Vatican Cleric Claims Catholics Can Be Freemasons

24th February 2020 by A Brother

Reading Time: 2 minutes

Fr. Weninger (far right) with Semler (far left) at the book launch

"Loge and Altar" is the name of the new book by the Viennese priest, ex-diplomat and Vatican employee Michael Heinrich Weninger, in which he explains in just under 500 pages why one can be a Catholic and a Freemason at the same time , He presented his views at a book presentation in Vienna on February 12th. Weninger is a member of the Vatican Council for Interreligious Dialogue. During his travels around the world, he was repeatedly addressed by Catholics who are members of lodges. "They told me about their consciences and mental problems, whether they were actually excommunicated because of their membership. And I told them with a clear conscience that this was not the case."

One has to differentiate between different types of Freemasons, Weninger said. He referred to the "regular" lodges under the umbrella of the United Grand Lodge of England, which also included the Freemasons of the Grand Lodge of Austria under their current grandmaster, the professed Catholic Georg Semler. The church, according to Weninger, had for too long made no distinction between the "regular" Freemasons and other, sometimes sectarian or anti-church tendencies.

Pioneering work by Cardinal König

As early as the late 1960s, Cardinal Franz König, Archbishop of Vienna, had held talks with Austrian, German and Swiss Freemasons in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), which culminated in the 1970 "Lichtenau Declaration". The bottom line was that Freemasonry was not a religion and at least shared the commandment to love brothers and men with the Catholic Church. The church's curses against the Masons should only be seen as a historical relic.

This positive assessment of the relationship was unfortunately offset by a negative result of the regional dialogue between the German Bishops' Conference and Freemasons. Nevertheless, König, among other things, succeeded in deleting the condemnation of the Freemasons from the new version in 1983, as was still stated in canon law from 1917. On November 27, 1983, the new Church Law (CIC) came into force, Freemasonry was not mentioned in a single sentence.

Gestures of reconciliation

Georg Semler, Grand Master of the Lodge of Austria, praised Weninger's book as an important step towards reconciliation with important clarifications. He also underlined that Freemasonry was not a religion, party politics and religion were not topics in the lodges. But maybe one or the other official gesture of reconciliation between the Catholic Church and the Freemasons would be needed.

Weninger also saw it that way. A meeting of grandmasters with representatives of the church – with the Pope or even the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – at which reconciliation is officially pronounced again should be enough. Because everything is clarified in church law.

Weninger said that he had already presented his book to the Pope, high-ranking cardinals of the Curia and Cardinal Christoph Schönborn. And the reactions of the recipient? – "Goodwill without exception." Addendum: At present, the recipients have to be satisfied with the German version. An English, Italian and Spanish version is planned.

Michael Weninger: "Lodge and altar. On the reconciliation of the Catholic Church and regular Freemasonry", Loecker Erhard Verlag, 2020

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