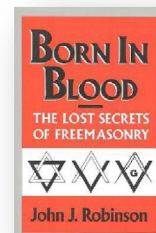


A Pilgrim's Path

By: John J. Robinson

Reviewed by Dan M. Kemble, Past Master, William O. Ware Lodge of Research

John Robinson is best known for his first book about Freemasonry: ***Born in Blood – The Lost Secrets of Freemasonry***. Although a Masonic best-seller, ***Born in Blood*** only served to reinforce the myth of Freemasonry having originated from the Knights Templar of the Middle Ages. Robinson, a successful Cincinnati businessman, was at best an amateur historian. While an entertaining tale, ***Born in Blood*** made no factual contribution to the story of Freemasonry's origin. Many Masons, unfortunately, accepted the fanciful theories found in Robinson's work as fact, and, without further exploration, added to the already distorted view of the Craft's history. ***Born in Blood***, while attracting attention to Freemasonry, further obscured its actual history.

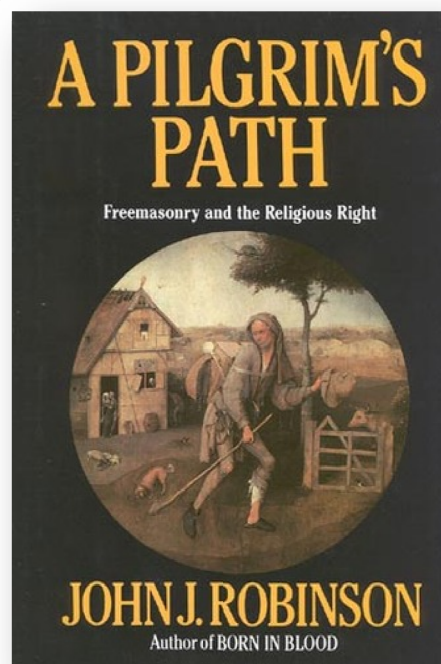


The response to ***Born in Blood***, both within and without Freemasonry, so surprised Robinson that he was motivated to write a second book about Freemasonry, ***A Pilgrim's Path***, the subject of this review. In this work, Robinson atoned for whatever deficiencies may be found to exist in ***Born in Blood***. ***A Pilgrim's Path*** is an excellent outsider's perspective of what Freemasonry is, and equally important, what it is not.

A Pilgrim's Path is divided into two sections, the first of which is by far the most important. In the first section of the book, Robinson takes dead aim at criticisms of Freemasonry by religious leaders of all stripes, but most especially fundamentalist Christians. Robinson begins by re-examining the Taxil Hoax and relating how, despite its having been exposed as a fraud over a century ago, religious demagogues still cite it as conclusive proof that Freemasonry is ultimately incompatible with religion, and, in fact, is a religion unto itself.

Robinson devotes a chapter to the writings of Albert Pike, and does a commendable job of putting Pike's words into context as they relate to both time and meaning. Pike's inclination to grandiosity has made him a popular whipping-boy for anti-Masonic zealots, and Robinson does a good job of bringing both Pike and his critics into focus.

Robinson's most effective writing is his dismantling of the claims of Pat Robertson and James Holly. Robertson used his platform as a prominent religious broadcaster, and Holly took advantage of his standing in the Southern Baptist Convention, to issue broad condemnations of Freemasonry. As Robinson clearly demonstrates, the claims of these two religious firebrands are without foundation or factual support.



Robinson also debunks the charges made by religious publisher Jack Chick, who distributed at least two cartoon-like tracts luridly claiming that Freemasonry was equivalent to witchcraft, sorcery and, ultimately, Satanism.

Robinson is equally effective in his explanation of how Freemasonry, while requiring a belief in God, is not a religion. He includes quotes from respected religious leaders who acknowledge that Freemasonry, while perhaps a friend of religion, is not a religion itself. Robinson points out that by having no specific dogma other than a belief in God, Freemasonry is able to unite men of all religions, whose goodwill towards each other is thus unconstrained.

The second section of ***A Pilgrim's Path*** is devoted to certain issues that Robinson found to be intriguing with respect to contemporary Freemasonry. One such issue is Freemasonry's preoccupation with secrecy. Robinson aptly points out that many Freemasons have taken the obligation of secrecy to such an extreme that even their closest family members are either unaware that they are Masons, or have no idea of what Freemasonry is. He correctly makes the point that in an era of shrinking membership, Freemasonry's obsession with secrecy has diminished the public's awareness of its existence.

In a chapter titled, "Don't Talk To Me About Change," Robinson again delivers a compelling outsider's perspective about the lack of cohesion among Grand Lodges, and within the Grand Lodge of individual jurisdictions. The lack of united leadership among Grand Lodges has resulted in, at best, mixed messages as to the aim and purpose of Freemasonry, and, in some instances, outright hostility between jurisdictions. Specific to individual Grand Lodges, Robinson points out that the governance structure is designed to hinder both the effective administration of the bureaucracy, as well as limiting the long-range planning necessary for implementation of strategic goals on other than a year-to-year basis.

In "A Masonic Idea File," Robinson includes a list of Masonic principles that it would be well for all Masonic Lodges to review and discuss. Nothing in his list of principles is foreign, or even new to Freemasonry, but serve as valuable reminders to the Craft as to Freemasonry's identity.

There are some troubling aspects to the second section of ***A Pilgrim's Path***. Robinson returns to the same themes about the origins of Freemasonry that he first espoused in ***Born in Blood***. This work would have been better had those themes not been included. He also inserts a chapter about Masonic charity, further entrenching the misconception that public charity is a part of Freemasonry's core mission. Since institutional Freemasonry trumpets its charitable works, it is no surprise that Robinson, a non-Mason, would echo those sentiments.

One of the more interesting aspects of ***A Pilgrim's Path*** is found at the close of the book. Robinson informed his readers that, after years of studying and writing about Freemasonry, he had decided to petition a Lodge and become a Freemason. Joining Cincinnati's Nova Caesarea Harmony Lodge No. 2, his declining health allowed him to be active only for a brief time prior to his death in 1996.

While ***A Pilgrim's Path*** is worthwhile reading material for Masons at all stages of their Masonic journey, it is an especially good book for newer Masons, or those who are contemplating becoming a

Mason. It is an especially good recommendation for those who are currently in the process of receiving the Degrees of Freemasonry, as it complements the information presented to the candidate inside the Lodge. A copy of ***A Pilgrim's Path*** should be a part of any creditable Masonic library.

A Pilgrim's Path, first published in 1993, is still in print and remains available from most online booksellers.