

Victoria Lodge of Education and Research  
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**FREEMASONRY, TO BE OR NOT TO BE**

by

R.W. Bro. N.H.A. Lawrie P.M. Aurora Lodge No. 165 G.R.B.C.

Most of the talks given in our Victoria Lodge of Education and Research have been Historical by nature and I suppose this is to be expected. However, this evening I propose to break from this practice with the hope that what I have to say will cause you to take another look at our beloved craft, a more reverential look. If this brings us to a rededication to its precepts, it will enable us to see in what direction we are moving and what action we should take to preserve it in the future.

It is a shocking thought, but our craft is just one generation removed from extinction if we do not  
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impress younger men by our example, to have them knock on our door seeking admission, it dies with us. So how important is it that we understand the strengths of our order? What has made it possible for it to continue firm and unshaken down through the ages. Although Free and Accepted or Speculative Masonry is comparatively young, most historians agreeing on 1717 with the four London Lodges forming the first Grand Lodge of record.. Operative Masonry can be easily and factually traced back to the 12th century in first found England. However most historians will also agree that operative masons had their beginnings when stones were first found to be useful in the construction of walls and buildings. Where confusion and argument starts, seems to be on the question of when in history did the operative masons begin to place a speculative value on the tools of their trade and the laws of their science. Whatever may be dim in the History of Freemasonry and in the nature of things must remain hidden. Its symbolism may be traced in unbroken succession through the centuries and its symbolism is its soul. This symbolism was deeply wrought into the minds of mankind that when at last the craft finished its labours and laid down its tools, its symbols became a language for the thoughts of the thinker. Speculative Masonry was born.

A new Masonic year begins, all over the world new officers will be installed, each bringing his own particular talent to his new office. So, you still have Old Sandy, Old Humphrey and Old Harry. But. while this situation is not unique, it is not common. What are we going to bring to the craft this year and what is the craft going to offer us and to me? What is even more important, what influence will the craft through us, have on Society at large?.

It is not too hard to relate to the significance of the Installation Ceremony, the die is cast as to the direction that the lodge will take for the next year. It is more difficult to see where Freemasonry will be in 100 years or 50: years or even 10 years. We know: however, that our craft is one of the most ancient institutions known to man and as expressed in the E.A. Tracing Board Lecture in the Canadian Ritual, "it is not only the most ancient but the most moral institution that ever existed." This statement, my brethren, expresses clearly the reason for its longevity. A beautiful and peculiar system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.

I know, there are some who will say, how about the fellowship and friendships, visiting, fraternal visits between lodges that have been taking place for years,

or the extra activities such as ladies nights or golf tournaments etc. I say to you that these are but the icing on the cake which are so enjoyable because they take place in an environment made possible by the active application of the principles inculcated in our Ritual.

Others will say, "How about Ritual and ceremonial work.?" No one can deny the pleasure to be found in giving a lecture well or in observing a degree presented with dignity, sincerity and perfection. But this can be achieved only when those taking part have been sufficiently moved by their sense of responsibility to give of their time and effort to produce the right result. Again I say, that the observance of the Masonic principles are what bring us to the joy we find in the craft and have resulted in its long life.

If then, these principles are the reason for our craft continuing down through the ages, surely, since they have stood the test of time, they must be the foundation on which we must build our future. Even further I say, that the future of mankind depends on the recognition of these principles and choosing to observe them or destruction.

In the centre of most lodge rooms is the V.O.S.L. and during the installation of every W.M. and in various parts of our Ritual we are admonished to refer to it. In Hebrews Chapter 12, verses 26 - 27 we find these words, "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also the heavens, And this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

There are two possible worlds with which we have to deal. One, the world which we have made.

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The other, the world that the world's Great Architect intends, and between then there is a wide difference. This creates tensions between the world that is and the world that ought to be. Tensions, conflicts and periodic upheavals. The great majority of mankind are content with the world that is, they resign themselves to it, adjust to it and if it gives them food, clothing and entertainment, they are quite content to leave it as it is without regard for others. In fact, they might even oppose the lifting process. 'Enjoy the world' is their philosophy, take what you can get and give as little as you have to and certainly don't make yourself unhappy trying to improve it. So, settling down in the world that is, living by what ever standards are acceptable at their time and place, they let things go from bad to worse until there comes a crisis, the rumbling of a major shake-up when all things seem to crumble and go to pieces.

The ancients had a proverb - 'when an evil has become intolerable, it has reached a point of cure'. There is a self defeating principle in every evil that brings about it's own down fall when we commit ourselves to unsound principles and build our systems on false foundations there comes an inevitable time of testing, a shake-up, a judgement day and the structures that we have laboured to build, begin to crumble and collapse. We know that bridges and buildings wont stand if they are built in defiance of sound laws of architecture. We know that businesses will not last if they are built on unsound economic practices. Well by brethren, there are sound laws for the development of man' characer, just as certain as- there are for bridges, buildings and business. There is a rightness in human relationships which cannot be ignored. Somewhere along the line will come our judgement day, the shake-up, because it has to come.

Our story is full of repeated shakings. They can be traced, little ones,

big ones, personal, national, social and even universal. In the beginning the Roman Empire was great. It brought order and form, justice and enlightenment to the multitudes. But in time it became a sprawling, corrupt system as merciless as it was mighty. Built up on pride and power and on the tired backs of slaves. Then there came a time when it was shaken. Its evil had become intolerable. By its own inherent corruption it began to crumble and collapse. With everything going to pieces around him, St. Augustine wrote - "There are two kinds of civilization, the perishable and the imperishable - the city of man, the city of God. The city of man must fall because it is man made and falsely built, that the city of God might come.'

One must be blind not to see that element of Divine Judgment in the world upheaval of our time. Judgment day for our western civilization and the ideas that we have built into it. We are in the midst of one of history's greatest upheavals, the full magnitude of which is not yet apparent. Never have so many forces been clashing in so many places or so many millions of people been involved. Old ideas are being questioned, judged, tested and shaken. Our world is being shaken because there are so many things wrong with it, it needs to be shaken.

Just as surely as the world needs shaking, the people of the world need, want and are searching for something of substance to hold on to. Something which will give them the firm foundation they need on which to build a new life, a new culture, which will include all peoples of all lands, based on principles which have been tested by time and not found wanting. Once we recognize what has made Freemasonry what it is, once we recognize what has preserved it and once we recognize the import of the charge at the N.E. angle in its fullest sense, then and only then can we see what the future of the craft may be.

The answer to the future of Freemasonry and to those searching for reality on the outside, rests with us. The secret is found in the principles inculcated in our rituals. We are not a service club, although we serve. We are not a social club, although one finds sociability. We are not a friendship club, although friendships are made and grow closer and deeper than one can imagine. But if any or all of the above are the only faces that we expose to the outside world, we are failing in our responsibilities to the craft for all are possible only in so far as we practice true Masonic principles. We must act and act with responsibility. A big job! You bet. Is it worth it? You better believe it. Can we do it? With the help of God we can. But it is up to us.

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'I am only one, but I am one,  
I cannot do everything, but still I can do something,  
And because I cannot do everything  
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do'.

If we are to fulfill our obligation to the craft and society we must live our lives so that the uninitiated will want to share in the joys which the craft offers and will want to relate to others as we are taught to do in our ritual.

There is a beautiful poem by an anonymous author which I would like to close with. It is entitled THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO YOU. Gospel of course being good news and if there is anyone here who does not believe Masonry is good news, he can leave now.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO YOU

There's a sweet old story translated for man  
But writ in the long, long ago:  
The gospel according to Mark, Luke and John  
Of Christ and His mission below.  
Men read and admire that gospel of Christ,  
With its love so unfailing and true  
But what do they say and what do they think of  
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO YOU.  
'Tis a wonderful story, that gospel of love  
As it shines in the Christ Life Divine;  
But Oh! That its truth might be told again  
In the story of your life and mine.  
You are writing each day a letter to men  
Take care that the writing be true,  
'Tis the only gospel that some men will read  
THAT GOSPEL ACCORDING TO YOU..

Masonry has good news to share with the world my brethren and it will only  
be shared through you and me.  
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