

Is Freemasonry the Answer?

- Scott Rowe

Much of today's world seems to be faltering on the edge of a dark abyss that threatens to swallow us back into those darker, more violent periods of times gone by. The unimaginable atrocities committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, better known as ISIS, and other extremist religious fanatics, seem almost unbelievable in our modern age. But the reality is that these horrific events serve as stark reminders that down through the pages of recorded history there has been a bloody trail of death meted out in the name of religion.

When that trail is studied none of the great faiths of the world can claim to be innocent of these crimes against humanity. The Biblical histories of the Judaic Old Testament speak of innumerable instances of slaughter and destruction of peoples and cities as part of God's will. Islam has fought for centuries against invasions of the Infidels, as well as deadly infighting clashes between the two main offshoots of that faith, the Sunni and Shiite Muslims. The Christian faith, perhaps by way of and because of its wide propagation, is estimated to have caused more deaths in the name of its "One True God" than all the political and ethnic cleansings ever perpetrated by man against his fellow man, far outdoing even the pogroms of Hitler's Nazis, Russia's Stalin, or the Killing Fields of Cambodia's Pol Pot. It is estimated that in the twenty year Abilgesian Crusade alone which started in 1209, more than one million people were killed in the Languedoc region of France for practicing Catharism. So brutal was this Pope sanctioned crusade that many supposed innocent Christians were killed also. The infamous words of Caesar of Heisterbach, in command of an attack on the City of Beziers, are still remembered to this day. When asked by his soldiers how they should identify and slay the Cathars in the city, he stated "Kill them all for God knows his own." Twenty thousand men, women and children were killed in a matter of hours, the vast majority of whom were Christian.

The strict and unbending laws of the medieval church left no tolerance for any deviation from their teachings. Control was so paramount most modern day Christians don't realize that for almost thirteen hundred years, until the 17th century, private ownership of the Holy Bible was prohibited by the Catholic Church. Penalties for possession of a Bible ranged from whipping, confiscation of real and personal property and even burning at the stake.

In light of the constant religious wars from the time of the Crusades, the horrific Spanish Inquisition, and through the traumatic and often bloody parting of the Catholic and Protestant divisions of Christianity, it is more than understandable that at the dawn of the new Age of Enlightenment there was a growing segment of the population ready and wanting a change. The invention of the printing press made the Church's ban on Bible ownership impossible to enforce, and the prolific spread of the printed page enabled exchanges of new ideas and scientific advancement.

The stage was set for men of good report and sound morals to put aside the differences of religion and embrace the common good found in all faiths. Thus the principles of Freemasonry were born, established on the novel premise that a neutral ground could be established where men of all religions, political beliefs and social status could come together as equals. The ground was neutral in that the

purpose of Freemasonry was to benefit a man's character, not change his mind. The right to pursue a man's faith in whatever manner he chooses was then, and remains today, still an inviolate right of all brethren. It is the reason Freemasonry has survived and flourished across so many lands and varied cultures and religions over centuries of time.

Today we bear sad witness again to atrocities around the globe in the name of religious differences, political differences and ethnic incompatibilities. Millions are caught up in spheres of influence and belief, so certain of their perceived rightful causes that they are willing to commit incredible acts of cruelty against their fellow men. It was a time like this, some three hundred years ago, when Freemasonry was conceived as a better way forward for those willing to put aside their differences. Perhaps again it is time to herald the benefits of an organization that judges no one by their religion, teaches the importance of charity towards others, and encourages respect to all.

Freemasonry could very well be the answer.