

Cover Page



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# Summary

The present dissertation examined the factors that motivate individuals to join the Dutch Freemasonry and to continue membership. More specifically, the present research aimed to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent do Dutch members of the Freemasonry differ from other Dutch men in terms of demographics, personality traits, social status, education, and religion?
- If Dutch members of the Freemasonry differ from other Dutch men, what then is their profile in terms of these characteristics?
- If Dutch members of the Freemasonry differ from other Dutch men, how can these differences be explained? To what extent can these differences be attributed to differences in generational composite?
- To what extent do Dutch members of the Freemasonry differ from Dutch Christian men on the characteristics mentioned above? Can potential differences between these groups be attributed to religious options?

To answer these research questions a sample of 174 members of the Dutch Freemasonry filled out a questionnaire containing items assessing constructs such as personality, magical thinking, attitudes towards death, belief in a higher reality, and religion. Data from Dutch (Christian) men were obtained from a previous study on social-cultural developments in the Netherlands (SOCON, 2000).

Usually men join the Freemasonry at a relatively late age, i.e. on average in their forties. Friends, work environment and, to a lesser degree, relatives and family usually support their decision. Internet and social media increasingly help men to inform themselves about the Freemasonry, before they decide to become a member. After their first thought of joining the Freemasonry, it still takes, on average, about 4 ½ years before men actually join the Freemasonry. Once member, they remain so, on average, for about seventeen years. When entering, men expect to find spirituality, to deepen their insights into life, find a sense of brotherhood and hope to meet like-minded people. Freemasonry appears to be a meeting place for highly educated and socially successful individuals and, although attached to tradition, members decide on their own social, religious and spiritual needs. Especially the Freemasonry as a method of symbols, rituals and initiations speaks to potential Freemasons.

Once Freemason, men's expectations concerning self-reflection, spirituality and meaning are fulfilled. They find like-minded people with a similar interest and social background, who share their search for the Light: a metaphor for spiritual awakening. The context of this search may be fixed, but not the departure point: Christians, Jews, Muslims, agnostics or atheists can all be, at the same time, Freemason. Although the Order formally conforms to the directives of the UGLE (United Grand Lodge of England), members of the Freemasonry themselves decide how to practice these directives. Seclusion and discretion are inherent to the Freemasonry. This aspect of the Freemasonry may make it, to the outside world, a secretive community, often resulting in speculations about the Freemasonry's activities. However, this secrecy is not as much characteristic of the Freemasonry itself, but of the quest for mystery humans may engage in, inside or outside the Freemasonry.

Compared to other Dutch men, Freemasons are, in general, older, more highly educated, less introverted, less religious, more receptive to marriage and politics and more often liberally oriented. Changing views on marriage, political preference and religion that took place in the second half of the last century, are reflected in the successive generations of Dutch men, but not in those of the Freemasons. It is as if the changing world view, that took place in Western society during the second half of the last century, passed Freemasons. When it comes to conceptions of a higher reality and death Freemasons differ from other Dutch men: they are more receptive to mysticism, more interested in answers to existential questions and view death more as a natural haven. Freemasons also score relatively high on deism and theism compared to other Dutch men. Although Freemasons and other Dutch men are comparable in terms of religious immanence, Freemasons of the protest generation distinguish themselves from other generations by a higher preference for the sacred (rituals, initiation and tradition). With universal religion as a starting point, Freemasons feel more connected to a larger universe (connected spirituality), while other Dutch men view themselves more as the center of the universe (free spirituality). In the Freemasonry this is reflected by hierarchical steps towards increased connected spirituality: first, they relate to themselves (entered apprentice degree), then they relate to the other (fellow craft degree) and, finally, they relate to a higher order or ordering principle (master mason degree).

In sum, the present research comes up with the following profile of a Freemason: almost a third of Freemasons, of which 80% has completed a form of higher education, shows affinity with magical thinking. As can be expected, the acceptance of mysticism is strongly related to magical thinking, since both refer to a higher reality. Whereas the first refers to the purely religious experience of being connected, the second refers to a pattern of thinking that enables the understanding of a higher reality. Both are characteristic of

Freemasons. Freemasons more strongly believe in a Supreme Architect of the Universe than in a Higher Power. Magical thinking explains much of the variance in the beliefs of Freemasons in a Supreme Architect of the Universe. It was found that, although equipped with well-developed analytical skills, compared to other Dutch men, Freemasons are more attracted to the emotional, non-rational elements of religiosity than the rational and dogmatic elements. Mysticism offers them the framework and magical thinking the tools.

All of the different generations of Freemasons, that were included in the present sample, highly value 'harmony', 'brotherhood' and 'tradition'. Although they all value the masonic method, when joining the Freemasonry, younger generations have lower expectations and, also, find, in the Freemasonry, less what they are looking for. The idea of Freemasonry as a secret community speaks more to them than to the older generations. More than Freemasons of older generations, Freemasons of younger generations adopt their own masonic approach, are more autonomous in their decision making when it comes to becoming a member and have lower expectations of becoming a different person by joining the Freemasonry. In addition, older generations are more positively critical of the Freemasonry and more satisfied about its functioning. Freemasons of the protest generation take a central place in the Freemasonry: they are numerically in the majority. More than older generations, members of this generation feel more bound to existing directives, believe the rituals to be in balance, both in form and content, and are more open to others in their doubts about Freemasonry. Although for every Freemason harmony has a high priority, harmony and identity are increasingly under pressure.

When compared to both other Dutch men and, more specifically, Christian Dutch men, Freemasons seem to be more receptive to mysticism. More than a third of Freemasons experienced their initiation as a mystical experience. Looking at the successive generations, whereas other Dutch men remained similarly receptive to mysticism and Christian Dutch became less receptive, Freemasons became more receptive to mysticism. This finding fits well with the masonic philosophy where the rituals provide the context for mysticism, as well as with the concept of universal religion that the Freemasonry is based on: a universal religion as a universal field of religion where specific types of religion, such as Christianity, are manifestations of. This universal core of mystical experiences touches the masonic principles of universal religion: elements of a non time- and culture-bound religion, as seen at the Spindle Time and articulated in the Constitution of Anderson. Freemasonry is best described as an imaginative religion with a non-verbal, emotional transfer of ideas through symbols and rituals, or, put differently, as a method with elements of universal nature and religion.

Freemasons have no problems with the 'Christian' imagery of their rituals. They accept it as a given traditional context, part of the Masonic method in which connected spirituality can be experienced. Because of their tradition of Judeo-Christian rituals and symbols, the outside world may view the Freemasonry as a Christian manifestation of the religious field, and not as a universal religion, as Freemasons do themselves (based on the Constitutions of Anderson). This may account for the marginal role of Freemasonry in the spiritual market, on which forms of free spirituality have become increasingly popular at the expense of Christianity and other forms of restricted/connected religion. It is possible that, because the Freemasonry has presented itself always as undogmatic and secular (other than most denominations), there was no necessity to adapt when, in the second half of the twentieth century, the world view in Western society became less dogmatic and secular. The process of secularisation that took place in Western society was already common place within the Freemasonry.

Late last century it became clear that the Freemasonry is increasingly confronted with the aging of its members, running the risk of becoming less vital and zealous. Therefore, reasons given by members who considered leaving the Freemasonry, such as the low percentage of younger members and the secretive relationship between Freemasonry and the outside world, should be taken seriously. In this respect, more openness to society, that enables both Freemasonry and society to learn from each other, seems essential.