

The Courier-Journal



STAFF PHOTO BY DURELL HALL JR.

Floyd Booth held a Masonic Home Journal which featured him in 1989. Booth, a member of Ninth & O Baptist Church, said Southern Baptists' charges against Masonry hurt some churches.

SATANIC RITES?

Attack on Masonry stuns many Baptists

By MARK E. McCORMICK
Staff Writer

Marion O. Reed, a Freemason and lifelong Christian, said his father's Masonic brothers cared for him and his family after his father died during the depths of the Great Depression.

His father's lodge in Louisville educated him, taught him the printing trade and paid his salary for many years as editor of the Masonic state newspaper, Reed said.

So when other Southern Baptists at the denomination's convention in Indianapolis last year charged that Freemasonry is sa-

tanic and anti-Christian, Reed stepped to the microphone to defend it:

He didn't get the chance to speak, however, and the convention ordered its Home Mission Board to investigate the charges.

Its report, released last month, sent shock waves through the denomination, many of whose leading members are Masons.

The report concluded that many tenets of Freemasonry are incompatible with Southern Baptist doctrine, but stopped short of condemning Freemasonry. In-

See MASONS
Page 9, col. 1, this section

MASONS

Continued from Page One

stead, it recommended that "membership in a Masonic Order be a matter of personal conscience."

Fourteen percent of Southern Baptist ministers and 18 percent of heads of its churches' deacon boards belong to Masonic lodges, a denominational survey shows.

Reed and other local Masons who also are prominent Southern Baptists said they are bitter and called the charges baseless and slanderous. They don't expect problems in their churches, they said, nor do they intend to abandon Masonry.

But other Southern Baptists defended the findings, saying the rituals and elaborate ceremonies of the Masons are satanic and have roots in paganism and the occult.

The full Southern Baptist Convention in Houston this summer will be asked to adopt the board's findings.

Freemasonry is a fraternity, not a religious cult, said the Rev. Jack Early, a United Methodist Church minister and Mason from Louisville. He said Masonry "is veiled in allegory and illustrated with symbols."

It is a clandestine organization known publicly for its benevolent activities but whose private pursuits involve rituals and an eclectic quest for knowledge.

Communists, atheists and women are prohibited from membership.

Masons say their emphasis on integrity, honesty and charity enhances the Christian faith.

Reed, who is associate chairman of the deacon board at Jefferson-town Baptist Church, said he's angry that an organization responsible for so much good in his own life and the lives of others should have such charges leveled against it.

"I've been embittered by it," Reed said. "I can't believe that people are listening to this diatribe."

He noted that Masonic philanthropy, in the form of Shriners' hospitals and other charities, totals about \$1.4 million a day.

The Southern Baptist report also condemned most white lodges' refusal to admit African Americans. It's "probably unlikely" that a black man could be admitted to a white Masonic lodge, Reed acknowledged, but he said "eventually it will happen."

James Montgomery, grand master of the predominantly black Prince Hall Masons, State of Kentucky, agreed that a black man probably couldn't join a white Masonic lodge in Kentucky. Prince Hall was a freed slave who organized his own lodge after being excluded from a white Masonic lodge.

Montgomery said his organization has good relations with its white counterparts. "We have whites in our organization — we

have officers that are white," said Montgomery, who added that in a few states blacks can join historically white lodges.

Despite the recent criticisms, Reed said Masons are viewed by many as a "group to be commended and trusted."

But other Protestant denominations have taken stances against Masonry.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the British Methodist Church and the Christian Reformed Church recommend that members avoid joining the Masons. In the past, the Catholic church also has condemned Freemasonry.

Larry Holly, a Beaumont, Texas, physician who pushed for the Southern Baptist report on Freemasonry, said "there is no question" that Masonry is ultimately the worship of Lucifer.

"No Christian denomination that has ever looked at it has failed to condemn it," said Holly, who has written two books on the subject.

Masonic charity is merely a veneer of legitimacy concealing satanic practices, he said. Holly said many Masons are ignorant of the true nature of Freemasonry and that "its evilness flows out of its pretending to be something that it is not."

He said Freemasonry has a salvation system predicated on good works, which is contrary to Southern Baptist teachings. But more damning, he said, is the organization's acceptance of other religions and other gods.

Because the Bible teaches that God said people should have no other God before Him, Holly said, the Masonic tendency to accept other deities runs counter to Christianity. (Masonic officials dispute that contention.)

And he blasted the Home Mission Board's report for not going far enough, calling it an "attempt to placate everybody."

Floyd Booth, a deacon at Ninth & O Baptist Church in Louisville, said he is disappointed that the issue was brought to the floor of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"It has already hurt some of our Baptist churches," he said. "People have already left over the issue, and some have left the denomination because some minister is opposed to the fraternity." Booth said nobody had left his church in protest.

A past grand master of the Masonic grand lodge of Kentucky, he said he has found no conflict between Masonry and his religion and doesn't intend to quit either one.

"I've been a Baptist ever since I've been saved," Booth said. "We've got people in our denomination who have so much control over the minds of our leadership, and what they are saying is, 'If you don't believe like me, you're wrong.'"

April 19, '93