

A Short Allegory

by M.D. Jardine

In matters of religion we are like students preparing for the final exam in a course at college or university. We are not sure if we have seen the professor but a number of lecturers have spoken to us, unfortunately not always to the same effect. Was one of the lecturers the professor in disguise? There are a number of textbooks for use in the course but they are not always consistent. We have done work during the term but we have not received the marks and have only our estimate of how well or poorly we have done. Is the professor an easy marker or hard? Is the term work heavily weighted so that it is important how well we do in it, or is the exam heavily weighted so that a good exam result will overcome even a miserable term mark? Is there a chance that everyone will pass? Is the professor marking on a curve so that he will only take the top 144 students? Is the professor prejudiced so that he knows who will pass even before we write the exam? If we fail, do we take the course again, or is there a remedial course, or are we expelled?

We must commit ourselves to an opinion one way or another in order to prepare for the exam. We may feel that we have got the key to the course and concentrate on that, or study generally in the hope of catching the correct answer somehow, or rely on the hope that the exam will be very easy and not work at all. Whatever we do, we will be stuck with it when we walk into the exam room.

We as Masons look beyond the differences of opinion and realize that, as people, we are all in the same class and are all trying to pass the exam. We have sympathy for our fellow students, even those who are taking a different approach. We want to wish everyone in the class good luck on the exam, even those we are pretty sure will fail. Wishing them good luck does not mean an assurance that they will pass. We try to encourage our fellow students to do the term work well since we all agree that it was really assigned by the professor, even if it isn't worth much in the assessment of the final mark. Knowing that the professor wants it to be done, we hope that it has some bearing on our final mark, but that is not the same as a claim that our final mark is based exclusively on term work. We believe that the more material relevant to the course we study (even if it isn't actually required to pass) the better we are generally and the better we can understand our fellow students.

It is to be hoped that this allegory may be of some assistance in explaining the position of Masonry towards religion to those who assert that Masonry puts forward a plan of salvation. In the terms of this allegory, salvation is passing the course. The road to salvation is not certain (any more than it is clear what approach will get the student a pass), which explains why there are so many different opinions about it. We are guided down that road by faith, by a belief which we adopt as our rule and guide. The focus of Masonry has to do with our relationships with our fellow creatures and with our determination to live moral or righteous lives, not because we are persuaded that this brings salvation, but because we know that it is approved by God. That is reason enough.