SCHOLARSHIP

This is a twofold category. Naturally, a well done conferral of the "Degrees of Masonry" and the "Grades of Rosicrucianism" makes "the Masonic experience" as well as "the Rosicrucian experience" more meaningful. I think everybody agrees on that aspect. In Symbolic Masonry, various Grand Lodges have varying guidelines on proficiency or what many old-time members casually call "memory work." The point of this exercise: whether stringent or permissive, was to have some assurance that a newly-made member 'understood the basics' of Masonry. We've had some very fine Masons who were not experts at ritual-performance, yet practiced the precepts of Freemasonry dutifully, in their daily lives. I personally like such 'balance.' Furthermore, no member was obligated to assume 'Officer Status'. In the heyday of Masonry's golden-years, such competition was keen when membership was high. Yet, it still isn't a requirement that a man need be an Officer.

In a Masonic Rosicrucian setting: I have seen many fine Fratres: some of whom did expert ritual renditions in various SRICF Colleges in the United States; yet, some Fratres were / are simply not cut out to write Scholarly Papers. That is only human-nature. I do not fault anybody. I believe we live in a Society...in a Masonic-sense...as well as in an Americanism sense.....**a Society that prizes diversity.** Not every person is the same. Not every State demographic is the same. In our academic pursuits, we often study 'alchemy' ---both figurative and from a historical or philosophical standpoint. I believe we need an alchemical lesson that only needs one instrument: "The Balance Scales."

One 'experiment that would be difficult to "quantify" is a Member's Commitment. That might be measured in blood, sweat, tears, and in unseen criteria of heartfelt loyalty. I respectfully submit that each of us has our strengths and our weaknesses. We all have diverse personalities, varying degrees of physical health and stamina, diverse backgrounds, and we each come from a wide spectrum of age groups: Some Fratres being younger than me and some Fratres being older than me. I value them all. Yet, I firmly believe that we, in Nebraska College SRICF, can still be a homogeneous group of men --- pulling in the same direction, unified in our overall purpose for the Good of Mankind, and for the Good of our Order.

That is what I like about **all** branches of Freemasonry ---including Rosicrucianism. We all depend upon each other. We placed our Trust in God and we all pledged mutual-aid and mutual-trust to each other. Nothing has changed, we are merely adding to our evolution...not planning our dissolution. I believe in the FUTURE, Nebraska College of SRICF can have that delicate 'balance' of proper Rosicrucian ritual rendition, well-written Scholarly papers, and a dues-structure that honors preexisting "Life Members" without disenfranchising them -- and making a welcoming new atmosphere for newer Members and Affiliates. As a good Masonic friend who has presided over nearly every branch of the Fraternity recently told me: **"If Masonry cannot honor a promise, who can???"**

Years ago, at its formation, Nebraska College was set-up primarily as a Research Body. We benefited by the then Supreme Magus Thurman Pace and by our then-Chief Adept Warren "Duke" Lichty. We have done an excellent job in that regard. Nebraska College has been praised for its efforts by Freemasons worldwide. Now, Nebraska College will focus on the added facet of Ritualistic Renditions, too. It is my hope that both objectives can be met....phased-in-over-time....and to the satisfaction of all concerned.



Furthermore, I firmly believe that preexisting Life memberships in Nebraska College should be honored as a "binding promise made among Masons" with no excuses for evasion or equivocation. **Viable solutions can satisfy almost everyone**, such as merely having those current Life Members pay perhaps \$35 per meal, if they attend a Banquet; yet honoring their prepaid SRICF Life Membership contract. A peaceful honorable compromise **can be arrived-at**. We **can** accommodate existing Members while welcoming NEW Members who might pay a future rate of dues at perhaps \$160 per year which encompasses the all-inclusive price of the banquet meal. The result would be practically identical ....with NO HARD FEELINGS and NO DISCORD. As I see it, we CAN "MERGE THE PAST GRACEFULLY WITH THE FUTURE", if, if, if, calm, cooler-heads prevail. We, in Nebraska College SRICF each have red-blooded "Nebraska Loyalty"...be it loyalty to the "Nebraska farmland" of our forebears; loyalty to "Nebraska Football"...or loyalty to "Nebraska College S.R.I.C.F."

Change is often hard, **yet we can adapt if the merging-ramp toward modernization is gradual** and allows us some flexibility. We all respect our National Governing Heads, yet, being in the Nebraska Heartland: we need some "breathing room" and that is accomplished via greater latitude of local-control of some issues which may not translate well from one regional demographic to another. Nebraska is unique in the United States of America. it has a Unicameral (one House) Legislature. Nebraskans like it that way. One size does not necessarily fit-all. Similarly, the Parliament of the nation of FINLAND is UNICAMERAL.

Our nation knows that Nebraska operates a little bit differently than most States. Yet, we "get the job done" in such a a manner that many States even envy and wish they such a setting for themselves. I pray for the continued operation of Nebraska College SRICF in the years to come. And, I hope peace and Brotherly Love will prevail. I respectfully feel that Nebraska college **CAN** play a constructive role within the Masonic SRICF in the United States for many years to come. However, like most things: the transition will require time, patience, fortitude, and a tinge of a little bit of flexibility, forgiveness and honorable compromise. Nebraska, like Finland --may be "an exception to the rule" ---but each is an exception that deserves credit for what they CAN accomplish.

I close this Presentation with my friendliest Fraternal Regards as we will meet in the M\*\*\*\*\* C\*\*\*\*\* in due form, in this World and in Heaven Above. God Bless the Grand Jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Masons in Nebraska and May God Bless Nebraska College of Masonic Rosicrucians for doing good work in "the Cornhusker State."

#### Sources / References / Exhibits /Recommended Readings:

- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Dr. Albert G. Mackey, M.D., 33<sup>o</sup> and a Knight Templar.
- Archives of The Masonic Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, Canada.

#### About the Author:

Frater James A. Marples, VIII<sup>o</sup> is a Perpetual Life Member of Mulvane Masonic Lodge #201 A.F. & A.M. in Mulvane, Kansas. He is a Life Member of The International Peace Gardens Lodge of Freemasons (Canada-USA) and also an Honorary Member of Golden Rule Masonic Lodge #562 in Willard, Ohio; as well as an Honorary Member of Nelson Masonic Lodge #77, in Nelson, Nebraska, which has recently consolidated with the Superior Masonic Lodge at Superior, Nebraska.



Companion and Sir Knight Jim is a Life Member of the Wichita York Rite Bodies (Wichita Chapter #33 R.A.M.; Wichita Council #12 R.& S.M.; and Mt. Olivet Commandery #12 K.T.). He is also a Life Member of the Lincoln Nebraska Scottish Rite Bodies; The Robert-the-Bruce Association (California); The George Washington Masonic Stamp Club; The Masonic Stamp Club of New York (organized in 1934); Masonic Order of the Gordian Knot (Indiana); Masonic Order of the Sword of Bunker Hill; Kentucky Chapter #134 of National Sojourners and Heroes of '76; North Texas York Rite College #118 of Sherman, Texas; and Nebraska College S.R.I.C.F.

He is a Regular Member of The Allied Masonic Degrees; Grand College of Rites; St. David Conclave of The Red Cross of Constantine; Shawnee County Kansas Square and Compass Club; and Holyrood Council #61 of Knight Masons (Nebraska).

