

LOYAL ORDER OF MOOSE

The Loyal Order of Moose was founded in 1888 in Louisville, Kentucky, by John Henry Wilson and following an initial decline in membership was re-organized in 1906 by James J. Davis.¹ Moose International (corporate name for Loyal Order of Moose and Women of the Moose²) reports an approximate membership of 1.6 million men and women. In its “Mission Statement” Moose International describes its mission as striving “for excellence in four areas”:

- (i) a fraternal program and community service within our lodge and chapter system known as the Loyal Order of Moose and the Women of the Moose;
- (ii) to provide a family environment and education for underprivileged children in residence at Mooseheart, Illinois;
- (iii) to provide for the needs of senior members at Moosehaven, Florida; and,
- (iv) to promote membership growth.³

Calling itself “a fraternal and service organization...dedicated to bettering the lives of children and elderly in need,” Moose International operates two institutions: Mooseheart and Moosehaven. Mooseheart, “The Child City,” is a home and school established to provide the care and education of Moose member families in need. It is located forty miles west of Chicago, Illinois. Moosehaven, the “City of Contentment,” is a home for dependent aged Moose men and women and their spouses and is located south of Jacksonville, Florida. These two self-contained communities, along with sick and death benefits provided to members, exemplify the loyalty of this fraternal organization to its members. In the interest of seeking new members, the organization in recent years has portrayed itself as “The Family Fraternity” that offers “fellowship and fun for members.”⁴ Social benefits (food, drinks, games, sports, etc.) and participation in civic affairs have also contributed to the lodge’s appeal.

Approximately 2/3 of the membership of the Moose Lodge remains men, who must be 21 years of age to qualify for enrollment. To be admitted into membership Moose applicants must, among other things, “be of good character” and “profess belief in a Supreme Being.”⁵ The Order permits no “social memberships” in the sense of permitting non-initiated members to be admitted into social groups or clubs sponsored by the lodge.⁶

Over the years there has been some reduction in the religious aspects of the Moose ceremonies and the word “enrollment” has been adopted to describe the initiation

¹ For historical background on Moose International see the organization’s official web site at http://www.mooseintl.org/who/moose_history.htm or a resource volume such as Alan Axelrod, *The International Encyclopedia of Secret Societies & Fraternal Orders* (New York: Facts on File, Inc, 1997), 173-75.

² See page 5 for a brief section on Women of the Moose.

³ *The General Laws: The Constitution and By-laws of Moose International and the Supreme Lodge of the Loyal Order of Moose* (Revised and certified and in force and effect as of July 1, 2000), 134.

⁴ http://www.mooseintl.org/who/why_the_moose.htm

⁵ *The General Laws*, 49.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 86-95.

ceremony. However, the presence of religious elements that permeate the rituals and services of the lodge show that the organization has not abandoned its religious character. The Moose Lodge does not consider itself a secret order, though candidates for enrollment are reminded—and especially for legal reasons—that it is a private organization. The lodge’s “Privacy Policy” requires limited admission and its By-laws contain strict limitations on the public dissemination of internal lodge affairs.

The Enrollment Ceremony and Special Services

Members are admitted into the Moose Lodge through an officially prescribed “enrollment ritual of the Order” conducted by ritual staff of the Lodge.⁷ When the Governor of the lodge has been assured that the candidates have met all membership requirements, officers of the lodge, in preparation for the taking of the membership oath, make presentations setting forth “the noble principles” of the lodge—its obligations and privileges. Following these opening discourses, the Governor begins the Nine O’Clock Ceremony, which is performed whenever members of the Moose are gathered at that hour. The Governor states: “At this time the little children at Mooseheart kneel at their beds to say their evening prayers. Let us face toward Mooseheart, fold our arms, bow our heads and join them in silent prayer.” Following nine chimes, the ceremony continues with all present repeating after the Governor: “Let the little children come to me...do not keep them away...for they are like the kingdom of Heaven...God bless Mooseheart...Amen (thereupon those present are asked to face the altar).

Following a brief presentation on Moosehaven/Mooseheart, the Governor asks enrollees if they “believe in the purposes of the Order” and desire “to join with us as Brothers.” He then proceeds to administer the enrollment oath, which he indicates, “once taken...shall bind you to us, and us to you, for all time.” In keeping with the requirement that a member of the lodge of the Loyal Order of Moose “profess belief in a Supreme Being,”⁸ the new member is first asked to pledge: “In the presence of the Supreme Being and those gathered here, I pledge that I will obey the laws of the Loyal Order of Moose, and the By-laws of the Lodge of which I am to become a member.” Following other briefly cited obligations, all candidates and “Lodge Brothers” are invited to “reaffirm their faith” in the Fraternity. An officer of the lodge (Prelate), with the Governor facing the altar, invites those present to pray as follows:

Almighty Father, who knows the hearts and minds of all His people, help each of us to accept—and continue—the oath of Moose allegiance. We ask You to hold us together in Your arms as we commit our lives to fraternity, fellowship, and service. We also ask You to bless Mooseheart and Moosehaven, so they will always be there for those in need. Amen.

⁷ Contained on pages 16-25 in *The Story of the Moose: Loyal Order of Moose*, Ritual Department, July 4, 2000. It should be noted that the Ritual book of the Moose has been revised three times since 1989, according to a ritualist of the lodge (*Moose Magazine Online*, May/June/July, 2005, 4).

⁸ *The General Laws*, 49.

In concluding remarks the Governor reminds new members that with the Enrollment Ceremony “we have become as one. One in spirit...one in purpose...and one in commitment.”

Burial ceremonies and Memorial services are optional, offered upon the request of the family of the deceased member. “The Service of Tribute” must be carried out in conformity with the prescribed ritual of the lodge.⁹ This service begins with the recitation of Psalm 23 by the Governor, who then states:

In this hour of sorrow, when we share the reality of loss, let us turn for guidance and comfort to Him who in His infinite wisdom created us all, and who in His own time will take us all from this life on earth.

The Prelate then leads those in attendance in the following prayer:

Almighty Father, we are reminded of the frailty of human life, for we have again been called into the presence of death. One of our brothers has been called from this life, and our Defending Circle is broken. To our mortal vision, all around us is darkness, and so we turn to you, Source of all life and light, for comfort and for aid. Help us today as we share this loss of our brother, that we may comfort his loved ones. Help us to assure them of your wisdom and Your loving-kindness, that they may say with us: Thy will be done. Amen.

Following a eulogy, the Junior Governor states:

Our Defending Circle is broken. Its goal was brotherhood: We built a great fraternal society and in it saw the realization of our goal. We placed each member in the Defending Circle of protection, a circle that would shield those within. Only yesterday we let our thoughts dwell on that circle, and our hearts felt pride and exaltation, but today the circle is broken and we stand helpless in the presence of death. Today, we realize how temporary is the life of man. Now we can only pray that You who watch over us will forgive our mistakes and faults, and that You will, because of the dedication that built it, find our circle worthy.

The Past Governor then assures those attending of the following:

Yes, our Defending Circle is broken. Nevertheless our departed brother shall continue to be in our thoughts. God in His wisdom gives to us the ability to remember those who have left this life. He also helps us to realize that through faith and devotion to Him, eternal life is possible. The example of this brother’s service shall be appreciated forever.

⁹ A copy of this Service of Tribute has been shared with the Commission by staff of the Moose Lodge.

Yes, he has now passed from this life into eternity. But, he shall continue to live in our thoughts. We remember him as he stood in our Defending Circle proclaiming his dedication to brotherly kindness that would unite all mankind in this life.

The Governor then adds:

Death is not to be feared. Our heavenly Father is the Author of life and all that is in it. Death provides us with a peaceful sleep. It is a great mercy, a peaceful rest from the struggles of life. May our brother rest in peace.

Death is but a separation, a journey to an unknown shore, a journey which we too must take—when this life has reached its end.

The Prelate offers this prayer:

Heavenly Father, we come to You in this hour of sorrow. May Your tenderness and compassion touch the hearts of all who have gathered here, especially the family of our departed brother. Comfort us in our sorrow and revive our trust and faith in you. O heavenly Father, help us to conform our lives to Your divine will, that we may exemplify Your good works and glorify Your name. Give us the strength to bear this burden Your wisdom has placed upon us, and make us strong to battle with the temptations and struggles of this life, so that when our day has come, we too may be gathered into your presence. This we ask in Your name. Amen.

The Service of Tribute concludes when the Governor states: “Now, Oh heavenly Father, with these flowers, symbols of immortality, we commit our brother to Your loving care.”

Evaluation of the Religious Content of the Rituals

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod recognizes that the Loyal Order of Moose, like other fraternal organizations of its kind, is engaged in many commendable humanitarian efforts (e.g., its Community Service program) and social opportunities that contribute significantly to the common good of our society. It recognizes as well that over the years the Moose Lodge has sought to reduce religious content that may be offensive to some and has expressed respect for the religious convictions of individual members.¹⁰ Regrettably, however, the rituals and ceremonies of the lodge continue to require and assume acceptance of religious truths that conflict with our Synod’s understanding of what is taught in the Holy Scriptures, and they do so in ways that compromise the Christian’s confession of the biblical Gospel.

¹⁰ In the 1989 edition of the Moose Enrollment Ceremony candidates are assured that obligations of the oath “will not conflict with any religious, political or social affiliations” that they may have or their duty to family, to country, or to “God”(26-27).

The principles of moral living taught in the rituals and services are noble. However, when the ritual speaks of man's relationship to God and of eternal life, participants are given the clear impression that the moral life of individuals can lead to eternal life—an assumption directly contrary to Scriptures (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:21-31; etc.). Nowhere does the ritual—in spite of numerous religious references—mention Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, through whom alone by faith people receive eternal life and are able to know the Father (John 14:6-7; Acts 4:12). The ritual presents God only as “the Supreme Being,” not as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—presumably because this generic reference to Deity will not be understood as sectarian and as offensive to non-Christians. In the name of this “Supreme Being” Christian and non-Christian alike join in taking the same solemn oath in the lodge's official Enrollment Ceremony. Curiously, the words of Jesus are quoted (without reference to Him; see Mark 10:14) in the Nine O'Clock Ceremony (in a manner that suggests endorsement of Mooseheart), but in a way that fails to read these words in their original context: the kingdom of heaven belongs only to those who come to Jesus Christ. Understandably for those who have formulated this ritual, this central New Testament truth could be unacceptable to some, and perhaps even offensive.

Prayers and references in the Service of Tribute—officially approved by the Lodge for use at funerals—call upon God for blessing, with no acknowledgment that human beings have separated themselves from God and can only be redeemed in Jesus Christ. The implication is that all members of the Defending Circle, broken for the moment by the death of a deceased Moose, will attain to eternity because of the mercy and love of a God who gives life and therefore peaceful rest (the Prelate's prayer asks of those present, that they “*too* may be gathered into Your presence”). The assumption of a universal salvation of all those who do good in this life must be rejected as contrary to the scriptural Gospel.

We charitably assume that there are members of the Order who do not in their hearts subscribe to this philosophy. Nevertheless, Christians who participate in the required ritual, under solemn oath, cannot do so without denying with their lips the particularity of the apostolic Gospel, and hence without compromising their public witness of God's truth.

In spite of appeals in recent years that the Moose Enrollment ritual be taken more seriously,¹¹ Moose officials have indicated openness to making changes “for the better.”¹² The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is also open to revising its objections to membership in this lodge, if religious tenets inimical to the Christian Gospel are removed from its rituals.

Women of the Moose

Founded originally in 1913 as an auxiliary organization of the Loyal Order of Moose, Women of the Moose is now considered an integral part of the Order. The corporate Moose International is therefore made up of two components, the Loyal Order of Moose

¹¹ *Moose Magazine Online*, May/June/July, 2005 1-5.

¹² *Moose Magazine Online*, August/September/October, 2004, 2.

and Women of the Moose. With no distinction between them in terms of purpose and mission, the men and women belonging to them are all governed by the General Laws of Moose International and are under “the sole power and authority of the governing body, known as the Supreme Lodge.”¹³ According to recent reports, the men and women of the Moose hold membership in 2000 lodges and 1600 chapters in the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Bermuda. Membership in the Women of the Moose is currently at about 500,000.

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¹³ *The General Laws*, 7.