

The Enlightenment, Freemasonry, and The Illuminati

by Conrad Goeringer

Part I - The Enlightenment

In the history of Atheism, no period is as complex and exciting as that time we know today as the Enlightenment. Cultural historians and philosophers consider this era to have spanned the eighteenth century, cresting during the French Revolution of 1789. It was a phenomenon which swept the western world, drowning in its wake many of the sclerotic and despotic institutions of *l'ancien regime* or old order, and helping to crystallize a new view of man and the roles of reason, nature, progress and religion.

And too, the Enlightenment was a feverish period of Atheistic thought and propaganda. Many of the leading philosophers of the time were Atheists or deists, opposed to the cultural and political hegemony long exercised by the Vatican and its shock troops, the Jesuits. Much of the political, social and literary activity of the Enlightenment was characterized by a repudiation of Christianity, and the formulation of doctrines calling for separation, if not outright abolition, of state and church.

Any definition of the Enlightenment must, of necessity, begin with a *prohibitorum* – attempts to rigidly segmentalize history are often futile, since they envision history as a string of compact, autonomous events, each a "period", distinct in all respects from all other times. History is not this way, of course, and like any period the Enlightenment is a broad designation to help us understand the events and ideas of the 18th century. Were we to construct a model to loosely describe this time, however, it would emphasize three areas – reason, nature, and progress. It was during this time that how leading personalities looked at their world, its religions, its societies, its knowledge, its political institutions, changed so radically. And it was here that the birthpangs of industrialization were being felt, where so much of the modern world was to be born from the womb of the old order.

Reason is the capstone in the pyramid of ideas which describe the Enlightenment. Reason, not faith or divine revelation, told one the facts about life and the world. Some held that reason alone, the product of thoughtful contemplation, could reveal archetypical truths in much the same way Pythagoras had deduced his theorems on Samos millenia before; others maintained that reason involved an empirical faculty as well. In either case, reason was intermeshed with nature. Like nature, mans' reason had become vitiated by those notorious enemies of humanity – religious superstition, government, socioeconomic rank, poverty and prejudice. Destroy these in an upheaval of antiauthoritarian wrath, and once again reason would provide a lucid, natural mechanism for apprehending the world and guiding a new human society.

Reason, then, was the faculty for comprehending nature, the second important element in the Enlightenment triad. Nature was just that – the natural, real world. It was not the realm of the supernatural, the demonic, or the godly, but the

empirical or rational "stuff" of which the universe was, and is, made. Nature could be understood through reason; through logic, scientific inquiry, and open mind of free inquiry, nature would yield her secrets.

Finally, there was progress. Reason, working upon nature, would enhance the quality of life for each and every one of the Enlightened. The Atheist philosopher Condorcet preached the doctrine of a coming Utopia, where indefinite progress would bring forth a "natural salvation" of plenty and immortality. Progress held that since the universe was knowable, enlightened man could become the subject of history rather than its object. Mankind could fashion nature to its wishes; the efficacy in shaping the natural order was limited only by time and the sheer limits, if any, of reason.

On each and every one of these points which underpinned the Enlightenment – reason, progress, nature – the orthodoxy of the era were hostile. The church maintained that divine inspiration and revelation were sufficient to lead the kind of life desired for man by god, pope and king. Nature was hostile, unknowable, and forever a surrogate to a higher reality ruled by supernatural forces, gods and demons alike. One's time on earth was allotted only for preparation in dying and being reborn in that supernatural kingdom. As for progress, the hierarchical arrangement of a god in heaven and kings and popes on earth as his "lawful representatives" demanded conformity, stability, and obedience, instead of development, experimentation and blasphemy.

Atheism and militant anti-clericalism were both important elements in the Enlightenment. The French philosopher Voltaire saw priests and Christianity as a scourge on the human race, exclaiming "*Ecrasez l'infame!*" (Crush the infamous things!). The clergy were perceived corrupt, the pope considered a tyrant, the king despised as a lackey and errand boy for the whoremaster in Rome.

If the bible was the holy book of the Christian enlightenment, then the Encyclopedia was the inspiration of the Enlightenment. Here was a compendium of human knowledge dealing with arts, sciences mechanics and philosophy which swelled to some 36 volumes by 1780. Begun by the Atheist Diderot in 1751, the Encyclopedia bore the imprints of Voltaire, Montesque, Rousseau, Buffon, Turgot and others. Gracing the title page of Diderot's compendium in the first edition was a drawing of Lucifer, symbol of light and rebellion, standing beside the masonic symbols of square and compass.

The Enlightenment mirrored the Christian religion. Reason became its revelation, nature its god. If the Enlightenment did not abolish the myth of god, it reduced god to a sort of absentee deity, a caretaker to the universe who was nevertheless subject to the laws of nature. Deism arose from the same fertile soil of the Enlightenment as had Atheism, and no doubt many deists were actually Atheists. The deistic god was symbolized in the masonic lodges as the "Great Architect of the Universe", certainly not the god of the Christian superstition.

This and other critical notions of the Enlightenment were spread throughout all of

Europe, and even to the New World. It had been nearly 250 years since the first book printer to popularize literature, one Aldus Manutius of Venice, had begun the mass circulation of pamphlets and booklets. The Enlightenment was a literary explosion of dissertations, books and journals, all filled with the novel ideas as controversies of the period. These ideas spread; they were discussed and debated in the universities (where they often met with official and clerical censure), in reading societies, in cafes and salons, and in those mysterious lodges of the Freemasons.

As the Encyclopedia became the bible of the Enlightenment, Freemasonry became its ritual. The history of the craft is centuries old, "obscured", as one writer puts it, "by the blending of provable history and legend."¹ It was during the Middle Ages that guilds of builder-masons existed. Traveling from town to town, they worked on the massive cathedrals, castles and bridges; they were neither merchants nor fixed to the soil, but instead a mobile fraternity of skilled workers. As early as the 14th century, stonemasons had organized into companies or lodges. The craft was both respected and demanding, for it was the mason who was both skilled contractor and, in many cases, architect of a particular building project.²

In the latter part of the century, the "Old Charges" were composed in some 115 documents outlining the nature, organization and functions of the craft. A 1425 manuscript traces the origins of masonry back to Euclid, through the construction of the Tower of Babel and Solomon's Temple. The Charges also established metaphorical principals and ethical standards to govern members of the guild.

Secrecy was common in most medieval craft guilds, and masonry was no exception. This mystification served to monopolize and control the knowledge of the craft, as well as to check renegade serfs from leaving their feudal bondage and joining the free and migratory trade of masonry. Scottish masons had invented passwords and special handshakes by the early 17th century, a ritual which soon spread throughout the lodges.

By the late 1600s, masons' guilds had enrolled growing numbers of "accepted" or "gentlemen" members who did not make their living directly from the mason trade. Some writers have accounted for this tendency by pointing to the growing interest in architecture amongst the nobility and landed. There was also the conviction among many, however, that the lodges, with their secrecy and symbolism, harbored certain hermetic truths handed down from ancient civilizations. Hard science (what little there was) still overlapped with occultism³ and Masonry was transformed into a potpourri of cabalism, mythology, ritual and intellectual heterodoxy. By the early 1700s, the original emphasis on principles of stonemasonry had been transformed into allegories. Unhewn stone was said to symbolize "man in his infant or primitive state, rough and unpolished". Polished stone was, as a corollary, "man in the decline of years, after a regular well-spent life in acts of piety and virtue, which can not otherwise be tried and approved than by the Square of God's word and the Compass of his own self-convincing conscience."

Despite some of the biblical flavor of this symbolism, it was not necessarily Christian. The first masonic *Book of Constitutions* maintained that members of any religion could become Masons, "leaving their particular opinions (about god) to themselves...."

In 1717, a United Grand Lodge was formed in London, using Dr. John Anderson's *Constitution* to standardize the rituals and practices of Freemasonry. It was from this constitution that the masonic tales of Hiram Abiff, King Solomon's Master Builder, along with the pyramid style organizational model would date. Some Masons, however, calling themselves "Ancients" refused to acknowledge the regency of the Grand Lodge.

This "Grand Lodge Era" for English Masonry was deistic and politically somewhat conservative. Many Lodge members were clergy and the bulk of Masons were disposed toward the Hanoverian dynasty which ruled the country. Outright Atheism was a taboo, of course. Anderson had stipulated in his Constitution that:

A Mason is obliged, by his tenure, to obey the Moral Law: and if he rightly understands the Art, he will never be a stupid Atheist nor an irreligious libertine....

The spread of Freemasonry, however, did not assure the uniformity and homogeneity found in the English lodges. A Paris lodge had been founded in 1725. In the minds of the Bourbons, the doctrine of religious and intellectual tolerance was inherently subversive. In 1737, Louis XV edicted that loyal subjects could not belong to the masonic order. The mere secrecy of the society, with its lore and awesome symbolism, was considered fertile soil for imaginative invective. Works bearing titles like *The Grand Mystery of the Freemasons Discovered* soon appeared. A letter in one popular English journal, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, declared that "Freemasons who have lately been suppressed not only in France, but in Holland 'were a dangerous race of Men'".⁴

Europe in the 1700s, particularly the Continent, lacked the types of political organizations where opposition to existing authority could find expression. Even universities, often controlled by Jesuit administrations, were mere hand-maidens to the aristocracy. It was only natural, then, that secret societies and salons, lodges of the Freemasons and private reading clubs would become the focal points for the seditious and "impious" activists of the Enlightenment. Masonry required that novitiates pass through a series of degrees, accompanied by symbolic ritual, whereupon the secrets of the craft were gradually unfolded; the metaphors of masonry, the remaking of humanity as early masons had remade rough stone, soon served as a revolutionary allegory. This became the new model of revolutionary organization — lodges of brothers, all seeking to reconstruct within their own circle an "inner light" to radiate forth wisdom into the world, to "illuminate" the sagacity of the Enlightenment. So pervasive and appealing was this notion that even relatively conservative and respected members of society could entertain the prospect of a new Utopia, "or at least a social alternative to the ancient regime...."⁵

Within Masonry were constant splits and tendencies, making it all the more difficult to trace the threads of Atheistic thought.⁶ Political and intellectual renegades of every sort, from Atheists to occultists, gravitated toward the lodges. There were the mystical and spiritualist masons of the Rosicrucians,⁷ or the followers of the Swedenborgian heresy, both of which substituted for orthodox Christianity equally obtuse and absurd hermetic systems. There were lodges where one found somewhat conservative dispositions towards politics and religion, often loyal to the Grand Lodge in London. There were the bored aristocrats who, freed of the onerous task of earning a productive living, dabbled in alchemy, astrology and the search for the elusive Philosopher's Stone. But it was still within the lodges of

Freemasonry where the ideas of the Enlightenment, with their siren call of revolution and Utopia, nurtured and spread.

By the end of the 1700s, the stigma attached to Free-masonry by clerical and civil authorities had taken hold. Clement XII issued his papal bull *In Eminenti* banning Masonry and forbidding lodge membership for Catholics. He declared:

For the sake of the peace and safety of civil governments, and spiritual safety of souls, and to prevent these men from plundering the House like thieves, laying waste the Vineyard like wolves, perverting the minds of the incautious and shooting down innocent people from their hiding places.... no Catholic was to be a Freemason.

Eleven other popes would condemn Freemasonry in the most vitriolic language possible. Leo XII lamented the fact that Christian princes and heads of state had not fully obeyed the Vatican in suppressing Masonry, "as the safety of both Church and State required", in the words of one Jesuit writer. Pius VIII declared of the Masons that "lying is their rule, Satan is their God, and shameful deeds their sacrifice....". Gregory XVI wrote that Masons and kindred secret brethren were comparable to a sewer in which "are congregated and intermingled all of the sacrileges, infamy and blasphemy which are contained in the most abominable heresies." Pius IX, outdoing his papal predecessors, condemned Masonry in six separate bulls between 1846 and 1873, denouncing "those baneful secret sects who have come forth from the darkness for the ruin and devastation of Church and State...."⁸

It was in America where so many of the ideas of the Enlightenment were actually instituted.² It has been said that Europe conceptualized the Enlightenment, whereas America, with the establishment of an "enlightened republic", realized it. Freemasonry had come to colonial America about 1730; the bulk of the evidence suggests that most lodges were politically neutral "in the English tradition", although "...outstanding individuals... make a definite link between Freemasonry, the new political ideas, and the struggle for independence."¹⁰ Not surprisingly, these figures were Atheists and deists, wary of the Christian theocracies of Europe. Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) was a deist, signer of the Declaration of Independence, early opponent of slavery, advocate of the philosophy of progress and a founder of the American Philosophical Society. Along with the French Atheist and philosopher Helvetius (1715-1771), he was a member of the Paris "Lodge of the Nine Muses", one of the continental masonic groups where the "revolution was hatching".¹¹ After his initiation into the lodge in 1776, he went on to assume the post of Venerable Master. The Nine Muses (or "Nine Sisters" as it was later known) also printed the constitutions of all thirteen American states, becoming "the first school of constitutionalism that ever existed in Europe...."¹²

George Washington became Charter Master of the Alexandria lodge, first president of the United States, and a vociferous advocate of fundamental Enlightenment ideas, including separation of state and church.¹³

Thomas Jefferson would also serve as president, amidst the hysteria which would sweep Europe and America concerning Masonry and the Order of the Illuminati, it

would be Jefferson who publically defended the Order and its founder, Adam Weishaupt.¹⁴

Thomas Paine, pamphleteer of the Revolution, was an associate of many radical European Freemasons, including Nicholas Bonneville. Bonneville was a radical republican and head of a neo-masonic group known as "Friends of Truth", active during the French Revolution. Paine's *Common Sense*, published in January of 1776, echoed the masonic notion that "we have it in our power to begin the world over again...." Later, he argued against Edmund Burke in defense of the French Revolution, declaring in 1791:

What were formerly called revolutions were little more than a change of persons or an alteration of local circumstances ... what we now see in the world ... is a renovation of the natural order of things, a system of principles as universal as truth....¹⁵

Despite the masonic motto of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity", revolution in America and revolution in Europe ultimately took distinctly different courses. The Enlightenment had given rise to diverse notions of how Utopia was to be reached. Many of the French philosophers, so repulsed by the brutalizing aspects of religious superstition, widespread poverty and political oppression¹⁶ argued in defense of "enlightened despots", with Frederick the Great serving as a role-model. It was in 1740 that Voltaire first visited Frederick's court to discuss the ideas of the Enlightenment. Voltaire had been initiated into the Lodge of the Nine Muses, and Frederick had long been a Freemason, serving as Grand Master and head of the Scottish Rite. To his credit, Frederick helped secularize many of the institutions of Prussia during his reign.

It was these "enlightened despots" who, coached by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, were to usher in a new age, free of the incumbrances of religious superstition.

Others influenced by the Enlightenment were less trusting in the power and authority of a beneficent State.

William Godwin (1756-1836), anarchist and Atheist, represented one of the most consistent libertarian impulses of the Enlightenment, writing "Political Justice" in 1793. Even the followers of Jefferson, the republican, admired Godwin's anti-authoritarian sentiments and Jefferson, while a governmentalist at heart, spoke of "a little rebellion now and then" by the people to be "a good thing". Godwin's Atheism and anti-statism were handed down to two other figures in libertarian history, Michael Bakunin (1814-1876) and Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), both Freemasons. When revolution again swept Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, it was the masonic model of organization which provided an organization blueprint for Bakunin's International Brotherhood and the Revolutionary Alliance.¹⁷

Tracing the myriad threads and interconnection amongst countless lodges, reading societies and sects is something which, even today, constitutes relatively unexplored historical terrain. The revolutions and upheavals of the Enlightenment were the products of manifold forces and developments – economic, social, political and conspiratorial. Conservative polemicists, then as now, emphasize this conspiratorial dimension, at the cost of ignoring the profound historical developments sweeping Europe as well as the New World. Then as now, they portrayed social revolution as merely the design of hidden, arch-conspirators (a mythology which was, at times, accepted by conspirators as well). This is not to say that in those lodges and reading societies there were no conspiracies laid, no plans hatched – far from it. But the power and efficacy of those plots was not in actual practice, but in the myths created often by their adversaries. Nowhere is this more the case than with the notorious group known as the Order of the Illuminati.

Part II - The Illuminati

It is ironic, yet in a way fitting, that the most secret, yet historically popular manifestation of Enlightenment conspiratorialism was formed in Bavaria. It was here in the middle of the 18th century that the ideas of the Enlightenment met such hostility and censure from an entrenched clerical and aristocratic establishment.¹⁸ One traveler reported the existence of some 28,000 churches and chapels; Munich, a city of only 40,000 boasted 17 convents. As one writer observed, "the degree of power to which the representatives of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) had been able to obtain in Bavaria was all but absolute".¹⁹ It was in Bavaria on February 6, 1748 that Adam Weishaupt was born, son of a professor of canon law at the University of Ingolstadt. The father died when the boy was seven; the child's intensive education then rested in the hands of his godfather. Baron von Ickstatt, a member of the Privy Council.²⁰ Adam had free access to the Baron's magnificent library, which was well-stocked with the works of the Enlightenment philosophers.

The young Weishaupt graduated from the university in 1768, rising quickly within the Jesuit-dominated institution to become a full professor in 1733.²¹ Despite his militant Atheism, he managed to become dean of the law faculty two years later at the age of 27.

Constantly at odds with university and ecclesiastical authorities, Weishaupt conceived the idea of forming a secret society, an order, organized along lines similar to the Jesuits, yet committed to the ideals of the Enlightenment.²² Weishaupt had embraced the Rousseauian vision of a world free of the constraints of government and church, where humanity would exist in a universal community with nature.

Yet he was more than a visionary day-dreamer; he was prone to action, convinced that only the relentless work of a powerful secret order could counter the pernicious influences of the clergy. This contestation embraced Manichean symbolism, a war between light and darkness, between the illumination of reason and the sordid dark ignorance of religious superstition. LeForestier wrote that

Weishaupt contemplated his scheme for several years and – after bickering over an appropriate name – founded the Order of the Illuminati on May 1, 1776.²³ It was this order which was to become, in the words of the Jesuit polemicist Abbe Barruel, "the conspiracy of the sophisters of Impiety and Anarchy against every religion natural or revealed...."²⁴

Unfortunately, Barruel's four-volume work has come to constitute one of the few sources of information on the Order of the Illuminati. The Abbe labeled Weishaupt: ...an odious phenomenon in nature, an Atheist void of remorse, a profound hypocrite, destitute of those superior talents which lead to the vindication of truth, he is possessed of all that energy and ardour in vice which generates conspirators for impiety and anarchy.

Continuing, Barruel claims the Order's Chief to be:

...head of a conspiracy which, when compared with those of the clubs of Voltaire and D'Alambert, or with the secret committees of D'Orleans, make these latter appear like the faint imitations of puerility, and show the sophister and the Brigand as mere novices in the arts of revolution.

Borrowing from the masonic model, Weishaupt structured the Order in pyramid-like fashion, with novices starting at the bottom degree of 'minerval', and receiving training in a network of minerval academies. These circles met each month to discuss recruitment and the various tasks of the Order; there was also a thorough schooling in those "impious" works of the day, such as the writings of the Enlightenment philosophers. Minervals were often selected and enticed into the society by 'insinulators'; each candidate was required to complete an exhaustive autobiography of himself, his strengths, weaknesses and interests, as well as a statement of why he sought admission into the Illuminati.

The minerval academies also had the task of obtaining books and other literary materials useful to the Order, with the distant goal of establishing an institute for Enlightenment scholars, a library which would be an intellectual armory for use in the battle with, particularly, the witty Jesuits.

Those candidates who displayed an appreciation and interest in progressive Enlightenment ideals, as well as opposition and distaste for civil and ecclesiastical authority, would gradually be admitted to the higher grades of the Order. It was here that the true objectives of Illuminism were revealed. Far from being a mere study group or reading society that had no social or political goals, the Order was, in truth, to be a mechanism for the promulgation of the very "Impiety and Anarchy" denounced by Barruel. The Order was to work incessantly for the day, in Weishaupt's words, when Princes and Nations shall disappear from off the face of the earth! Yes, a time shall come when man shall acknowledge no other law but the great book of nature; this revelation shall be the work of Secret Societies and that is one of our grand mysteries. ...²⁵

Weishaupt eschewed the notion of seizing existing political structures, something truly exceptional for most revolutionists; men had to be re-made, as the stonemason shaped rock into a thing of harmony, beauty and perfection. "The

grand art of rendering any revolution," he wrote, "whatsoever certain is to enlighten the people – and to enlighten them is, insensibly to turn the public opinion to the adoption of those changes which are the given objects of the intended revolution. ..." Illuminists at all grades were to apply themselves "to acquiring of interior and exterior perfection", a perfection which would, through the works of the Order, illuminate the entire world with reason and good deeds.

Such ideas and activities were prohibited not only in Bavaria but throughout most of Europe. The circulation of books and tracts was still regulated in a number of countries,²⁶ and the heavy hand of Jesuit intrigue remained, despite official disbandings of the Society in 1773. The Order did its work in secret, constantly fearing exposure to civil authority and the clergy. Indeed, at the lower level of the minerval academies, the order postured itself as having no interest in politics or religion per se, and concerned only with altruistic deeds based on the life of Jesus Christ!

Weishaupt's Order grew slowly, reaching a membership of 200-300, when the Marquis d'Costanza, acting as an insinuator, recruited Baron Adolph von Knigge in 1778. Knigge (1752-1796) was a noted German playwright and novelist, who had translated Mozart's *Magic Flute*, an opera abundant with masonic allegory and symbolism.²⁷

Knigge was already a member of the masonic sect known as the Rite of Strict Observance, formed originally to combat the mystical and occult tendencies within Freemasonry. Despite his interest in occultism as a hobby, however, Knigge was an Atheist.²⁸

Following the Illuminist practice of adopting classical pseudonyms, Knigge was known henceforth as 'Philo'. Weishaupt had chosen the name of 'Spartacus', after the Thracian-Roman slave who led a series of slave rebellions in 73-71 b.c., before falling to the imperial armies of Crassus. It was Baron Knigge who helped graft on to the Illuminati much of the ritual of Freemasonry but Weishaupt had dabbled in masonry several years before forming his Order, and considered it of little use in furthering his own purposes. It was Baron Xaverius von Zwack ('Cato'), a member of the Areopagites, or ruling council of Illuminism, who had begun the process of recruiting minervals from within masonic lodges. As a result of this, along with the tireless efforts of Knigge, the Order swelled in size to over 2,000 and extended throughout much of Europe. Each country had a national director who presided over a network of inspectors; they in turn carried on the business of the Order with the help of provincial aides, working down to the city level and minerval academy level.

Membership in the Order included some of the major figures of the German Enlightenment. Christopher Nicolai, a German Atheist, writer, critic and bookseller (1733-1811) was Master of the Berlin lodge. He co-founded the critical journal *Bibliothek der Shonen Wissenschaften und Freien Kunste*, and collaborated in numerous literary reviews. Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), German philosopher, Atheist and composer was an Illuminist, as was Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1823), German philosopher, writer and privy councilor. Goethe is best known, perhaps, as the creator of Faust, which some have speculated to be an Illuminist allegory.

At the zenith of its power and influence, the Order had perhaps as many as 3,000

members. The lodge at Munich, along with six other circles throughout Bavaria, boasted some 600 members in minerval and advanced degrees.

Illuminist organizations existed in Poland, Holland, England and France, often working within the masonic lodges which had become "illuminized" during the Congress of Wilhelmsbad in 1782.²⁹

The inevitable stresses of operating such a society, with the constant threat of banishment and public exposure, along with Weishaupt's own predilection for secrecy and organizational detail, all took their devastating toil. As the order grew in numbers, so did the possibility of factionalism, inter-organizational strife and betrayal. The Order, so dedicated to the perfection of mankind, soon found itself immersed in the travails of bureaucracy and the imperfections of present-day human nature. Spartacus-Weishaupt wrote to Cato in August, 1783:

I am deprived of help. Socrates, who would insist on having a position of trust amongst us, and is really a man of talent, of the right way of thinking, is certainly drunk. Augustus' reputation could not be worse. Alcibiades does nothing but sit all day long with the vintner's pretty wife and spends his whole time in sighing and pinning with love. ... Tiberius attempted to ravish the wife of Democides, and her husband took them in the act. ...

So disillusioned with his undertaking at times was Weishaupt that he wrote, in anticipation of the arrival of a prominent candidate for membership in the Order, that the minerval would balk at joining a society of "dissolute, immoral wretches, whoremasters, liars, bankrupts, braggarts and vain fools...." ³⁰

Seized correspondence of the Illuminati, exhibited by Barruel, indicates that a growing portion of Weishaupt's activity was expended in maintaining a semblance of control of some of the freewheeling Illuminists. In one letter, Spartacus told a provincial lodge director that a "worthy Brother of the highest rank in the Order" has stolen jewelry from another member. Would the director implore the Brother to return his loot to its rightful owner? Despite his goal to "fit man by illumination for active virtue", even Weishaupt was caught up in the tragi-comedy; "I am in danger of losing at once my honour and reputation", he wrote, "by which I have had long such influence", and revealed that he had gotten his sister-in-law pregnant. Attempts to secure abortion failed, and Weishaupt was forced to consummate the cuckholding-marriage following the birth of a son.

Added to this were the problems inherent from the Congress of Wilhelmsbad; despite gains made there in recruiting new members (such as Knigge), the victory in Illuminizing so much of Freemasonry was by no means total. Illuminist propaganda against the church had been traced to Lodge Theodore, which was dominated by the Order. The Bavarian elector directed that inquiries be made and the lodge was ordered dissolved. The closing of other lodges was soon ordered, as it became obvious to investigators that there was a conspiracy afoot against state and church; the inevitable quislings within the Illuminati soon appeared. Other factions of Masonry such as the Rosicrucians used this opportunity as well, and some Illuminists countered by theorizing that Jesuits were behind the plot to disband the Order.³¹ Worse yet was the growing animosity between Weishaupt and

Knigge; Philo labeled Spartacus a tyrant, while the embattled Weishaupt condemned his former associate for his growing obsession with occultism and ritual. The ultimate defection of Knigge helped seal the fate of the Order of the Illuminati. Disillusioned by the course of events, four university professors in the lower degrees of the Order disclosed their secret knowledge to the elector, charging that the sect posed a threat to Christianity, condoned epicurean pleasure, justified suicide,³² and taught that "the end justified the means" if it served a noble cause. In 1785, with police raids, public trials and banishments, the Order was abolished.

Weishaupt was dismissed from his post at the University of Ingolstadt and was given a pension of some 40 pounds, which he refused. He then journeyed to Regensburg, where he began a pamphlet war with his *Apologie der Illuminaten* as a defense of the Order. He subsequently found refuge in the estate of the Count of Saxe-Gotha, Ernest, a member of the Illuminati. Weishaupt later became a professor at the University of Gottingen, where he published critical works on Kantian philosophy. He died there in 1830, his marvelous Order disbanded, and the world little closer to the illuminated heights which he had sought for it. In his defense, Weishaupt wrote:

I have contrived an explanation [of Freemasonry] which has every advantage, is inviting to Christians of every communion, gradually frees them from all religious prejudices, cultivates the social virtues, and animates them by a great, a feasible, and a speedy prospect of universal happiness, in a state of liberty and moral equality, freed from the obstacles which subordination, rank and riches continually throw in our way. My explanation is accurate and complete; my means are effectual and irresistible. Our secret association works in a way that nothing can withstand, and man shall soon be free and happy....

To fit man by Illumination for active virtue, to engage him to it by the strongest motives, to render the attainment of it easy and certain ... this indeed will be employment suited to noble natures, grand in its views, and delightful in its exercise....

And what is the general object? THE HAPPINESS OF THE HUMAN RACE.... When we see the wicked so powerful and the good so weak, and that it is in vain to strive singly and alone against the general current of vice and oppression, the wish naturally arises in the mind that if it were possible to form a durable combination of the most worthy persons, who should work together in removing the obstacles to human happiness... and by fettering lessen vice; means which at the same time should promote virtue, by rendering the inclination to rectitude, hitherto so feeble, more powerful and engaging. Would not such an association be a blessing to the world?

One writer has posed the question of whether the Order of the Illuminati was any better than the world it sought to reform? Would the order, had it succeeded, been a blessing or a curse? And we are still today left with the question of why Illuminism failed in its enterprise.

Government and clerical harassment, the denial of fundamental rights of freedom

of speech and press – these obviously were responsible, in large part, for the death of the sublime Order, Repression and intolerance necessitate an infectious secrecy which cannot help but contaminate those whom it touches. The task of promoting ideas soon became bogged down in the mire of conspiracy, degrees of revelation, secrets and mysteries, despite the lofty goals and vision. The genius of Adam Weishaupt was no exception in this case.

Most who have written of the Illuminati have had little, if any, good sentiments regarding the Order. They have called Weishaupt a knave, a despot, abortionist, heretic, demagogue, and traitor to his friends. We know from his correspondence, however, that he was a man vitally concerned with social justice, the struggle against political tyranny, and the Atheist ideal. We know also that despite his personal shortcomings, he sought fervently "the happiness of the human race." Indeed, perhaps some day the Order of the Illuminati will be seen as a "blessing to the world."

Part III - Aftermath

The disbanding of the Order of the Illuminati by the Bavarian Elector failed to dissipate the festering rumors of the sect's influence and size. Within certain segments of the state and church, it was thought that the Order had burrowed still further underground, and was at work throughout the continent under many different guises. Barruel's lengthy polemic against Jacobinism and Illuminism went into print in England a full thirteen years later, in 1798. A similar work by the English royalist John Robison, titled *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All Religions and Governments of Europe*, was published in Britain and New York that same year. Both authors claimed that Illuminism had survived the persecution in Bavaria, although the Abbe Barruel considered Illuminism to be a manifestation of a far greater Atheistic evil, namely Jacobinism. The Jacobins were one of the most radical, anti-clerical and at times despotic factions during the French Revolution of 1789; ironically, they adopted their name from a dominican order of priests, whose seized monestary served as the jacobin meeting place.

Other elements within Freemasonry also capitalized on the exposure of the Illuminists. The Rosicrucians, active within the masonic lodges of Prussia, warned their fellow Masons of the Atheistic and revolutionary doctrines of the Illuminati. Robison himself was a Freemason who considered Illuminism to be a perversion of the craft; history does not record whether or not he was a Rosicrucian, although Robison does not explain the widespread popularity of Illuminist ideas within so much of continental masonry.

Nevertheless, the exposure of the Illuminati created "enormous confusion...about the whole world of Masonry, secret societies and sects."³³ The myth of Illuminist invincibility (something which the crafty Weishaupt had worked hard to create!) was nurtured by rumors that the Order survived in the German Union, created by Carl Frederick Bahrdt (1741-1792). Bahrdt was a militant Atheist who had suffered on account of his anti-clerical satires; he founded the Union with other Atheists as a reading society dedicated to the circulation of Enlightenment works. Ironically, it

was the Illuminist Areopagite, Bode, who thought the idea of such a group to be foolhardy. No firm historical evidence links the Order of the Illuminati to the German Union; if anything, the Order survived only as ideas, rather than a working organization.

Such ruminations, however, ignited panic in the New World following the French Revolution, as official religion and puritan institutions in America were in decline. The early American colonies had all of the trappings of feudal theocracies; each colony had, in effect, an established and tax-funded church of the Christian religion.³⁴ In Virginia, there were laws which provided the death penalty for speaking against the divinity or tenets of the Christian faith. Delaware prohibited anyone who was not a believer in "Trinitarian Christianity" from holding a public office. South Carolina officially declared "the Christian protestant" form of superstition to be "the established religion of the State", adding: "That God is publicly to be worshipped" and "That the Christian Religion is the true religion."³⁵

The founding fathers with their deistic persuasions no doubt looked with disfavor on the constant feuding within assorted Christian sects, each of which sought hegemony over the others. One can also find that these prominent deists and skeptics were often Freemasons, among them Franklin, Washington and Jefferson.

Revolutionary America was a period of official disestablishment of the assorted state religions.³⁶ Virginia enacted a Declaration of Rights on June 12, 1776, which provided for "free exercise of religion", and not favoring any one religious sect. That same year, religions were disestablished in Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania; in 1777, New York, Georgia and North Carolina followed suit. Local and state laws against theatre were repealed, along with censorship laws as well – all to the consternation of ministers throughout the country.³⁷

All of this—the collapse of traditional puritan institutions, and the disestablishment of religious bodies – created a wide-spread neurosis and anxiety throughout religious groups. Worse still for the churches, out of some 4 million persons living in America in 1790, religious groups could claim only about 5% on their scanty membership rolls. Staunch clergymen chose every conceivable theme and incident to exploit in the quest for new followers; the discord of the times, along with the deteriorating condition of America's relations with France, were no exception. John Adams had declared May 9, 1798 to be a day of fasting and prayer, "to implore Heaven's mercy and benediction on the imperiled nation..."³⁸ It was on this day that the Illuminati hysteria in the New World began.

One of the many ministers who preached to their congregations that day was Rev. Jedediah Morse of Boston. He was known as a fiery orator, geographer and even an early supporter of the revolution in France. His enthusiasm for the revolution waned, however, with the "astonishing increase in irreligion" precipitated by The Terror, and the subsequent rise of brazen Atheism. Morse warned his North Church Street audience that similar forces were at work in America. Historian Vernon Stauffer observed:

If, said Morse, a contributory cause for the present "hazardous and afflictive position" of the country is sought, it will readily be found in "the astonishing increase of irreligion". The evidence of this, in turn, is to be found, not only in the prevailing atheism and materialism of the day, and all the vicious fruits which such impious sentiments have borne, but as well as the slanders with which newspapers

are filled and the personal invective and abuse with which private discussion is laden, all directed against the representatives of government, against man, many of whom have grown gray in their country's service and whose integrity has been proved incorruptible. It is likewise to be discovered in the reviling and abuse which, coming from the same quarter, has been directed against the clergy, who, according to their influence and ability, have done what they could to support and vindicate the government....

When the question is raised respecting the design and tendency of these things, their inherent and appalling impiety is immediately disclosed. They "give reason to suspect that there is some secret plan in operation, hostile to true liberty and religion, which requires to be aided by these vile slanders"....³⁹

Morse maintained that such a master plan did exist, the fruition of which had already been achieved in France, and was being put into action throughout the rest of Europe and America as well. Conjuring John Robison, Morse went on to warn that during the past two decades, a sect calling themselves "The Illuminated" had plotted against thrones and altars everywhere, and had established itself in the United States. Jacobinism, the hidden "manifestation of the Illuminati" was at work"⁴⁰, and Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* was regarded as part of a general plan to accomplish "demoralization of the people".

Morse was careful not to mention Freemasonry as part of his plot; in this respect, he had followed Robison's lead, maintaining that Illuminism had been grafted onto the craft, and represented a corruption of masonic doctrine. Morse's sermon, along with the circulation of Barruel's *Memoirs* and Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy* soon created widespread alarm throughout New England. Such conspiracy theories were sufficiently vague yet tantalizing to explain, to the superficial and the uninformed, many of the events taking place in the land. There indeed was a spirit of irreligion loose in the country, and the old puritan institutions were crumbling. The ideas of the Enlightenment were being realized here on a number of levels, including political rights as well as the dedication to material progress; but all of this was due to a number of complex historical and economic forces, not the midnight plots of small bands of intriguers.⁴¹

The public debate which followed Morse's revelations in countless New England journals such as the *Independent Chronical* and the *Massachusetts Mercury*, failed to produce any evidence that Illuminism had survived the persecution of the Bavarian authorities and lived to organize lodges in the New World. The letters and exchanges debated Robison's book in particular with razor-tongued ferocity; and as a consequence, more heat than light was cast on the entire question. No lodges were uncovered, no names revealed.

Thomas Jefferson, who would later stand accused of being part of a non-existent Illuminist conspiracy in the New World, had read Barruel's scurrilous work about the order. Like many, even he accepted part of Weishaupt's rationale in defense of Illuminism found in the chief's *Aopologie der Illuminaten*. In a letter to Bishop Madison in January, 1800, Jefferson wrote:

I have lately by accident got a sight of a single volume (the 3d) of the Abbe Barruel's *Antisocial Conspiracy*, which gives me the first idea I have ever had of

what is meant by the Illuminatism against which *Illuminate Morse*, as he is now called, and his ecclesiastical associates have been making such a hue and cry. Barruel's own parts of the book are perfectly the ravings of a Bedlamite. But he quotes largely from Wishaupt [sic] whom he considers as the founder of what he calls the order. As you may not have had an opportunity as forming a judgment of this cry of 'mad dogs' which has been raised against his doctrines, I will give you the idea I have formed from only an hour's reading of Barruel's quotations from him, which, you may be sure, are not the most favorable. Wishaupt seems to be an enthusiastic philanthropist. He is among those (as you know the excellent Price and Priestley also are) who believes in the infinite perfectability of man. He thinks he may in time be rendered so perfect that he will be able to govern himself in every circumstance, so as to injure none, to do all the good he can, to leave government no occasion to exercise their powers over him, and, of course, to render political government useless. This, you know, is Godwin's doctrine, and that is what Robinson [sic], Barruel, and Morse had called a conspiracy against all government...." ⁴²

Not surprisingly, certain Catholic writers blamed the "virus" of Preemasonry for nearly every political assassination, revolution and war of the nineteenth century. ⁴³ Their "evidence" for such a claim is a potpourri of facts and myths; particularly in the eyes of the Vatican, the agents of Masonry were to be found everywhere doing their diabolical dirty work.

No sooner had the Illuminati hysteria died down than a new wave of paranoia over Masonry swept the country. An anti-masonic movement emerged during the early to mid-1800s on several occasions, one of which even ran candidates for public office.

Illuminism's spectre rose again in the early 1900s with the writings of Nesta Webster, a writer who enjoyed considerable popularity in Tory circles in Britain. Her voluminous outpourings warned of plots, secret societies, Illuminists and Masons, all of whom were determined to bring down the edifices of state and church. By now, the legend of the Illuminati was more powerful than truth; Webster, writing in *The Nineteenth Century*, quoted Vernon Stauffer's work claiming that "As early as 1786, a Lodge of the Order had been started in Virginia, and this was followed by fourteen others in different cities ... no, Illuminism is not dead. ⁴⁴ In fact, Stauffer had debunked such rumors and mythologies; Webster had quoted as established fact something which Stauffer reported as unsubstantiated rumor. Stauffer analyzed the Illuminist hysteria in terms not only of the decay of puritan institutions, but in the intrigues of Federalist vs. anti-Federalist politics. For Webster, however, Jews, Cabalists, Freemasons, Anarchists, Illuminists, occultists and heretics of all varieties were linked in a grand conspiracy running back through history to establish what some imaginatively termed an "Occult Theocracy".

The ubiquitous paranoia about Freemasonry, along with the voracious gullability of Catholics, proved fertile ground for one of the greatest literary hoaxes of all time, designed by an Atheist-satirist known as Leo Taxil. Born Gabriel Antoine Jogand-Pages (1854-1907), he was educated by the Jesuits, but soon became a militant Atheist and anti-clerical propagandist. He authored a variety of anti-religious skits and satires beginning when he was 25 including *A Humorous Bible*, *The Skullcap*

and its Wearers, and *A Humorous Gospel, or the Life of Jesus*. He was particularly adept at ridiculing the sleazy lifestyles of the decadent popes, along with sacred doctrine and religious taboo. He served as secretary of the Anti-Clerical League in France, which boasted some 15,000 members, and edited the society's newspaper, *Anti-Clericale*. Earlier, he had published *La Marotte* (Fool's Bauble), an Atheist journal of humor and insult, and in 1880 founded a Society of Freethinkers. (Accounts vary, but his society may have either merged with or been renamed the Anti-Clerical League.)

One of Taxil's collaborators was another Atheist, a Dr. Karl Hacks, who wrote under the pseudonym Bataille. In 1892, the two began issuing a serial publication known for its infamous title, *The Devil in the Nineteenth Century*, a satirical expose of Freemasonry and Satanism. The work began by referring to Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Humanum Genus*, wherein the holy father divided all of humanity into two warring camps – those who worship the one, true Christian god, and those who serve Lucifer. (After the hoax had been exposed, Hacks remarked that no sooner had he and Taxil read Leo's encyclical than he perceived "a rare opportunity to coin money out of the mass credulity and boundless stupidity of the Catholics ...") From this inspiration was born *The Devil*, Taxil and Hacks set to work; "sometimes I fabricated the most incredible stories", wrote Taxil, "as, for example, that of a serpent inditing prophecies with its tail..."

The Devil in the Nineteenth Century is truly a collection of outrageous, unsupported and amusing tales; the gist of the story involves progressive revelations about Freemasons and other secret societies and their drive to establish some kind of Luciferian theocracy on earth (one strangely resembling the City of God, but with a different twist!)

All of this was set against the background of "the most comical episode of his (Taxil's) strange career", a supposed return to the fold of the church. While writing a book on the life of Joan of Arc, designed to incite animosity amongst the clergy, Taxil was (so the story goes) overwhelmed by returned sentiments of religiosity. "I burst into sobs", revealed Taxil in his comical *Confession*. "Pardon me, oh God!, I cried out in a voice choked with tears. Pardon my many blasphemies! Pardon all the evil I have wrought! I passed the night in prayer, and resolved on the next day to seek absolution for my sins.... " ⁴⁵ Taxil immediately withdrew from public Atheistic activities, resigning at a meeting of the Anti-Clerical League. Accounts suggest that few of his Atheist cohorts believed in Taxil's born-again religiosity, "yet every one was puzzled to understand the strategic purpose of this retrograde movement...." Some cried "Ha! You can't fool us! You've been paid by the Vatican! How much, eh?"

Taxil immediately set to work in writing the first segment of his sham-expose, his *Complete Revelations*, overflowing with imaginary and gruesome tales of devil worship, debauchery and sacrilegious rites. The Catholic press, taken in, greeted the smirking Taxil and his revelations with exultations, boasting that the works

"combined positive and irrefutable proofs of the diabolical character of the Masonic mysteries". By 1887, Taxil had conned his way into a private audience with Leo XIII, who informed Jorgand that he was an avid reader of the Revelations.. ..and Taxil left the Vatican with a papal benediction as well as "the conclusion that he could imagine nothing so absurd that it would not be received in Catholic circles as authentic and indorsed by infallible authority...." ⁴⁶

Catholic presses continued to grind out Taxil's fantastic literature for the church-going gullible when he and Bataille-Hacks began publication of *The Devil in the Nineteenth Century*. This literary fantasy told the story of Albert Pike, a Grand Master of Freemasonry residing in Charleston, South Carolina, whom the book called "the satanic pope". The real Pike was a colorful and controversial figure in the history of the craft. Pike served as a general in the Confederate Army during the Civil War; after mustering out, he developed an interest in Masonry and ancient languages (it was reported he was fluent in some two dozen tongues, many of them considered "dead languages"). He rose within Freemasonry to become grand commander of the Scottish Rite, and head of the Southern Jurisdiction in the United States.

Taxil and Bataille named Albert Pike as head of a mysterious Luciferian conspiracy known as the New Paladian Rite, headquartered in Charleston, S.C. with affiliated temples in Washington, Rome, Montevideo, Naples and Calcutta. Taxil also fantasized a device (years before the invention of radio) where Pike could communicate with his masonic stooges throughout the world at the touch of a button; the satanic pope even had a bracelet to summon Lucifer for consultation at any time. ⁴⁷ "One day Satan took Pike gently in his arms and made a trip with him to Sirius", wrote Taxil, "traversing the whole distance in a few minutes. After exploring the fixed star, he was brought back safe and sound to his room in Washington...."

The Devil also told of a labyrinth of underground laboratories beneath the cliffs of Gibraltar, staffed by mischievous demons under the leadership of one Tubal-Cain. Here, Satan's chemists worked around the clock concocting flus and epidemics to be spread amongst Christians everywhere. (Tubal-Cain, by the way, reportedly spoke fluent French.) And more fantasy: in the town of Freiburg, Switzerland was to be found a Masonic temple hewn out of rock for use during the satanic mass. Naked men and women engaged in irreligious and erotic outrages, including stabbing holy wafers which had been stolen by Jews from Catholic churches.

The spicy comedy was not complete, however, without one Miss Diana Vaughn, whom Taxil presented to society as a descendant of the Rosicrucian alchemist Thomas Vaughn. ⁴⁸ The lady claimed to possess a signed contract between her famous ancestor and Satan himself, dated March 25, 1625. Miss Vaughn was supposedly born in Paris on February 29, 1874 – a most ingenious feat, considering that in that particular year there was no February 29. Having been raised on strictly Luciferian principles, she purportedly one day expressed doubt to her satanic mentors as to the worthiness of Cain and Abel as paragons of diabolical virtue. It was quickly ascertained that the youngster was possessed by the Christian angel Raphael, and in need of immediate exorcism, lest she fall prey to the one, true god. Exorcism was performed, "the whole process of which, as described by

Taxil ... a clever travesty of the ceremonial prescribed by the Romish church for the expulsion of evil spirits...." In any case, the ritual was a success and "Raphael" was driven out.

Few, if any within official Catholicism, grasped the humor in Taxil's devastating parody on Leo's "Exorcismus in Satanam et Angelos Spostatas", issued by the pope in 1890.

Her body restored to health, Miss Vaughn was placed in the care of Asmodeus, one of the major satanic functionaries. The demon sometimes approached her in the form of a handsome suitor emitting the strong aroma of balsam. He escorted her on pleasure trips and short jaunts to purgatory, even whisking her to the planet Mars where the two visited Schiaparelli's canals and strolled amongst the pygmie inhabitants of the Red Planet.

Throughout this entire episode, Catholics everywhere gorged themselves with such incredulous fabrications, all spun by the poker-faced Taxil and his collaborator, Dr. Bataille. The Catholic journal *The Month*⁴⁹ wrote glowingly of Taxil's conversion to the church and his subsequent revelations about Masonry, noting that "an instance of conversion as that of Leo Taxil ought to at least encourage us to hope that there may be many such."

In fact, Taxil had fooled all Christendom: "My colleagues were aghast and exclaimed 'You'll spoil the whole joke with your nonsense!' 'Bah', I replied, let me be and you will see!"

Taxil promoted his *Complete Revelations* and *The Devil* until 1897, when public pressure demanded the persona of Miss Diana Vaughn, the reformed Luciferian. Taxil called a press conference on April 19; mounting the platform before the assembled reporters and observers, he confessed his ruse to a bewildered public – "After thanking the clergy for their aid in carrying out his scheme and attributing their cooperation chiefly to ignorance and imbecility, he escaped amidst much confusion."⁵⁰

Yet this revelation – that Taxil the Convert was, in reality, the same old Taxil, who had hoaxed and satired religion before – did not serve to convince all true believers. One Catholic writer maintained that the man who called the press conference was really an impostor, and that Masons had kidnapped the real Taxil. Still another insisted that Diana Vaughn failed to appear because Freemasons had bribed Taxil into placing her in a lunatic asylum. *The Pelican*, another Catholic magazine, still supported Taxil's revelations about devil-worship and Masonry, insisting that Freemasons, Jews, Luciferians and their comrades carried out many of the atrocities described by Taxil and Bataille. It was further asserted that in

July 1897, Jews absconded with consecrated wafers from a church in Silesia, whereupon the plot was uncovered by a Polish nobleman.

Thus ended one of the great literary hoaxes in history, a battle of pen and wits which the church clearly lost. Taxil returned to the anti-clerical movement, being recorded in the Catholic Encyclopedia as "one of the most notorious religious hoaxers of the nineteenth century."

The linkage of Freemasonry with the most bizarre rituals and practices, at least in the Christian imagination, was cemented still further by yet another spurious collection of writings known as the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. The *Protocols* are taunted as a masterplan hatched at a secret meeting of Zionists in 1897, held in Berne, Switzerland. Depending on whose account one reads, the meeting was run by Jews, Masons, Luciferians, the Illuminati, international bankers, or other un-touchable types. With the intent of bringing about the decay of Christian civilization, the *Protocols* pledge:

...to corrupt the young generation by subversive education, dominate people through their vices, destroy family life, undermine respect for religion, encourage luxury, amuse people to prevent them from thinking, poison the spirit by destructive theories, weaken human bodies by inoculation with microbes, foment international hatred and prepare for universal bankruptcy and concentration of gold in the hands of the Jews."⁵¹

Since their inception, the *Protocols* have been incendiary fuel for everyone from Nazis to fundamentalist Christians. Hitler mentions the *Protocols* in *Mein Kampf*, maintaining the existence of a Jewish plot against Christianity, in league with Freemasonry.

The *Protocols* are actually a plagiarism of an early tract called *Dialogues in the Underworld Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*, penned in 1865 by Maurice Jouly as a satire on Napoleon III. The evolution of these *Dialogues* into the *Protocols*, with appropriate additions and rewritings is less important here than is the fact that they are, like Taxil's creations, historical forgeries.

Given human credulity, it is not surprising that the mythology of the *Protocols*, the revelations of Taxil-Bataille, the fantasies of Barruel and Robison, and other assorted tales about Masonry and Illuminism persist to this very day. Little objective, scholarly work has been done, in this century, on the Illuminists, although there are over 10,000 pieces on Freemasonry. Taxil's satire is still taken seriously by segments of the Christian community such as the Cinema Educational Guild and the Christian Defense League; several popular books in right-wing circles still repeat the more bizarre tales of *The Devil in the Nineteenth Century*, and claim to link the defunct Order of the Illuminati to events today. More than two centuries after the founding of the Order, there is more fiction than fact to represent its philosophy, its accomplishments, its aspirations and its demise.

Epilogue

What then can we say of Illuminism and Freemasonry from the Atheist perspective? Certainly, it was in Freemasonry that much of the Atheism and deism of the Enlightenment was nurtured. The metaphors of creating new edifices from raw, unfinished stone, of Grafting and transforming the world to create new structures were themes which intertwined with the whole spirit of the Enlightenment. Ironically, it was when this philosophy was kept most secret and subjugated to the most conspiratorial organizational forms, that it failed. Despite Weishaupt's carefully laid plans, the Order of the Illuminati did not and could not succeed.

In a period of almost total church seizure of all political, economic and cultural institutions. Atheism was sheltered in countless lodge and sect meetings. Today, Masonry (particularly in the United States) has decayed to the status of a social club, ⁵² having lost its revolutionary character, becoming a symbol of the bourgeoisie. It is somewhat more radical in Europe, especially in France, where the Grand Orient readily admits Atheists into masonic membership. The Vatican, in March, 1981, resurrected the entire question of Freemasonry when it again warned Catholics that they risk excommunication for joining lodges. Not surprisingly, the statement was issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, formerly the Holy Office, and known before that as the Inquisition. The papacy thus upheld the condemnation of eight popes in the church's struggle against Freemasonry, who condemned the craft in over 400 Bulls and other documents. All seem to echo the charge of Leo XIII that Masonry was aiming at "the overthrow of the whole religious, political and social order based on Christian institutions, and the establishment of a state of things based on pure naturalism...." The conservative and far right factions within the church, led by renegade Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, claim that some prelates within the church are secretly members of the craft.

The role of groups such as the Illuminati during the Enlightenment has often received only footnoted mention or passing reference in historical writings on the period. Albert Soboul in *The French Revolution, 1787-1799* mentions the lodges only in passing, but claims that "the really significant feature of the masonic movement in France at this time was that it had no ideological unity and no revolutionary fervour ..." ⁵³ A thorough account of masonic involvement with Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment history has yet to be written.

James Billington, in *Fire in the Minds of Men* devotes more space than any other contemporary historian to Masonry and Illuminism and their role in revolutionary politics. Unfortunately, the most seminal segments are in a chapter titled "The Occult Origins of Organization". His bibliography for this section is indispensable in serving at least as a starting point in tracing the roots of Atheist thought through the lodges and sects of the time.

While a number of right-wing Christian groups continue to sound the alarm against imaginary Illuminists, some primary source material on the Order has been reprinted. Vernon Stauffer's *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati* was originally

published in 1918, but was re-issued in 1967. In 1969, Culture et Civilisation, a publishing house in Brussels reprinted from the original Adam Weishaupt's analysis of Kantian philosophy. The same year Laforestier's exhaustive history of the Order, *Les Illumines de Baviere et la Franc-Maconnerie allemande* was reprinted in Switzerland by Slatkine, Inc., complete with original charts and illustrations.

Historical indexes and abstracts reveal pathetically little about the Illuminati. There are no English-language biographies on Weishaupt, Nicoli, Knigge or other leading Illuminists; somewhat revealing but at times speculative accounts of the Order can be found in John Lepper's *Famous Secret Societies and Mythology of Secret Societies* by J.M. Roberts. One must often turn to the writings of the Christian-royalist Nesta Webster, including her *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements*, reprinted from a 1924 edition in 1967 by the Christian Book Club. Her July, 1920 article titled "Illuminism and the World Revoution", which appeared in *The Nineteenth Century* is a distillation of the Order's history, mixed generously with misinformation and prejudice.

Four copies of the English translation of Barruel's *Memoirs* are known to exist and circulate in public libraries in the United States on the Inter-library Loan System. Unfortunately, reading these volumes is a wearisome chore, not only due to the antiquated typographical style of the period, but also to the Abbe's constant rantings against the "sophisters of Impiety and Anarchy". Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy* was reprinted by the John Birch Society in 1967, when the group began the rather imaginative task of linking Illuminism with something it terms the "insiders", a group of behind-the-scenes types responsible for everything from Communism to the common cold.

Thomas Paine's *History of Freemasonry* is not generally available, although a copy is known to exist in the Rare Book Collection at the Library of Congress. This work was originally printed by Nicholas Bonneville.

The Atheist scholar and propagandist Joseph McCabe also wrote *A History of Freemasonry*, issued as number B790 in the Haldeman-Julius series, and published in 1949. McCabe deals chiefly with the papal condemnations of Masonry, but neglects the subject of Illuminism; his essay is more a polemic against Catholic censure of the lodges and less a detailed study of their history. For Atheists, the history of Freemasonry must be rediscovered.

Concerning the Order of the Illuminati – that is a historical backwater eddy few have bothered to thoroughly explore. Nevertheless, its roots in Atheistic tradition deserve and demand a more impartial and exhaustive inquiry than history has given it.

References

¹ The best work today on Masonry and kindred sects during this time is James Billington's *Fire in the Minds of Men* (New York: Basic Books, 1980). Special attention is devoted to secret societies in Chapter 4.

² A concise summation of masonic origins is found in Norman MacKenzie's *Secret Societies*, published in 1967, Chapter 7. For the more ambitious, see *A New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, by the mystic-mason A..E. Waite (New York: Weathervane Books, 1970).

³ Alchemy is one of the best examples of what we could term "pre-science". See *Alchemy: Ancient and Modern* by H. Stanley Redgrove (New York: University Books, 1969).

⁴ See Nesta H. Webster *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements*, originally published in 1924, but reprinted in 1967 by the Christian Book Club of America, Hawthorne, California (p. 150). Webster was a rabid royalist and a religionist, who sought to connect Masonry and Illuminism with a pernicious jewish plot.

⁵ Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*, Chapter 4.

⁶ A.E. Waite's *Encyclopedia* is a rich source for appreciating these multitudinous sects and lodges.

⁷ See Charles Mackay, LL.D., *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, originally published in 1841, but reprinted in 1980 by Bonanza Books, New York. Mackay has sections dealing with assorted heretics and occultists, including the Rosicrucians; his work is a skillfull expose of sham, pseudo-science and charlantanism, spanning the whole of human folly and gullability.

⁸ Refer to *Freemasonry and the Anti-Christian Movement* by Rev. E. Cahill, S.J. (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son Limited, 1959). Another source concerning the church pronunciations about Freemasonry, as well as attempts to link the craft with "devil worship" is found in *Minor Historical Writings*, Dr. Henry Charles Lea (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942).

⁹ Henry Steele Commager, *The Empire of Reason* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977). Commager's thesis is supported by one of the best bibliographies of material dealing with the New World and Enlightenment, although not specifically in the context of Freemasonry.

¹⁰ Re: Mackenzie, *Secret Societies*.

¹¹ Re: Waite, *New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, Vol. I, pp. 70-71.

¹² Re: Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*.

¹³ Dr. Madalyn Murray O'Hair, *Freedom Under Siege* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1974). This work is an excellent collection of facts about religion in early America, along with separationist opinions held by the founding fathers.

¹⁴ See Jefferson's letter to Bishop Madison, January, 1800, noted in the *Jefferson Cyclopedia*

¹⁵ Billington, p. 56.

¹⁶ See E.J. Hobsbawn, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (New York: New American Library, 1962). This is one of the best economic histories of the period, with considerable mention of Freemasonry. Hobsbawn is a vital tool for understanding the economic underpinnings of the Enlightenment, and in learning about the transition throughout Europe from feudalism toward early industrial capitalism.

¹⁷ See George Woodcock, *Anarchism* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1967). Also, see Michael Bakunin's monumental essay *God and the State*, reprinted in 1970 by Dover Publications, New York.

¹⁸ Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967). This edition is a reprint of the 1918 printing. Stauffer deals mainly with the Illuminati-hysteria in America, yet his third chapter, dealing with the Order in Europe, is important source material.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ R. LeForestier, *Les illumines de Baviere et la Franc-Maconnerie allemonde* (Paris, 1915). Reprinted in 1968 by Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, Switzerland.

²¹ For a concise history of the University of Ingolstadt, see the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* entry under University of Munich. Weishaupt and his Order are given a passing mention. It is also noted that during World War II, the University suffered heavily from bombing raids which destroyed nearly 70% of its buildings "including the library with a large part of its bound volumes, manuscripts and rare book collections." We can only wonder if priceless materials on Illuminism and Weishaupt were lost to posterity.

²² See Billington, p. 94. Several names had been suggested for the new Order, including "Perfectabilists" and later, "The Bees". The former corresponded with Weishaupt's lofty notion of "remaking humanity" along the lines of Pythagorean perfection and the latter is rooted in masonic and early hermetic symbolism.

²³ Needless to say, the date of May 1, 1776 has caused much rumor and misinformation about the Order; some have suggested that May Day (May 1) is derived from the Illuminist founding, when in fact it is a labor day celebration of American origin. Others have incorrectly asserted that the Great Seal of the United States is an Illuminati emblem, thereby "proving" Illuminist activity during, and after the American Revolution. In fact, Illuminist symbols are displayed in LeForestier's exhaustive history (based on documents seized by Bavarian authorities from the Order) and have no resemblance to the United States Seal.

Not only have right-wing types fallen victim to this mythology, but many "new age" devotees likewise have, uncritically, accepted the Illuminist or "occult" meaning of the Great Seal. See Issue No. 41, *Gnostica* magazine, February/March 1977 for an occultist interpretation of this foolish fantasy.

²⁴ Abbe Augustin Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (London: T. Burton, 1798). Barruel's polemic is divided into three main sections, dealing with "The Antisocial Conspiracy", "The Anti-Christian Conspiracy" and the "Anti-Monarchical Conspiracy". Barruel is briefly mentioned in the New Catholic Encyclopedia under his own name, and identified as a "Jesuit polemicist".

²⁵ Barruel, vol. 3, p. 25.

²⁶ As revealed throughout Baurreul's *Memoirs*, the Order is shown to have been vitally interested in gaining the interest of bookdealers, publishers, printers and heretical writers. Weishaupt sought to strengthen the Illuminati so as to create a book production and distribution network free of the control of the church, thus providing an unheard of degree of liberty in literary circles. Carl Nicoli was important as an Illuminist in this task.

²⁷ *The Magic Flute*, not only a masterpiece of musical charm, is also a finely orchestrated example of symbolism and allegory, all of it Masonic in character. Billington speaks of Mozart's "illuminist" message, although no records list the composer as a member of the Order. He was, however, a Freemason and embraced the craft vigorously while still managing to compose over 600 works in his productive lifetime. *The Magic Flute* conveys the message that evil exists as a defiance of the natural order of things, a natural order (Nature) which is fundamentally good. Evil, then, is a creation of mans'. All in Nature is good, its misuse through avarice or lust creating the evil. *The Magic Flute* in this, Mozart's last opera, is actually the harmony and order found in the universe.

²⁸ Again, it must be emphasized that "occultism" during this era was not always distinct from what was, at the time, taken for "science". There was a considerable area of both overlap and confusion. Alchemy was still being practiced, and many

continued the futile search for the Philosopher's Stone, a mechanism to transmute materials into silver or gold. What is important in our discussion here is that much of what historians in retrospect term "occult" was *pre-scientific*, and certainly not Christian or religious. Not surprisingly, the church frowned on such interests, making them all the more appealing to many.

²⁹ The Congress was held with the goal of formalizing and standardizing the tenets and rituals of the many diverse segments of Freemasonry. In this respect, the gathering was a confusing failure; the Illuminati, however, did manage to win a large number of masonic lodges to its program (see Le-Forestier and Barruel).

³⁰ "A far cry from the invincible and totally pernicious demons conjured by many anti-Illuminist publicists! If anything, these remarks suggest that any "cause" movement, no matter how lofty its goals, must nevertheless deal with the limitations of human behavior, and be prepared to face the countless difficulties stemming from the diversity of human nature.

³¹ Fear of the Jesuits during the Enlightenment mirrored the subsequent fears of Illuminist and masonic intrigue; Barruel, for instance, lays the whole responsibility for the French Revolution at the person of the Duke D'Orleans, the Grand Orient, and the Illuminati. See Billington for a discussion of apprehension within the masonic and Illuminist movements of Jesuit infiltration.

³² Xavierus von Zwack, alias Cato, had penned letters and an essay on the subject of suicide; the right of suicide was one of the tenets of the Order, and was considered an "eternal sleep". The Order also justified and defended abortion; naturally, such notions were anathema to church doctrine, and were not discussed at this time with nearly the public acceptance they are today.

³³ See Mackenzie.

³⁴ See O'Hair.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ See Stauffer.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 229.

³⁹ See Stauffer, p. 232.

⁴⁰ Morse, Barruel and Robison all contradict each other regarding the inter-relation between Jacobinism and Illuminism, unable to say which exactly is a "manifestation" of the other. Morse warned of the Illuminist threat, while Barruel concentrated on the Order as another variant of Jacobinism.

⁴¹ See Hobsbawn.

⁴² Omitted from manuscript.

⁴³ See Cahill.

⁴⁴ See *The Nineteenth Century*, "Illuminism and the World Revolution", Nesta Webster, July, 1920. Stauffer's work on the Bavarian Illuminati appeared in 1918.

⁴⁵ In times so serious as ours, Atheists owe themselves the pleasure of a good laugh now and then. One of the best can be had while reading E.P. Evan's account in *Popular Science Monthly*, titled "A Survival of Medieval Credulity", March-April, 1900, p. 577.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ It is fascinating to see what portions of the Taxil-Bataille farce survive today, accepted by fools. The Christian Defense League offers for sale a two-cassette collection titled "History of the Illuminati" where the tales of the New Paladian Rite are given credence; so is the Taxil creation of Albert Pike using radio, although the outlandish story of the devil-summoning bracelet is not.

⁴⁸ See Mackay, p. 189.

⁴⁹ See *The Month*, published in London, Vol. LXIX, May-August 1890, article titled "Leo Taxil".

⁵⁰ See Curtis D. MacDougall, *Hoaxes* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1941) p. 100.

⁵¹ Ibid., p201.

⁵² Some lodges in Italy have even become vehicles for the establishment of authoritarian, right-wing coups. In May, 1981, the Italian government uncovered a plot with lodge "Propaganda Due" to seize control of the state. Implicated were

intelligence officers, military figures, members of parliament, bankers and "leading Italians".

⁵³ see Denis Pichet and Francois Furet, *The French Revolution* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1970).