

THE GREAT LIKELIHOOD OF POPE PIUS IX BEING A FREEMASON By Frater James Marples, VII°

Various articles have been written on the life of Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti, who, in his later life was known as Pope Pius IX, the longest reigning Pope in the history of the Roman Catholic Church in modern times. Many writers depict his views as anti-Masonic, while a handful claim that he was Raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason in his early manhood.

Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti was born on the 13th day of May in 1792 in the village of Senigallia, in the Papal States (now modern Italy). He died on the 7th of February 1878 at age 85, at the Apostolic Palace in Rome. He was ordained a priest in April 1819 and was sent by an earlier pope, (by his earlier predecessor Pope Pius VII) , to Chile and Peru in 1823 to work as an auditor and in 1825 to assist the Apostolic Nuncio. It should be noted that in the mid-to-late 1820s, Chile had only a small number of Freemasons, but Peru had a large number of active Freemasons ever since the year 1807. Quite often, Catholic priests were members and enthusiastically supported the Masonic Fraternity.

Some writers have erroneously claimed Mastai-Ferretti joined a Lodge in Italy, which was under the jurisdiction of a German Grand Lodge. I have contacted the Grand Lodge of Italy and they tell me that such claims are fake. However, the likelihood that he was a Master Mason is still quite possible. I believe it was while living in Peru that Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti was initiated into Freemasonry. On his return to Europe, Mastai-Ferretti became Archbishop of Spoleto, Italy, and became quite popular among the common people there. He visited prisoners in jails; he gave alms to the needy; and sponsored education for the orphans and friendless children. At that time, he was considered a "Liberal" (back in the day when "Liberal" was seen as a good word). When he became Pope Pius IX in 1846, he was quite popular throughout Europe. He freed political prisoners and tried to institute reforms to make the Church more open and accessible to the people. Pius IX believed in the principles of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

However, by 1848, revolutionary tendencies began to sweep across Europe. Pius IX essentially tried to apply the brakes on further reforms. Prior to becoming Pope, he was an activist trying to push open the door of reform. In the early days, of his papacy, he relished that open-door policy. But, when the crowds grew too large, too boisterous, and when they sought further openness by being nearly combative, he swiveled-around to close that door to added reforms. He felt the changing dynamics were factors that could easily spiral into chaos. For better or for worse, Pius IX not only frantically pulled-in the reins of power by his stern decrees and rigid dogmas; but he almost made a role-reversal by changing from a "Liberal" to a rigid "Conservative" within a relatively short period of time. In terms solely pertaining to spiritual matters, his decision may have been somewhat understandable. But, from a purely political standpoint, his paranoia and fear of being toppled, caused him to fritter-away the main base of his temporal power as being the Sovereign of the Papal States, which were almost entirely "lost" or severely whittled-away during the latter part of his pontificate. In Italian, Pius IX (Pius the 9th) is translated into Pio Nono. Humorously, when he transformed from a Liberal who agreed and assented to a rigid conservative who dissented, he literally was viewed as a "no-no" at times.

The United States of America was initially so pleased by the early years of his papacy that diplomatic relations were established with the Papal States on 07 April 1848. That feeling of goodwill and harmony only lasted until 1867 when relations ceased. That window-of-opportunity is what I want to especially focus on in this paper.

After 1870, Pius IX was still a spiritual force in religious circles; but he was an isolated captive inside the Vatican who resided on a relatively tiny patch of land compared to his formerly vast territorial empire which was previously called the Papal States. I believe that poor communication led to a whole chain of bad events surrounding his later years. In the early years of his papacy: happiness and harmony prevailed. In the final years: lonely isolation, rigid theories on dogma, wild pronouncements on perceived enemies, and widespread bewilderment prevailed.



There were reports that in the early years of his papacy, he was cited as a member of the Masonic Fraternity. By 1870, there were reports, (either real or contrived) that Pius IX was given a Masonic Trial and expelled from membership. It must be emphasized that although a "trial" or "trials" may have taken place based on fraudulent claims --- it does not rule-out that Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti may have been a member in a legitimate Lodge elsewhere, for which no expulsion ever took place.

At first blush, it would be easy for people to cast aside any claim that Pius IX was a Freemason. Critics might say, 'His actions indicate otherwise.' Oh? Do they really? As Illustrious Brother, Sir Knight and our Rosicrucian Frater Albert Pike once noted, "All eyes do not see alike." Human-beings tend to view various aspects of life from their own viewpoint ----with their own slant. Historical evidence viewed today may be viewed more objectively, with less passion, less prejudice...and illuminate finer points which may reveal that Pius IX was a Freemason, who had to walk a thin and awkward tight-rope because he felt the need to 'please' or 'appease' a vast number of people.

I believe that there is a great likelihood that Pope Pius IX was indeed a Freemason. I believe that he joined while in Peru as a young priest. Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti was known for mingling with the best and the brightest. Highly educated and charismatic, he also socialized with people from all walks of life. He had overcome bouts of epilepsy and had an inner charitableness toward his fellow man. Many Roman Catholics in Peru were members of the Masonic Fraternity in the 1820s, and even quite a number of priests were Masons.

Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti's thoughts, spoken words, actions and deeds reflect a certain Masonic lilt that cannot be chalked-up to mere co-incidence. He believed in the concept of: "The Brotherhood of Man, under the Fatherhood of God." He re-established the Latin Patriarchate in 1847 and re-founded the Knights of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem that same year. I once read an old Masonic journal which had the eyewitness account of a Mason stating that he had sat in Lodge with Pius IX (when he was a younger man). Another Mason attested that he had visited a Lodge in South America which had a painting inside the Lodge room of Pope Pius IX wearing a Masonic apron and regalia (again from his earlier days).

These accounts cannot all be brushed aside as hearsay. Perhaps the most astounding evidence comes from the actions of Pius IX himself. In 1854, for the construction of The Washington Monument ---- Pope Pius IX donated a block of stone marble from the Temple of Concord in Rome for the Washington Monument's interior wall. Sadly, on March 6, 1854, a group of vandals stole the stone from an outdoor shed on the grounds before it was to have been installed. It is believed that the vandals tossed the stone into the Potomac River. As an interesting side note --- over a century later, in 1982, the Vatican donated a replacement stone.

It is surmised that vandals stole the original stone. It was rumored that a group of anti-Catholic bigots were responsible for that dreadful act. I just wonder if such an act would have occurred if communication had been better? Protestants got their name by literally being "protesters" of Roman Catholic doctrines. And, like many other groups...some protesters get emotional and are apt to blindly 'protest' against "the other side", even if all the facts had not come to light. Keep in mind, it was the year 1854.

I sometimes ask myself the following questions: What if Pius IX's Masonic membership had been openly proclaimed at that time? Would that have eased Catholic-Protestant tensions? What would have transpired if the vandals had not struck and stolen the papal stone at the Washington Monument?

As previously noted: Official diplomatic relations between the U.S.A. and the Vatican began in 1848. Relations looked bright as of Pius IX's stone-donation gesture of 1854. But relations ceased



in 1867. There had to be some "turning point moments" in-between. All of this occurred during Pius IX's papacy.

Was Pius IX's gesture by giving a stone a way of reaching out? I think so. But we may never know for sure. Let us analyze and contemplate the following from what we do know:

- * Why would the head of the Roman Catholic Church give a block of stone for a project (a monument) which was commenced with a Masonic cornerstone-laying service?
- * Why would the Pope contribute a block of stone to a project which was supported by countless Masonic organizations donating their own blocks of stones?
- * Why would the Pontiff contribute said stone in order to erect an obelisk honoring the first President of the United States, George Washington, who was in fact an active American Freemason ?????

I can think of no other logical answer to all of these questions except that Pope Pius IX was a Mason who wanted to join his Masonic Brothers in this endeavor to honor a Brother Mason. There is simply no other plausible answer that adequately explains the various aspects of this gesture. Pius IX could have donated money. He could have sent a congratulatory letter. But, instead --- he donated a stone. And, not just any old stone....he donated a perfect ashlar from an historic Temple for the project.

Count Pelligrino Rossi once served as Minister of the Interior, and provisionally as Minister of Finance. Rossi noted that, "the fundamental statute is the consecrated corner-stone on which our political future rests, and from which it ascends. Pius IX planted it, and planted it wisely, with his own hand." He further said, "Respect and obedience to the law is the just and necessary standard to which the acts of every citizen, of every man truly free and worthy to be so, must conform; the standard that the government of His Holiness has proposed to itself to follow."

In the year 1847, Pope Pius IX quoted the words of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, saying, "The beauty of wealth lies not in the manner of life of the rich but in food given to the poor; wealth is more resplendent among those who are weak and in want; Christians should learn to use money in looking not for their own goods but for Christ's, so that Christ in turn may look out after them." He added, "When you recall these and other praise, We hope that you will vigorously assist the poor whom We are discussing....Meanwhile, venerable brothers, We most lovingly impart to you our Apostolic Blessing."

Frater Albert Pike noted: "Charity is devotion to another" and "He who truly loves his brother respects the rights of his brother." Pike also made the observation: "God being all just and all good, He can will nothing but what is good and just. Being Omnipotent, whatever He wills He can do, and consequently does. The world is the work of God: it is therefore perfectly made."

Both Pike and Pius IX believed in the virtue of good schooling and broad-based education. They may have differed radically in their methods, but their ultimate aims were somewhat alike. Both men loved books and approved wholeheartedly in the creation and maintenance of Libraries. The current Archives of both The Vatican and The Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction of the USA are filled with many priceless items...thanks to the foresight of these men.

Human frailties often cause misunderstandings, confusion, jealousy, and even envy. Pike made the astute analysis, "Good actions are not always followed by happiness, nor evil ones by misery" and "Virtue is not always rewarded, nor vice punished, in this life." At that point, Pike respectfully yields and defers matters of faith to individual persons and to their spiritual advisors. Many people sometimes fail to see that Freemasonry is a fraternal society dedicated toward improving a man's character; and that as a fraternity, we do not tread in matters properly belonging to the realm of



clergy. Freemasonry lets a man make his own individual choice as to his Church preference and doesn't infringe on any mode of religious expression or other aspect of personal Faith.

Pius IX acknowledged in 1871: " although the universal Church is spread throughout the whole world and composed of people with different customs, talents, and pursuits, it is still inspired by the one spirit of God." Those human differences, as noted above, often led to misunderstandings due to different human perspectives, different human methods, and different human mindsets or prejudices. However, good people seek to retain their own good, virtuous character. Masonry in a fraternal setting helps to showcase good character. Religious Houses of Worship (in a similar, but different vein), attempt to mold good character by the Commandments of Almighty God, the Creator. Masonry offers friendships and fellowships, and that doesn't replace or displace clergy in any way.

Although Pius IX is well-known for his theory of "Papal Infallibility," it should be noted that he only claimed or put forth that theory in instances when the Pontiff was making an official pronouncement "ex cathedra" or "speaking from the Chair" in matters of doctrine of faith or morals. Many protestants feel that this is overly presumptuous...and even I am somewhat skeptical of his theory. However, I am mindful that Pius IX was very aware of human weaknesses, plus he knew that there must be cooperation among superiors and subordinates in every walk-of-life in society. Few people realize that Pius IX, in 1849, said: "The very nature of human society obligates its members to obey its lawfully established authority; nothing in the precepts of the Lord on this subject, which are proclaimed in holy scripture, can be altered. For it is written: 'Be subject to every human institution for God's sake, to the king as supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish wrongdoers and to praise those who do right....'" In that context, Pius IX was acknowledging that human actions, human laws, and human authority have a proper place. Further, Pius IX always taught that Jesus Christ was the primary teacher on Christian tenets.

Many Catholic men who happen to be Masons sincerely try to "do right." Like other Masons, they cheerfully abide by lawful rules and regulations issued by lawful and recognized authorities. Such honorable men are deserving of praise. Their mortal thoughts, deeds, and actions are compatible with (and do not infringe upon) their religious faith.

Frater Albert Pike said: "We know that God is good and that what He does is right." "God's love takes care for all, and nothing is neglected. It watches over all, provides for all; for age, for infancy, for maturity, for childhood; in every sense of this or another world; for want, weakness, joy, sorrow, and even for sin. All is good and well and right; and shall be so forever. Through the eternal ages the light of God's beneficence shall shine hereafter, disclosing all, consuming all, rewarding all that deserve reward."

Regarding Law, Pike goes on to say: "Be faithful, thereto, to the promises you make, to the pledges you give, and the vows you assume, since to break either is base and dishonorable."

After pondering the above opinions of Frater Pike and Pope Pius IX, I personally see a lot of similarity. Both of their commentaries seem remarkably compatible and perfectly in tune with each other. Consider their avocations: Pike was a lawyer; Pius IX was a prelate. It is often stated that "Religion" and "Justice" are two-sides of the same coin. I firmly believe that any rifts in the past between the Roman Catholic Church (as a Church) and Freemasonry (as a Fraternity) were caused in large part by each side honestly and zealously promoting ideals seen mainly on one side of the coin, while choosing to minimize or utterly failing to see/ignoring the ideals on the opposite side of the same coin.

One major human flaw is hasty judgment. Another flaw is stereotyping based on bad experiences of a few and generalizing that to any given group (as a whole).

Late in his pontificate, Pius IX grew somewhat agitated by supposed actions of Brazilian Masons. Unfortunately, some Masons in Brazil, Mexico and a handful of other countries in Latin



America and South America, sought to intermingle their political agendas with their fraternal activities. The Pope was rightly upset at that action. Even the country of Italy has a whole host of groups claiming themselves to be "Masonic." Some are legitimate, while others are illegitimate. And, their status grows more complex when a seemingly "legitimate group" gets corrupted by a few, which suddenly changes it into a spurious "illegitimate group." That is why our Grand Lodges in the United States should be extremely slow and cautious when granting Official Recognition of foreign Grand Lodges. Our fraternity within the United States does not condone that type of behavior. It is unmanly, unworthy, spurious and clandestine to anyone who cherishes honor and upright dignity. My point is: Pope Pius IX correctly cracked the whip over dubious activities in Brazil and elsewhere. Yet, with Peru (where he likely joined Masonry) he gave tacit approval to its existence. And, to the United States, he gave a block of stone as a token of friendship.

Masonic critics never mention this intricate weaving in & weaving out of affection between Pius IX and his Masonic Brothers. From all accounts, he may have used an iron fist toward his opponents, but he also equally extended the warm hand of friendship to his friends and Brothers. If Pius IX was truly cold, aloof, and indifferent, he wouldn't have given the United States anything. As it was, I believe he was trying to make in-roads in the American Masonic community.

The more we learn about Pius IX, the more we may try to envision ourselves in his shoes. We cannot satisfy all the people all of the time. Masonic Biographies often get boring because they try to "polish-up" an already shiny image. I believe this study into the likelihood that Pius IX was a Mason is quite beneficial, because his character and his actions were not glossy.

Pius IX was a complex person. His character is spotted with good and bad (mostly due to the fluctuating circumstances he had to deal with). He was a Pope who was well-liked and yet fiercely hated by various elements of the populace. He was a man confident enough to make reforms, yet paranoid enough to ultimately become suspicious of the world around him. He was once a Liberal. He was later a Conservative. He made stern remarks about Masons or supposed Masonic groups in South America, yet he bestowed a tangible gift to honor a Freemason in North America.

I believe that Pius IX was a Freemason who was trying to reach out and improve Masonic relations throughout the world. When things went right in his life, his demeanor was cordial and friendly. When spurned (even by accident, such as with the episode in which his gift of a marble stone for the Washington Monument was stolen) he became withdrawn like a snapping-turtle inside its shell. I read one report (published during his lifetime) which revealed his Masonic membership. Pius IX denied it with overdone words that made it sound (to paraphrase the old adage): "Me thinks he doth protest too much." I believe that Pius IX was looking for an "opening" to politely, plausibly, and honorably announce his Masonic affiliation. Obviously, the few people who knew him in his early manhood and who had sat in Lodge with him were witnesses and knew he was a Mason. Most of those Brethren were in South America and the details of his Masonic membership slightly surfaced, but due to communication and long-distance travel being limited, Pius IX could hide behind of shield of simply "not admitting" he was a Mason. Communication and information dispersal being quite difficult in essence gave Pius IX "plausible deniability." I think he was content in his later years to remain silent...consumed with his very survival and holding onto his job --- the Papacy. He carefully judged his stance to appease a predominately Italian clientele. Putting himself into virtual exile made Pius IX a reclusive hermit which only compounded gaps in documenting parts of his earlier life as well as his inner thoughts. His official biographies were gleaned and artificially choreographed to project a parochial smoothness. For the rest of us who want to know "the rest of the story," we have to study the circumstantial facts at hand and weigh the likelihood for ourselves.

I believe that as a young man Giovannia Maria Mastai-Ferretti joined Masonry of his own free will and accord. I believe he practiced Masonic tenets regularly during his papacy ---and I think he was hoping for a time when he could cheerfully proclaim that Freemasonry didn't conflict with his Catholicism. However, I equally believe that as he grew older, the turbulent times in which he lived caused him to be a Mason in his heart without the open disclosure he truly wanted. As an old



man, his non-admitting his Masonic affiliations was his choice, which was further magnified by his own fears. In any event, the kind actions, generous spirit of fraternalism, and far-reaching humanitarian efforts of the young man named Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti (who later became Pope Pius IX) should be remembered. He should be remembered for who he actually was; and for what he actually did. We cannot rely on censored, filtered, or redacted biographies which airbrush Freemasonry out of his life. The more we study this...the more we will see the great likelihood of Pope Pius IX being a Freemason.

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