

# A Lutheran Catechism

ON

## Lodge Membership

WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE  
*Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks*

**Rev. Marcus T. Zill**



*“Let There Be Light!”*

### **FOREWARD**

**24 January 2000**

*St. Timothy, Pastor and Confessor*

The following Catechism was developed as the culmination of a lengthy process in a previous congregation of mine. It is placed here in the hopes that others may also benefit from its use. In offering it here I do not claim that it is superior to other materials that may be found or that it might not be improved upon. However, it does represent one pastor's attempt to faithfully work through such a problem with those sheep entrusted to his care. For that reason I have included the original preface, which may give insight as to the context in which it was used.

I remain grateful to the many materials made available by many other pastors and especially the LCMS Commission on Organizations, as well as their guidance. In the same spirit in which they supplied their material, I offer this to any and all who may find its reading fruitful. You are free to use this as you see fit, provided that nothing of doctrinal substance is altered. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [pastor@standrewslcms.org](mailto:pastor@standrewslcms.org) or 307.745-5892.

### **ORIGINAL PREFACE**

**14 September 1998**

*Holy Cross Day*

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church,  
Wolf Point, MT

As you are by now well aware, there have been many questions and concerns raised over the past

several months about members of our congregation holding membership in lodges such as the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. Having brought this to the attention of our elders this past spring and instructing them in regard to many of the issues involved, they agreed that the best course of action was to offer an educational event so that light could be shed on this important issue and people like you would have the opportunity to learn.

After months of careful research, correspondence, and planning, a congregational wide forum was held during the week of June 15-19. That presentation entitled, “**Let There Be Light!**” was attended by approximately 25-30 individuals, including our Circuit Visitor and the Exalted Ruler from the local Elks lodge. Overall, it was a blessed opportunity for many to learn. A large portion of that which was presented during that forum is either contained or summarized in this compendium.

However, the full presentation is still available for those of you who have not been able to yet read it. I cannot encourage you enough to do so! This “catechism” of sorts is designed to not only be a follow-up to that presentation, but also to serve as a helpful review for those who attended it. Being more concise, it will hopefully help facilitate the appropriate discussion and reflection that is still needed for many who are struggling with this issue. It is not intended to replace the much more thorough presentation made over two months ago, but to serve as a supplement to it. I will also be incorporating it as I continue the process of now working with individuals to patiently lead them to a clear cut decision in this matter, and also to help others who have questions gain a better understanding. I urge you to do the same. Perhaps there is someone you know who might benefit from reading this. Again, much of what is contained here is a synthesis of various materials provided by our LCMS Commission on Organizations and gratefully used with their permission.

As your pastor, I humbly offer this for your consideration. My hope is that as you have questions it can serve as a discussion guide for you and all concerned. May it be a handy reference tool and guide for you and others. I continue to be greatly affirmed by the desire that so many of you have demonstrated in wanting to learn and discuss this important issue. May this catechism further such study to the glory of Christ our Savior.

✝ *In Nomine Iesu* ✝

## I. INTRODUCTION

### ***1. Why is it any of the Church’s or pastors business anyways if someone is a lodge member?***

A pastor is a servant of Christ sent to care for his members “spiritually,” in much the same way as a doctor cares for his patients physically. Christ, the Chief Shepherd, will demand an account of His undershepherds for the souls He has entrusted to their care. A pastor is not his own man in this sense. He must administer his office according to God’s Word, and not his own private opinion or desires. He must faithfully teach and preach God’s Word in its truth and purity. Part of that responsibility necessitates warning members of his flock of that which is contrary to God’s Word, and therefore detrimental to their individual spiritual health and that of the rest of the congregation.

*Acts 20:28 “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”*

*2 Tim. 2:24 “And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.”*

*2 Tim. 4:1 “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage- with great patience and careful instruction.”*

[See also [Ezekiel 33:1-9](#) and [John 10:11-13](#)]

## II. OFFICIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS

### 2. *What does the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod officially hold concerning Lodge memberships?*

The congregations of the LCMS in Convention have never wavered in their unified agreement in matters concerning freemasonry and/or the lodge system. According to the 1995 edition of the LCMS Synodical Handbook, the bylaws of Synod faithfully maintain:

#### ARTICLE X. FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

##### 10.01 Statement of Purpose

- a. The Synod has declared itself firmly opposed to all societies, lodges, and organizations of an unchristian or antichristian character.
- b. The Commission on Organizations shall assist the pastors and the congregations of the Synod in fulfilling their commitment to witness publicly and privately to the one and only Gospel set forth in the Holy Scriptures.

##### 10.02 Responsibilities of Pastors and Congregations

- a. Pastors and lay people alike must avoid membership or participation in any organization that in its objectives, ceremonies, or practices is inimical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ or the faith and life of the Christian church.
- b. It is the solemn, sacred, and God-given duty of every pastor to properly instruct his people concerning the sinfulness of all organizations that:
  1. explicitly or implicitly deny the Holy Trinity, the deity of Christ, or the vicarious atonement;
  2. promise spiritual light apart from that revealed in the Holy Scripture;
  3. attach spiritual rewards to the works or virtues of men; and/or
  4. embrace ideologies or principles that clearly violate an express teaching of the Holy Scriptures concerning the relationship of men to one another.
- c. The responsibility of diligent and conscientious pastoral care requires that pastors of the Synod do not administer Holy Communion nor admit to communicant membership members of such organizations who, after thorough instruction, refuse to sever their affiliation with the organizations, since Holy Communion expresses an exclusive spiritual relationship of the communicant to his Lord and to his brethren (Matt.10:32; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 1 Cor. 11:25). Earnest continuous efforts should be put forth to bring individuals to a clear-cut decision regarding their contradictory confession, in order that they may become or remain communicant members of the congregation as the case may be.
- d. The responsibility of conscientious pastoral care recognizes that a pastor will occasionally encounter an exceptional case in which he is called on to administer Holy Communion to a person who is outwardly connected with such an organization. Such exceptional cases ordinarily involve an individual who
  1. has accepted the pastoral care of the congregation and is being instructed by its pastor in an effort to lead that person to see the inconsistency of contradictory confession and witness, and
  2. has renounced to the pastor and/or church council the unchristian or antichristian character of the organization in which membership is held. In such exceptional cases the pastor should consult with his brethren in the ministry or with officials of the Synod, as the case may require. He should, furthermore, beware of procrastination and the giving of offense to members of either the congregation or sister congregations.
- e. The Synod instructs its officials to exercise vigilant care and urges all pastors and congregations to carry out these provisions and faithfully eradicate all compromise or negation of the Gospel through members' identification with objectionable organizations. It shall be the duty of every member, pastor, and especially officials of the Synod to admonish those pastors and congregations that fail to offer counter testimony and take decisive action in matters pertaining to this subject. Refusal to heed brotherly admonition shall lead to suspension and eventual expulsion from the Synod."

### 3. *What does our congregation have to say on this matter?*

According to the constitution of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church our congregation maintains the following (my **bold** for emphasis):

**“No one can become or be a member of this congregation nor enjoy the rights and privileges of such membership**

**unless he:** a) is baptized; b) accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testament as the only divine rule and standard of faith and conduct; c) is acquainted with, and accepts, Luther's Small Catechism and also the Unaltered Augsburg Confession; d) leads a Christian life and abstains from manifest works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21); e) attends divine services faithfully and partakes of the Lord's Supper frequently; **f) submits, for the sake of love and peace, to the regulations already made, or still to be made, by this body, provided they do not conflict with the Word of God, and suffers brotherly admonition when having erred or offended;** g) contributes regularly and faithfully, as God has prospered them, toward the building of Christ's Kingdom in the congregation and throughout the world; devotes his time and talents to the extension of the kingdom of God; **i) is not a member of any secret or other organization conflicting with the Word of God.**

Thus, the LCMS(in general), and our own congregation(in specific), have made very public stands against "secret or other organizations conflicting with the Word of God." The above documents also speak in no uncertain terms concerning the implications of this matter.

#### ***4. So should someone leave the Lodge right away?***

Our Synodical Constitution and bylaws make it quite clear that "thorough" instruction needs to play an integral role in the process of working with those who have bound themselves by an oath as members in such a lodge. Ultimately, the decision to become or remain a lodge member is something that an individual has to make over time. But it is a decision that one should not make, nor be asked to make, without "thorough" instruction and necessary patience.

#### ***5. By taking this stand are we saying that all Lodge members are necessarily not Christians?***

Although we must regard the lodge rituals and practices to be unchristian and thus antichristian in character, neither I, nor we as the LCMS, have ever stated that a lodge member is necessarily not a Christian. Many lodge members are sincere Christians who often simply do not recognize or understand the conflict between the lodge rituals and the teachings of their Christian confession, not to mention the vows they have made in God's Name to be faithful to both.

#### ***6. Is the LCMS and its pastors out to get the Lodges?***

No, of course not! The truth is that the rituals and teachings of the lodge are not in agreement with the teachings and confessions of the Lutheran Church according to God's Word. The Lodges have the right to develop their own religious rituals and teachings without our consent. We too enjoy the same privilege. While we may support the rights of the Lodges and other religious organizations, Christian or otherwise, to have the political freedom to profess their religious beliefs, the LCMS' position and that of our congregation concerning the Lodges are based purely and totally for "religious" reasons.

### **III. SCRIPTURAL IMPERATIVES**

#### ***7. What makes being a member of a lodge different than one's holding membership in other organizations?***

It is possible for confessing Christians to be members of many organizations without compromising their Christian witness. There are, however, some organizations with noble purposes and commendable programs that nevertheless require their members to subscribe to a religious understanding and practice that compromises a Christian's confession of faith. The Elks Lodge, for instance, has many commendable features. The reputation of the local lodge is good and the Elks perform many works of benevolence at both the national and local level. However, their required rituals, oaths, and obligations are nonetheless, contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

#### ***7. Do lodges such as the B. P. O. E. have any ties to freemasonry?***

Directly? No. Indirectly? In great measure! Most all lodges such as the Elks are historically part of a greater Masonic family. Most of the first members of these organizations were Masons and thus the Masonic character has greatly influenced the organization, rituals, and vows of these lodges. For this reason it is hard to discuss the lodges without references to the freemasonry that has so influenced them.

### **8. Do these organizations claim to be religious?**

No, they do not. However, a distinctive and identifiable religious position is taken by those organizations that attach eternal or spiritual rewards to the particular virtues they have chosen to extol. As private organizations the lodges are not responsible to the churches for their membership requirements. As moral and ethical organizations, however, they have a responsibility to receive no one into membership under false pretenses. When any organization makes religious promises contrary to the Holy Scriptures, requires calling upon God as a witness to an unnecessary oath or one pertaining in unrevealed matters, promises eternal life apart from Jesus Christ as a reward for virtue, regards the Bible as simply a “book of justice” or one moral code among many, pronounces that all religious beliefs are equally valid before God, practices quasi-sacramental rites with religious meanings, or requires prayer, but at the same time by rule and for a purpose forbids the use of Jesus’ name in prayer- then the Christian must avoid membership in organizations like the Elks because they are involved in sub-Christian religion.

### **9. But won’t leaving such an organization create family, business, and social strife? Aren’t they equally important matters?**

Such matters are indeed important, but in no way are they more important than one’s relationship to Christ! Placing such matters above one’s relationship to Christ is clearly idolatry.

**You shall have no other gods.**

*What does this mean?*

We should fear, love and trust in God above all things.

The refusal to become or stay involved in an organization that promotes sub-Christian religion may create family conflict or may cost the Christian some business, social, or recreational advantage. In fact, one may be persecuted for doing so. This should not surprise us!

Matt. 10:32-39 *“Whoever acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge before My Father in heaven. But whoever disowns Me before men, I will disown him before My Father in heaven. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword... For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law- a man’s enemies will be members of his own household.’ Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”*

Matt. 10:28 *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*

A Christian cannot “compartmentalize” his/her life into separate and distinct areas- one for business, another for social activity, and a third for religious purposes. A Christian is concerned to live all of life in a way through which the Savior is honored. No association or affiliation is exempted from the Christian’s calling to be a witness for Christ.

1 Cor. 10:31 *“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”*

Mark 10:28-29 *Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!” “I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age...and in the age to come, eternal life.”*

### **10. But somebody doesn’t have to agree with everything an organization professes in order to become a**

## ***member do they?***

A Christian cannot verbally agree to an organization's tenets while having mental reservations, especially when a vow is made in God's Name in doing so. This is true either before or after such a vow is taken. That is being dishonest, dishonors the Lord, and blasphemes His Holy Name. People have every right to assume that Christians mean what they say when they publicly identify themselves with an organization's "official" pronouncements. A Christian cannot in good conscience and without sin take a "tongue-in-cheek" oath in God's name merely as "a form you must go through" in order to gain some social, recreational, or business advantage.

## ***11. What is a vow and why is it important?***

A vow is a serious thing in God's eyes, for He declares:

Numbers 30:2 *"When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said."*

When one makes a vow and gives their hand as a sign of their pledge they are in effect solemnly "binding" themselves to the one whom they are making the vow to and to those who have also made such a vow. This has manifest implications in terms of both the public rites of marriage, confirmation, and ordination, where God's name is involved in the solemn and binding act. Now there is nothing inherently wrong with taking a vow or an oath in God's name, even in some secular matters (i.e. testifying in a court of law). However, we must always use God's Name in connection with that which is true and right, and never in support of that which is false and wrong.

## ***12. What does God's Word have to say about taking vows?***

How seriously we take using God's name to make an oath or vow should be in direct relation to how seriously God takes the making of vows in His name!

Deut. 23:21-23 *"When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. **That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.**"*

Pr. 20:25 *"It is a trap for a man to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider his vows."*

Matt. 12:36-37 *"But I tell you that **men will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.** For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."*

Deut. 6:13 *"Fear the Lord your God, serve Him only and take your oaths in His name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land."*

Is. 42:8 *"I am the Lord; that is My name! I will not give My glory to another or My praise to idols."*

Leviticus 5:4-5 *"**If a person swears, speaking thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, whatever it is that a man may pronounce by an oath, and he is unaware of it- when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty in any of these matters. And it shall be so, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing.**"*

Lev. 19:12 *"**Do not swear falsely by My name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.**"*

Ex. 20:7 *"The Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."*

Indeed, God does take vows seriously! We know this also from the second commandment: *"You shall not misuse the Name of the Lord your God."* May God always help each of us to use His Name properly, so that *"we do not curse, swear (i.e. take false oaths), use satanic arts, lie (i.e. make Him through the misuse of His Name party to something that is false), or deceive by His name (i.e. vow to something using*

His Name which we have no intention of upholding), *but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.*”

**13. *What relation does this have to the vows that we make as Christians and as members of this congregation?***

Jesus said: *“Whoever confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father in heaven. But he that denies Me before men, I will deny him before My Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 10:32-33) This is precisely what occurs through our rite of initiation into the full life of the Church, namely Confirmation. As part of one’s vows, the catechumen is asked among other things to acknowledge the gift which God gave them in Baptism, to renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways, and to publicly confess their belief through the words of the Apostles’ Creed. Then, having done so, they pledge, by the grace of God, to faithfully conform all of their life to the divine Word, to be faithful in the use of God’s Word and Sacraments, which are His means of grace, and in faith, word, and action to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death.

Indeed, the taking of these vows are a serious and important matter! Thus, the confessing Christian, in line with his/her voluntary and professed desire to conform their life to God’s Word and to remain true to their Triune God in “faith, word, and action” will want to exercise special caution before identifying themselves with any organization, especially one that refuses to fully disclose its tenets, practices, or ritual requirements before requiring agreement with them, and especially when such vows in God’s Name and directly or indirectly contradict their own Confirmation vows.

**14. *So if one’s Confirmation vows give shape and form to their life as Christians, then what do the Elks believe gives shape and form to their life as lodge members?***

The foundational principles to which every member of the Elks Lodge subscribes are, as stated in the initiation ritual, and continually repeated elsewhere, “My solemn and binding obligation.” In other words, their vows! While many may seek to join a lodge for various reasons, it is still consistently maintained that it is precisely one’s “solemn and binding obligation” that defines one as an Elk!

## IV. GENERAL EVALUATION

**15. *So what are the vows and what is the Elks Rite of Initiation like?***

The public is strictly forbidden from witnessing such rites! However, according to the ritual books used by the B.P.O.E. we do know much about them. After the initiate is brought before the altar, on which is placed the Bible and a set of Elk antlers, the candidate is introduced to the Exalted Ruler who then announces to him as follows:

\_\_\_\_\_, you have been duly accepted by the members of this Lodge as worthy to become united with them in the noble work to which this Order is dedicated. Before proceeding further with your initiation, it is necessary for you to take the solemn and binding Obligation of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. In this, I assure you, there is nothing which will interfere with your duty to yourself or your family, or conflict with your religious or political opinions. Are you willing to assume such an obligation? (p.34)

The candidate then affirms his belief in God (p.34). The obligation is then administered after the candidate is placed in the proper position with his left hand over his heart and his right hand lifted above the altar. The candidate then swears at the altar among other things, to keep matters of the Order confidential, support and obey the statutes, uphold the Constitution and laws of the United States, and not “introduce into the Order anything of a political or sectarian character,” etc. The obligation concludes:

If I break this obligation, may I wander through the world forsaken; may I be pointed out as a being bereft of decency and manhood, unfit to hold communion with true and upright men. And may God help me, and keep me steadfast in

this my solemn and binding obligation in the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the United States of America. Amen. (p.37).

While the hand of fellowship and assistance is then offered to him by every Elk, the candidate is warned, that "should you prove unfaithful, these same hands will be clenched to drive you from our midst and punish you for your infidelity."(p.38). As this is being said, the rubrics, or directions, in the Ritual Book itself require each member present to clench their right hand for emphasis.

### ***16. What about the Elks funeral and graveside services?***

In the Ritual for Funeral Services the Exalted Ruler says:

Our Father Who art in Heaven, we come to Thee as the fountain of our faith, the source of our common brotherhood, the vine and branch of every virtue, and humbly ask Thy blessing upon this service. May the passing of our brother inspire us with new devotion to the fraternal duties entrusted to our keeping. May those who mourn be comforted in Thy supreme love and tender mercy. From the darkness of this hour lead us into the sunshine of Thy presence. As Thou art with us through life, so mayst Thou guide us across the uncharted spaces of death, and bring us at last where worlds unite in bonds of eternal peace. Amen. (Rituals of Special Services, pp.16-17).

The Exalted Ruler announces that "again we realize that in the midst of life we are in death; that He who watches over all our destinies has the spirits of the departed under His gentle care, and on the last great day will again unite the chain of Fraternal Love so recently broken."(p.17). Graveside services are similar, and include in the prayer these words, which assume that the departed brother is in heaven:

"Our Father Who art in Heaven, in all your wisdom, **you have chosen our brother to be with you forever in Heaven**, and we are happy that he shall live in the sunshine of eternal life. Comfort those who mourn with Thy unflinching goodness and mercy....Amen." (p.22).

The ritual specified for the mandatory Memorial Services in December to commemorate departed brothers, emphasizes even more strongly the promise of eternal life to all departed Elks. The Chaplain's opening prayer includes the words:

...we meet to honor the memory of our brothers whom Thou hast summoned to lay down the burdens of mortality, and to find rest with Thee....Imbue our hearts with the inspiring hope of immortality that banishes sorrow and **gives assurance of a happy reunion upon the shores of Thy fair land**. Enable us to read the tablets of love and memory, and learn from the records of our departed brothers, how best to live our own lives. (p.30)

The Exalted Ruler then announces,

As Elks we are taught that some day the mortal shall put on immortality. **Firm in our faith**, we are reminded by these services that we are born, not to die, but to live. True, the light of beloved eyes has faded from our sight, but it shines more brightly upon another shore. Voices we loved to hear at the fireside, in marts of trade, or in fraternal association, are silenced; but **they will live again in the music of the Choir Invisible, and blend forever in the harmony of angels**. Memorial Day with us is a day of tender sentiment. Hope dries our tears, and with eyes of faith we may see those whom we loved and lost awhile, faring on through a better land, **awaiting the day when the chain of fraternal love shall be re-united forever**. (p.30)

### ***17. What analysis does our LCMS' Commission on (Fraternal) Organizations provide about the the Elks rituals?***

"Although the Order has less emphasis upon religious philosophy in its ritual than Freemasonry, there is a strong resemblance in its promotion of the principles of the Order as meriting the approval and blessing of God. The Order is to be highly commended for its patriotic civic, social and benevolent contributions to society. The sincere Christian will, however, be deeply disturbed by the fact that his concern for approaching God only through Jesus Christ is ignored, in spite of the fact that he had been promised there would be nothing to conflict with his religious convictions. He believes that no religion or politics may "be injected into, or have any effect upon" lodge deliberations, only to discover that whole ceremonies are built upon a premise of universal salvation which he cannot accept. He is confused by the use of the poem

"Thanatopsis" which denies all immortality, and the ritual references to the assurance of immortality. He hears of the "redeeming grace and power" of God, but sees it applied to men who reject the Redeemer. The motivation for keeping the Golden Rule appears to be simply "for old time's sake" and recognition of man's natural imperfection (i.e. sin) and the work of God's Holy Spirit are completely absent.

The Christian is further disturbed by the use of the Bible in a questionable manner for a lesser and different purpose than that for which it was given, *"to make men wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 3:15). Viewed from the basic theological position of both the Old and the New Testaments, the religious ingredients of the Elks' Ritual, the prayers, hymns, funeral and memorial services, are incompatible with confessional Christianity. Officers of local Elk Lodges sometimes insist that some mandatory rituals are omitted and that funeral services are falling into disuse. Whether omitted or not, however, these forms still are definitive of the Elks' religious philosophy. They must be subscribed to by all prospective members, together with all other ritual forms. Membership in the organization would constitute a compromise of one's faith to which the Christian cannot give assent to in good conscience. Undeniably, public identification with such an organization gives tacit approval to its religious pronouncements."

## V. SPECIFIC EVALUATION

### 18. *What are some of the main areas where the Elks ritual contradict the Christian faith?*

#### a. **The doctrine of Scripture**

During the initiation ritual the Bible is opened on the altar and is among other things, called a "the Book of Law, upon which is founded, Justice." But if the Bible is simply a book of law to establish justice then the Bible is no more sacred to Christianity than the Koran of Islam, the Talmud of Judaism, and other Christian and non-Christian books of ethics and morality. Ultimately, the central message of God's Word - salvation through faith in Jesus Christ - is entirely omitted.

John 20:31 *"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."*

Luke 24:27 *"And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."*

Just because the Bible is used does not make an organization necessarily Christian. It may in fact be just the opposite! Immediately following His Baptism Jesus was led into the desert where He was tempted for forty days by the devil. (Luke 4:1-13) The devil used all sorts of pious Biblical phrases and spoke as if he had great authority. Moreover, he directly quoted Scripture while conveniently leaving out key phrases in order to deceive Christ and tempt Him to, in essence, swear by his name and worship him. Jesus answered the devil's twisting, distortion and misuse of God's Word with the "correct" proclamation of God's Holy Word. We are to do no less.

Col. 2:8 *"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy."*

Jer. 23:21-24 *"I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds..."* Yes," declares the Lord, **"I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, "The Lord declares." ...They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least,"** declares the Lord.

1 Peter 5:8-9 *Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."*

1 Tim. 6:20-21 *"Guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing*

*ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith.”*

## **b. The doctrine of God**

It is not enough to simply say that one believes in God either! A previous question must be asked, namely “Who do you believe God is?” The following was stated in a letter of March 5, 1992 from a Past Grand Exalted Ruler of the B. P. O. E. writing in response to inquiries made by our LCMS Commission on Organizations: “Elk members are not required to understand or accept the mystery of the Trinity (the Triune God; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit).” But as we together confess in the Athanasian Creed:

“Whoever will be saved shall, above all else, hold the catholic faith. Which faith, except everyone keeps whole and undefiled, without doubt he will perish eternally. **And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God**, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance....**This is the catholic faith which, except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.**”

The complete absence of any reference to the Trinity, or even to the Son, or Holy Spirit, coupled with the numerous general references to God in the Elks rituals, is not accidental. But why? Well, then the Lodge would have to be limited to Christians! Since many Elks are non-Christians (i.e. Jews, Muslims, Unitarians, etc.), they would be completely offended by any reference to Christ! Thus, the Elks purposefully make no mention of Christ, and are in effect forbidden to do so, by the fact, that the rituals of the Lodge must be used in their exact fashion and without substitute. This is an implicit and clear denial of Christianity, while then at the same time promising universal access for all Elks to God and eternal life apart from Christ.

Acts 4:12 *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*

Matthew 10:32-33 *“Whoever confesses me before men, I will also confess him before my Father in heaven. But **he that denies me before men, I will deny him before my Father in heaven.**”*

1 John 2:22-23 *“Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist- he denies the Father and the Son. **No one who denies the Son has the Father.**”*

John 5:22-23 *“The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. **He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him.**”*

1 Tim. 2:5 *“**There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.**”*

It should be appalling to every Christian that the Elks ritual (and others like it) blasphemes Christ in this way by offering salvation apart from what He accomplished through His sacrificial and atoning death at Calvary!!! Paul told us to be aware of those who would teach such false doctrines under the appearance of religious piety:

2 Tim. 4:3 ***The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.** Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. **They will turn away from the truth and turn aside to myths.** But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

1 John 4:1 *Dear friends, **do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**”*

Rom. 16:17-18 *“**I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.**”*

Is. 5:20 *“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.*

Titus 1:16 *“**They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.**”*

[See also Jeremiah 6:13-15]

### c. The doctrine of man

The emphasis in the Elks is on the “worthiness” of the individual. Man is viewed as being inherently good. This teaching reaches its culmination in the initiation ritual where it is stated “But, as Elks we teach...Our whole influence in life is determined by the good deeds we do.” This is directly contrary to the doctrine of justification, the chief doctrine of the Bible:

Rom. 3:22-24 *“There is no difference, for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”*

Rom. 3:28 *“A man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”*

Gal. 5:4-5 *“You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ.”*

Eph. 2:8-9 *By grace you have been saved, through faith- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Heb. 11:6 *Without faith it is impossible to please God.*

### d. The doctrine of Salvation and Heaven

The Elks ritual speaks of heaven as being an extension of their brotherhood(i.e. an eternal Grand Lodge). The Elks promise their members that if they live according to the virtues that the Lodge has chosen to extol, they shall after death be reunited with other sincere members of their organization. Thus, life after death is promised to Elks, whether they believe in Christ or not! To promise eternal salvation for all who are Elks is false teaching and gives false hope to those who are in need of the true Gospel. It is an abominable lie!

The Christian message is not broad, but narrow! To illustrate this, we need only to look at the best known of all Bible passages, John 3:16. The passage does not say: “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever tries to live a good life will not perish.” It does not say: “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever is sincere in whatever he believes will not perish.” It does not say: “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone will receive eternal life.” What Jesus does say is this:

John 3:16 *“ God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**”*

This same fact was restated by our Lord elsewhere in John’s Gospel:

John 3:36 *“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and **he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.**”*

John 14:6 *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through Me.**”*

The Christian must categorically object to any promise of a reunion in heaven with anyone who is not a believer in Jesus Christ.

### 19. *But no one really takes such vows seriously anyways?*

This is of no consequence in God’s eyes. It is an abominable offense nonetheless! God’s decrees are not dependent on our understanding of them. He takes our use of His Holy Name quite seriously whether we do or not. Moreover, they are serious vows and are meant to be so. God is not to be called upon as a Witness and Judge in something that the Christian does not take seriously or does not intend to do.

Deut. 23:21-23 *“When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you*

*have promised with your mouth.”*

It is precisely because the lodges take the vows seriously that God must be called upon as a witness. If it were not meant to bind your conscience they would leave God out of the vows altogether, or better yet, not have vows at all. Furthermore, some of the oaths specifically rule out - again in God's name- “any mental reservation or secret evasion of mind whatsoever.” Thus, lodge oaths can hardly be taken as “merely a form you must go through from both the perspective of the confessing Christian or an Elk.

## **20. Are these vows viewed as binding on those who make them?**

Yes. In fact, they are a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week, lifelong obligation! The final instructions in the Elks' initiation ritual makes this extremely clear:

**You must at all times have in mind the solemn and binding Obligation** which you have so recently assumed, and I charge you that your highest duty as an Elk is to keep it inviolate. Conscience will not permit you to expunge a paragraph, eliminate a sentence, or evade a responsibility; nor can you lay it aside when you leave the Lodge room, for it must henceforth be your constant guide and faithful monitor...**Fidelity implies strict adherence to our Obligation.**” (p.49)

Further, if these vows were not meant to be binding there would be no need to threaten the perpetrator of them for his “infidelity” with “clenched fists.”

**You shall not murder.** *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.

In the end the idea of not taking the lodges vows seriously is dishonesty toward the lodge itself. Just as we have every right to expect those who become members of our Church to take their vows to God and to us seriously, so too does the B.P.O.E. have every right for their members to do likewise. In fact, lodge members have every right to expect more of a Christian in this regard. Let there be no doubt, when one makes a vow it is a serious matter. This is the view of the Christian Church and as you can see from the above, it is also the public view of the Elks.

## **21. I still don't understand why the rituals are such a big deal?**

The use of a ritual is, in and of itself, not objectionable. Liturgy is a ritual. The “contents” of a ritual, not the “use” of a ritual, determines whether it is objectionable to a committed Christian. Just as the ritual that we use in the Divine Service on Sunday both expresses and reinforces our beliefs, so too do the rituals that the lodges employ express and reinforce their teachings. Many lodge members are quick to declare that neither the rituals of the lodge nor their underlying philosophy have any meaning for them. They say that the rituals do not at all reflect their purposes for joining the organization. Sometimes they speak of “suffering through” the rituals of initiation only to gain some advantage of lodge membership. This may be true, but it is ultimately hypocrisy towards the Elks as well as the Church.

## **22. What is so “secret” about all these lodges anyway?**

Lodges might best be described not as “secret organizations,” but rather as “organizations with secrets.” Such secrets as passwords, and hand signals are innocuous. But secrecy becomes objectionable for the Christian when it involves his/her swearing to do or support something that has not been revealed. Moreover, as Christians, we are told to be on the lookout for those who keep such things secretive:

2 Cor. 4:2 “We have renounced *secret* and shameful ways; **we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.** On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.”

Eph. 5:6-8,11 “Let no one deceive you with **empty words**, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore **do not be partners with them....Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness,**

***but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.”***

2 Peter 2:1ff *“But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them- bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”*

Even if that which is hidden is good and noble, the Christian is not at liberty to swear to support it, obey it, or perform it.

Leviticus 5:4-5 *“If a person swears, speaking thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, whatever it is that a man may pronounce by an oath, and he is unaware of it - when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty in all these matters. And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing.”*

### **23. What about the “protective” nature of the Lodges?**

There is clearly nothing wrong with giving special attention and care to the members of one’s own organization. However, there is something clearly wrong with “condoning” the actions of others simply because they are a part of your organization. While the Elks perhaps have not completely followed the Masonic mindset of protecting each other even in the face of criminal investigations, their Masonic roots do shed light on why the word “Protective” is in the name of the Order, and the promise in the initiation ritual to “forgive, forget, and condone” the actions of a brother Elk, as well as the threat of bodily harm for the breaking of one’s vows.

### **24. But at least an Elk has to profess belief in God in order to be a lodge member? Isn’t that a good thing?**

A careful distinction must be drawn between “recognition of the existence of God” and “worship of God.” Many of America’s national documents recognize the existence of God. America’s coins, pledge of allegiance, and national anthem also recognize the existence of God much to the dismay of some atheist organizations. Yet none of these establish religion, for they make no pronouncements concerning God and they involve no worship of a specific kind. No doubt, many organizations intend to do no more than recognize the existence of God, but they do, in fact, establish religion when they prescribe just how one prays in the organization, when they require subscription to statements concerning God’s mercy or judgment, when they promise eternal rewards for virtue, and when they extend the hope of eternal life to the family of a deceased member.

### **25. So what other lodges are also considered objectionable?**

The LCMS Commission on Organizations, based upon its continued research and investigation, continues to hold that the following family of Masonic organizations and their many affiliates are deemed “objectionable” from the theological perspective of the LCMS:

- Ancient Free and Accepted Masons
- American (York) Rite Masonry
- Scottish Rite Masonry
- Prince Hall Masonry
- Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (a.k.a. “Shriners”)
- Order of the Eastern Star
- Order of Rainbow
- Order of Job’s Daughters
- Order of De Molay
- Knights of Pythias
- Order of Pythian Sisters
- Independent Order of Odd Fellows

The Rebekah Lodge  
Order of Patrons of Husbandry  
Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks  
Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of Canada  
Order of the Royal Purple (Canada)  
Loyal Order of Moose  
Fraternal Order of Eagles  
Fraternal Order of Eagles Ladies Auxiliaries

**26. *So are we the only church that has expressed such concern about the Lodge System?***

Absolutely not. While Lutherans have always spoken very clearly on this issue, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches have always forbidden membership in either the Masons or the so-called “animal lodges.” Among the Protestant churches there is a wide variation of statements, attitudes, and prohibitions, though some church bodies, or individual churches at a local level, no longer take the matter seriously, either out of ignorance on the issues or indifference.

**28. *But if other churches don't take this very seriously anymore why should we?***

The Church must be faithful and avoid confrontation with religiously- involved organizations as far as her own members and prospective members are concerned. Confession, witness, and proclamation of the one and only Gospel are at stake. The Church, of course, has no authority to speak that which God has not spoken, but she also has no authority to dismiss anything He has spoken!

1 Peter 3:15 *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”*

Jer. 23:28 *“Let the one who has My word speak it faithfully.”*

If an organization requires subscription to anything that contradicts the one and only Gospel, the Church has no choice but to identify that which contradicts the Gospel and pronounce the organizations requirement incompatible with the Church's own confession.

**29. *So what is the best way to approach this problem?***

Simply put, we must tell the truth! God expects no less. We are surrounded today by so much that is counterfeit that it is increasingly difficult to tell what is REAL- whether it is a news report or a person's appearance. Some of this we have come to expect and we make allowances for it, but sometimes we have to probe pretty deeply ourselves to discover what is genuine about a product, a service, a friend- or even a religious commitment! Scripture speaks of those who *“hold the form of religion but deny the power of it.”* (2 Tim. 3:5)

**30. *What is a good Biblical example of this?***

Let us turn the calendar back some 3,000 years to the days of the prophet Elijah. The land of Israel in which he labored was quite “religious.” The people were scrupulous about observing all the religious customs and ceremonies, the “forms” of religion. But it ended there. They seem to have kept these “for old time's sake.” For “fun and games,” however, they drifted over to the Temple of Baal, the god of their pagan neighbors or Tyre and Sidon. The Baal-worshippers, you see, knew all about the “new morality.” Their temple was “where the actions was!” No matter how contradictory to their faith it was to identify themselves with Baal, the Israelites always managed to justify it: “It's not for religious purposes that we go there - it's only for social advantages.”

Isn't there something familiar about this? People attempting to bend their religious convictions so that they would not get in the way of their pleasures? Christians dividing their lives into areas - family, work,

social, religious - some of which witness for Christ and others that deny Christ?

### **31. But why can't someone remain a member of both?**

Consider the following present day hypothetical analogy:

"I once moved to a small town in which there were many churches but not a decent place to eat or entertain guests from out of town. But the Catholic Church had a very fine place to eat, drink, and entertain. The only stipulation was that you had to join the Catholic Church, go through their initiation ritual and makes vows before God that you were indeed a loyal Catholic, that you would remain true for life to your 'solemn and binding obligation' as a Catholic, etc. in order to use the facilities. So when I had settled in and I was accepted by transfer at the Lutheran Church, I promptly joined the Catholic Church as well so that I could use their facilities. Please understand, I only joined the Catholic Church for social reasons! While being a loyal member of the Catholic Church I also remain a loyal Lutheran.

It is common sense to regard such an arrangement as absurd and hypocritical! One cannot be a member of organizations which hold opposing doctrines. In effect, in an attempt to do so, vows in both organizations become null and void for they can not coexist together! In the end, that's what Israel was doing- identifying itself with Jehovah or Baal, both at the same time, depending upon what was most convenient, profitable, or pleasurable at the moment.

One day Elijah assembled the people on Mount Carmel and stood before them and said, "*How long are you going to falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.*" (1 Kings 18:21) In other words, Elijah was saying, "How long do you intend to carry on this duplicity? Tell it like it is! Don't call upon the Lord unless you mean it. And if you mean it, then break off this identifying yourselves with Baal. If pleasure and convenience are the biggest things in your life, then don't pretend God is! Admit it! You cannot have it both ways!" Read what comes next: "*and the people answered him not a word,*" (1 Kings 18:21). There really wasn't very much they could say. The decision was theirs!

### **32. But what about the New Testament?**

The Apostle Paul encountered a situation similar to Elijah's, but among the Christians at Corinth, where the pagan temple was dedicated to Astarte instead of Baal, but the problem was the same. The Christians were going over the Temple of Astarte for their fun and games. Paul, like Elijah, put the question squarely to them,

1 Corinthians 6:11-16a "*O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open. Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?*"

In other words, Paul was saying, "Dear saints in Christ, this can not be, you have yoked yourself with that which is false. Come out from among them and be separate! This is not who God has called you to be in Christ Jesus!" But what is this "temple of God" Paul is talking about not being in agreement with idols? Actually, this temple is not a "what," but a "who"! Look at Paul's very next sentence: "*For you are the temple of the living God.*" (1 Corinthians 6:16b) He wasn't talking about a building, or even about an organization. He was talking about Christians, the Corinthians themselves, you and me. The temple of God is with us wherever we go, whatever we do. We are witnesses of how God has shined the light of His forgiving grace in Jesus Christ into our lives and has set our feet on new paths. We are witnesses of our Triune God's power to redeem and to effect reconciling changes in people, to bring people out of darkness of sin into the light of His eternal mercy in Christ.

Matt. 5:14-16 "*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*"

John 8:12 *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

1 John 1:5b-7 *God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."*

Eph. 4:25 *"Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body."*

1 Peter 2:12 *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.*

Eph. 4:1 *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."*

For the Christian witness there can be no mental reservations, no crossed fingers, no secrets, no short-term commitments, no withholding of certain areas of life. Elijah tells it like it is! Christ tells it like it is! Paul tells it like it is! We too can do no other!

### **33. But isn't it enough to just recognize that the rituals are wrong?**

It is incumbent upon the Church to call people to an undivided witness for Christ. Certainly, the church cannot judge a person's faith- but it can, and is, to judge someone's affirmation of faith. That which a person endorses, supports, and affirms, especially by their participation and involvement, is either compatible or incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is incumbent upon the whole church to witness to the one and only Gospel! The question of what the Christian identifies himself or herself with is not a minor or peripheral matter.

2 Tim. 2:19 *"Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."*

Ps. 26:4 *"I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, O Lord, proclaiming aloud your praise and telling of all your wonderful deeds. I love the house where you live, O Lord, the place where your glory dwells."*

Prov. 19:5 *"A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will not go free."*

Ps. 5:4-5 *"You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with You the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in Your presence; You hate all who do wrong."*

### **34. But others who are Elks sincerely see nothing wrong with this?**

God's truth is not determined by man's ignorance! I'm sure the Israelites were quite sincere as they danced around the golden calf. (Exodus 32) However, in God's eyes, "ignorance is no excuse." You can be quite sincere in what you believe and go to hell because what you believed in was not Jesus Christ!

Matthew 7:21 *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"*

### **35. What does Exodus 32 have to do with the Elks?**

Well, let's take a closer look. The Israelites had grown quite tired of waiting for Moses to return from the mountain, so they gathered around Aaron and pleaded with him to help make them gods that they could see and touch. Perhaps fearful of saying, "No!" Aaron *"took what they had handed him(i.e. gold) and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf."* Why a calf? Well, for starters it was really a "young bull calf," and perhaps reminded them of the fertility necessary for their flocks, but the idea was probably borrowed from the Egyptian religious festivals of Apis(i.e. the culture around them). Then Aaron built an altar in front of the calf and announced, *"Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord."* The people

gathered and ate and made merry. It was a social occasion and Aaron had attached some quasi-religious significance to their allegiance to their self-made idol, so everything appeared to be just fine in their eyes.

*“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them...They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it....’”*

Though Moses was able to intercede and persuade the Lord to not destroy them immediately for their falsehood, when he returned to the camp to watch their social spectacle around the calf, he burned with righteous anger:

*“He threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it. He said to Aaron, ‘What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?’”*

Thus, Moses turned to Aaron whom he had left in charge and demanded an account from Him for the people’s idolatrous and blasphemous actions. Aaron, of course, tried to pass the buck. He claimed that the people were ignorant. It was simply expedient to please them. “I was fearful Moses, you know how the laity can be. They came to me with this proposal and they thought there was nothing wrong with it, and I was fearful how they would treat me if I said no, so I went along with their request, but I made it somewhat O.K. by declaring it to be done in the “name” of the Lord, that way they could at least feel as if they were doing a good service to God and their fellow man.”

*“So he (Moses) stood at the entrance to the camp and said, ‘Whoever is for the Lord, come to me.’ And all the Levites rallied to him. Then he said to them, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.’” The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. Then Moses said, ‘You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day.’” The next day Moses said to the people, ‘You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin. So Moses went back to the Lord and said, ‘Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves god of gold. But now, please forgive their sin- but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.’” The Lord replied to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.’” And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.”*

The Israelites had sinned greatly by binding themselves and worshipping that which was false. They thought they were justified in doing so since they had attached quasi-religious meaning to what they did. But instead of being a witness to the Egyptians of the false nature of their religious practices, they borrowed from them and made them their own. Their leader Aaron was held accountable for not warning them. In spite of their sincerity or ignorance, God held them accountable and burned with anger toward them, and through His servant Moses called them to repentance. They had made vows to serve God alone. He had every reason to expect their total allegiance, but they had turned to that which He had forbidden and they worshipped what they had fashioned for themselves instead. When they were told by their prophet that they had sinned, they were called upon to make a clear-cut decision to either follow the true God who had saved them or the false god of their own making. Those who repented were spared(though later punished accordingly for their sin), but those who did not repent were destroyed for their wickedness.

### **36. But does God really expect our complete allegiance?**

Let’s answer this question through the use of other questions: Does it anger our God when we align ourselves with that which blasphemes Him? Does it not incur not His blessing, but His wrath when we make vows in His Name at His altar, and then make contradictory vows at another, foreign, and strange altar? Does it anger our Lord when we take the easy way out like Aaron, and seek to please men instead of be witnesses to them, though they may hate us for it? And if God slayed 3000 of His own chosen

people for their disobedience for their idolatry are we so foolish as to think that He will not hold us accountable, especially when we have called upon Him to do just that by virtue of the vows we have made in His Most Holy Name? The answers should be obvious!

### **37. *But isn't God compassionate?***

Indeed! In fact, He heard Moses cry on the behalf of His people and He gave them the opportunity to repent and choose to follow Him though they had sinned. He would restore them and continue to be their God and they His people, but not if they insisted on justifying their unfaithfulness and idolatry! As Jesus would say Himself,

Matt. 6:24 *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other."*

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

### **38. *So where does this leave us?***

The Church must stand where her Lord stood- in the world but not of the world! She cannot overlook the "tough spots" in her ministry. In this way, we must follow the example of faithful Moses and not unfaithful Aaron. The Church's insistence upon an undivided witness will leave her open for bruises and ill will. She will be called "narrow" and "intolerant." But here too we are called to stand where the Lord stood, and we should not be surprised where that leads us- to the cross at Calvary!

Luke 21:12-19 *"But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. **This will result in your being witnesses to them.** But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For **I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.** You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. **All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.**"*

### **39. *But what if one doesn't participate in any of the Lodge functions of meetings?***

Though someone may not seek any participation in the "inner" workings of the Lodge, they simply put, must participate in order to be a member. How you "feel" about the matter ultimately does not change that participation. In 1 Corinthians 10:14-21, the Apostle Paul makes this exceptionally clear. The Corinthians lived in a pagan society, and there were many temptations around them to worship false gods. Many of them had been called out of the darkness of the pagan worship of Apollo, Demeter, and Aphrodite and the like. Though believers, there was a constant temptation for them to keep one foot in their former way of life. To this Paul admonishes them:

*"Therefore, my beloved, **flee from idolatry.** I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread."*

In other words, as we ourselves know from the Lord's Supper. Christ is really truly present in the actual bread and wine. One receives His actual Body and Blood, either in faith to their benefit, or without faith to their harm, regardless of what they think, or what they want to think, is going on. It is the thing itself that matters: Eating and drinking of Christ's Body and Blood is participation in Christ's Body and Blood, even if the devil himself should receive it. In this way, one participates physically in Christ's Body and Blood regardless of how they may feel about it, how prepared they are, or whether or not they actually believe Christ is really, truly, present. This helps explain the serious Scriptural mandate for those who come to the Sacrament of the Altar, and why we practice closed communion. Paul continues:

*“Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? Than an idol is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.”*

The same as above is true when we participate at the altar where the Triune God is strictly denied. If the God professed in Elkdom and other lodges is not the true Triune God (and it is clearly not for they deny Christ) then that god must be some other false god, under the dominion of Satan. In going through the rituals themselves, someone may not want to think it is any big deal, they may not agree with what is going on, and they may not take their vows seriously, but they are nonetheless participating in *“the cup of demons”* simply by going through the thing itself! And in the words of Paul, *“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord (participate at His altar!) and the cup of demons (participate at an idolatrous altar!).”*

***40. So are you saying that if someone who is a member of this Church is also a Lodge member they must leave the Elks?***

Yes. The initiation vows and other rituals implemented by the Elks greatly mitigate against the Gospel of Jesus Christ and are an absolute offense to the Gospel and all who cherish it for their salvation. The vows which one makes as an Elk are in direct contradiction to those which someone makes as a member of our congregation. When two sets of vows are made in God’s Name and they clearly contradict each other, in the end they are both null and void. One cannot be faithful and honest to both!

If you have taken such vows as an Elk, whether you remember it or not, or whether you realized it at the time or not, you have sinned in greatly misusing the Lord’s Name in pledging yourself with God as your witness to that which is patently false and absolutely idolatrous!

Leviticus 5:4-5 *“If a person swears, speaking thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, whatever it is that a man may pronounce by an oath, and he is unaware of it- when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty in any of these matters. And it shall be so, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing.”*

This sin, as with all sin, needs to be repented of and you need to separate yourself from that which is false. There is only room for one altar per life!

***41. So what will happen if someone chooses to not leave the Elks or another such lodge but wants to remain as a member of the Church?***

We as a congregation have every right to assume that those who are voluntarily a part of our fellowship will refrain from holding membership and supporting organizations that so blatantly contradict our confession of faith. We also are to have concern for their souls! This, in essence, they have asked us to do by virtue of their own vows and by submitting to the pastoral care of this congregation. If someone after countless, patient, and thorough instruction continues to willfully and steadfastly remain impenitent of their sin, and continue in defiance of the clear word of God, and as a result, they refuse to separate themselves from membership in the Lodge, they will be excommunicated from this congregation, in love and according to Christian principles for the sake of their eternal salvation. Should this become necessary, in this or any situation, it is cause for sadness and calls for not scorn but much continued prayer that God through such a Scripturally mandated measure will bring them to repentance. Excommunication means that by their steadfast impenitence, an individual is outside of the kingdom of God and is not to be considered a Christian, until such a time that by God’s grace they repent of their sin and seek to be restored. Should that occur the whole church is to lift its voice in joining the angels in rejoicing!

Luke 15:10 *“In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of angels of God over one sinner who repents.”* [See Luke 15:11-31]

As we all were taught and confess in the Small Catechism:

**What is the Office of the Keys?** The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of the repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant sinner as long as they do not repent.

**Where is this written?** This is what St. John the Evangelist writes in chapter twenty: The Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, “*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*” (John 20:22-23)

**What do you believe according to these words?** I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.

#### **42. Does it really matter if I do anything about this?**

Yes, this is very serious! To remain impenitent of one’s sin is to forsake Christ and reject the forgiveness He secured for you through His death and resurrection. There is no option.

John 8:31 **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really My disciples.”**

Prov. 8:13 **“To fear the Lord is to hate evil.”**

James 4:17 **“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do, and doesn’t do it, sins.”**

Gal. 6:7 **“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”**

Acts 5:9 **“We must obey God rather than men!”**

John 14:15 **“If you love Me, you will obey what I command.”**

#### **43. But this is between me and God. It’s none of the church or pastor’s business anyway! Doesn’t the Bible say “Judge not lest you be judged!”**

We are the “body” of Christ! We must care for our members, not only for their sake, but moreover for our own. What each of us does, or doesn’t do, impacts the other parts of the body.

1 Cor. 12:25-26 **“There should be no divisions in the body...its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”**

However, when someone persists in willful and impenitent sin, it does neither that member, nor the rest of the body anything but harm if nothing is done to bring them to repentance, even if the toughest measures have to be employed.

1 Cor. 5:5-6 **“Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord...Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.”**

It is not God’s will for His people to idly watch while those He cares for are in great spiritual danger, whether they realize it or not. If those who know of someone’s sin do nothing, they are guilty themselves.

Gal. 6:1 **Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.**

2 Cor. 5:20 **“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.**

1 Cor. 5:12-13 **“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.”**

Matt. 18:17 **If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.**

Prov. 3:11-12 **My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent His rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in.”**

#### **44. But that would just be you or this Church’s opinion?**

No, it is not! It is the judgment of Christ! According to the Office of the Keys which Christ has bestowed upon His Church, when either the binding or loosing key is faithfully used according to God's Holy Word, the result of such use is as sure and certain as if Christ was present to use it Himself.

Luke 10:16 *"He who listens to you listens to Me; he who rejects you rejects Me; but He who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."*

Matt 18:18 *"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

**45. I realize that what I have done is wrong but I have too much too lose in leaving the lodge! I guess that is just the way it will have to be for now!**

True contrition and sorrow over sin will necessarily manifests itself in the desire of the heart to do what is right in God's eyes regardless of earthly consequences for our sinfulness.

Heb. 10:26 *If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*

Luke 3:7-8 *John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.*

John 8:11 *"Go now and leave your life of sin."*

**46. I realize that this is wrong, and I know what I need to do, but can't I just wait a little longer to make the decision and carry it out?**

Patience dare not ever be a substitute for the truth, nor can tolerance be a substitute for commitment.

Exodus 32:26 *"So (Moses) stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord come to me?"*

1 Kings 18:21 *Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him."*

Joshua 24:14ff *"Now fear the Lord and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods of your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods or the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. Then the people answered, "Far be it for us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods...We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God."*

**47. I suppose you enjoy giving us sleepless nights over this?**

2 Cor. 2:3ff *"I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.*

**48. I'm so sorry, can God ever forgive me?**

Yes. Yes. It shall be so!

Prov. 28:13 *"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."*

1 John 1:9 *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

Acts 3:19 *"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."*

Ps. 32:5 *"Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" - and You forgave the guilt of my sin."*

✝ Soli Deo Gloria ✝