

DEBATE - The Lifeblood of the Education Process

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It is quite an honour for me to come and talk to such an auspicious, if not austere, body of people who are interested in education. Brother Heaps, I must say that I enjoyed your remarks very much this morning. I have been interested, ever since I became a Mason, in reading and have been privileged to speak on various subjects within the Lodge of Education and Research. Some people have been kind enough to say that, at times, I make sense. But I also realize that, having done a great deal of work in public life, masonic meaning without the lifeblood of the education process can be deadly dull and repetitive. Attrition comes about in our lodges through lack of stimulation in the distribution of the work among the members.

What I propose to talk about today is, debate. The difference between ritual and dogma is something that we should really consider. If we go back into the early days of the Catholic Church, for instance, the ritual of the Church was in Latin for the purpose of preventing the members from understanding. Just think on that, for a moment or two. The ritual of a Masonic Lodge to a new candidate is literally very difficult. It is very difficult for a person who has had no masonic experience to come into a Masonic Lodge, go through the ceremonies of the First or .any Degree and actually have it make sense until he has had the initiation and gets into the hands of a coach. The difference between ritual and dogma is understanding.

To understand it we have to have someone to explain it. Someone to encourage us to read. Someone to take different stances so that we can enlarge our appreciation of what we are being taught. One of the best ways of arriving at understanding is what we are doing this morning. We are having a subject which is "The Education of Masons in Lodges." That subject was presented to us by a capable speaker who understands whereof he speaks and we are now debating it and have been all morning, to our mutual benefit. A lot of the lodges are frightened of debate, feeling that to disagree is to create controversy. This is not so. All adult, intelligent human beings are capable of entertaining more than one point of view, even if it is a stance taken for the purpose of teaching. Much of the material that is taught is not necessarily a part of the philosophy of that particular teacher, but it is a point of view. a fact of the learning that each and every one of us should be able to encompass. It is not argument or controversy. It is simply an enlargement so that we get more points of view upon the matter in question. We've heard, in the last few minutes and before we went to lunch, whether or not it is better to take an entered apprentice into the lodge which opens in the Entered Apprentice degree and expose him to that phase of the Work. This obviously makes sense but, there are other points of view. Many of the Lodges like my own, have always opened in the third degree. I remember once when I was in the Chair of Education & Research I opened in the first degree or the third degree, I forget which - great excitement in the senior warden's chair because he said we were in the wrong degree. How could we be in the wrong degree if we were in the Masonic Lodge? But they just put it down to an older member losing his grip.

A debate is a wonderful instrument. Let us just dwell for a minute on what a debate is. Mount Newton Lodge sends you two members here--erudite, polished gentlemen to debate a subject. Vancouver and Quadra or some other lodge have two scholars here. The subject has been chosen, published, and so

forth and they meet and in sequence, one Pro and one Con, one Pro and one Con. They address the subject, for and against, exposing the whole matter to the lodge or lodges. Supervising this whole procedure we have a moderator. The great thing about a debate of this kind is that it involves a lot of people. We have a panel of judges, unbiased, uninformed - just people - they simply are listening to the Pros and Cons of this thing. At the end of the debate they give their judgment and the reasons for it. Someone wins and someone loses. But everybody there really wins because, this is not a competition in that sense. It is an exercise for the mind. It creates a tremendous amount of interest in a Lodge.

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We've heard quite a bit about R. Wor Bro. Harry Carr, a lecturer here, who filled this hall, right up to there, when he came to speak to us and completely justified his presence. To quote him, he said: "Every major philosophical treatise of man's life on earth was devised and written by men. For example the Koran, the Bible, The Masonic Rituals. No wisdom, legend, history or myth came down to man by Divine Power. It was never engraved in English or tablets of stone. The Masonic Ritual was devised by clever men to illustrate certain philosophies." It really is, the Masonic Ritual, a re-enactment of most of the major faiths that man has always had, They have had great good fortune in the early days. Some of the great scholars of the time deliberately fashioned the ritual. It was not by divine credence that it came down and was given to Masons to form whence to whither. It was devised and written by clever men. They deliberately fashioned the ritual. All of this creative imagery was effected to establish a special point of view. They worked and reworked the ritual to illustrate man's point of view. They worked and reworked the ritual to illustrate man's struggle, man's progress, man's aspiration. They worked towards these things. They held up certain goals. They reached back into history and legend, myth, superstition to select symbols to illustrate the various things that they wished to incorporate. If you go back over the rituals, you will see how this progressed in a steady progression. The original masonic ceremonies were simply no more or less than a regularized trade guild meeting.

When masonry became as we find it today (speculative) and the accepted masons came into it, educated men came into masonry and wished to enhance the ceremonies. They changed them, they enlarged them, they polished them, they made them more interesting. They dressed the lodge to provide a setting for the ceremony that we know as Masonry. This was all to the good, but I would like every mason to realize that we know that it was something done by man for man's benefit and he must understand that he can change it. He can take different points of view as much of it is very,very varied. The points of view are expressed, they are contradicted in the next section and all sorts of irregularities are present. We can go back and read the story of Hiram Abif and the building of the Temple in the Bible. We read it in one part of the Bible and it says one thing; we read it in another part and it says another thing Through the centuries these legends have changed. The names have changed. So many things are different. Even today there has been a sensational new book brought out refuting much of the basic Christian teaching that is in the Bible. Now I haven't the slightest conception of what that book says nor do I have any intention of changing my mind concerning the Christian ethic, but it is creating a debate that is good for Christians everywhere, because they are springing to defend their faith. They are rehoning their interest in their own religion, consequently it is good. If we had a man who came in here today and contradicted flatly the Masonic Order, many of us would spring to attention. We

would defend it with all our skill and interest. None of these religions or masonry came about suddenly. Nobody sat down and wrote the Bible in a couple of weekends. Nobody contrived the Masonic Rituals in a matter of weeks. It took years. It took centuries to evolve and it is still evolving. Only in recent years there was such a mumbo-jumbo in British Columbia in the ancient work, with every town and every lodge in B.C. doing it differently. A group of the higher-ups in the Grand Lodge of British Columbia appointed a committee, which as we know is the solution to everything, to rewrite the work. Now, being a traditionalist, it is an affront to me to lose some of the beautiful music of the old work, but it regularizes it and we have a new bible of masonry which new generations of masons will take, and, fifty years from now somebody who is interested enough, will stand in front of you and say, "but in 1971 the committee, who nobody had really known of or had any basis in real understanding, other than a genuine will and interest in trying to stabilize the rituals in British Columbia, did the best they could." Future generations will debate as to whether or not they were right in the Grand Lodges all over the place. When the United States took up masonry they had certain considerations. They are the people who really started the custom that lodges would be conducted in the third degree, people of less stature would not be permitted into the lodge. In England it has not been done so, as you have heard from the floor here. So there was a very gradual evolvement of the masonic ritual. There is no attempt nor was there any attempt to deceive anyone.

The ritual is not, as we would say, gospel truth; it is a legend; it is a myth; it is symbolism, it is so many things. It never, ever, says this is the way it was. When they said, during the admission to the

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Temple that the Fellowcraft were to assemble and receive their wages. There were 18,000 Fellowcraft. That would be quite an assembly if you were distributing corn, wine and oil, and so on and so forth. You would have to have a lot of oil - in some lodges, a lot of wine. They weren't trying to fool anybody or write something that was wrong in the sense that they were trying to give a wrong impression. They were writing a story in ritual form, a drama, if you like, to illustrate the progress that was available to man if he used his mind, lived a moral life and hoped for a better future. This the masonry which intertwines it, irrevocably, with religion. It is, in a sense a religion in itself

The dedicated scholars gave endlessly of their time and talent to improve and enhance the fluency and beauty of our masonic rituals. Whether it may, or may not be fact doesn't detract from it in any way at all, but leaves the floor wide open for debate. What do they mean when they say this or that? What were the events that led up to their discoveries? Having said this much about the origins of our ritual, debating it shows the frailty of their foundations in fact. Let us debate a few subjects of masonic interest and thus use our lodges as a forum instead of a degree factory. Each Lodge has a tremendous capacity within its brethren for debate, for differences of opinion. We all come from different backgrounds. We have had different education's. Many of us are from different faiths.

The Lodge of Education and Research, in fact, the Grand Lodge of British Columbia is going to be very interested in the rededication of the Jewish Temple on its 100th birthday. We are pleased and proud to be a factor in that particular reenactment of a ceremony which in one sense people may say, in fact they have said to me, "What have the Masons to do with the Jewish Synagogue?" Well, the Masons are citizens on earth. They are found everywhere.

So let us think for a moment about debate. Remember now we have a

moderator, we have four speakers, two Pro and two Con, we have a panel of judges who are appointed and have their little score cards ready, and, we have a lodge full of people. Let us hope that we have two lodges and the teams are debating in competition. So we have all these people there and we realize, as we realized this morning, that discussion follows debate and discussion for adult minds is healthy, providing that it is properly supervised and regulated. There is no place in a masonic lodge for out and out controversy. We do not want that. There is lots of room for various points of view. Let us take a sample subject that will really get to the audience and they will have to think. The subject for tonight's debate is "Was King Solomon's Temple ever built?" What are they going to say about that?? All right, the first Pro speaker gets up. He has long quotations from the Bible. He reads the Biblical history of the creation of King Solomon's Temple. He read the historical record that he has assembled. He has archeological findings on the site. He has measurements, he has photographs, and so forth and so on, of the stone quarry where the stones were cut. He has a great deal of information about King Solomon's Temple and he definitely says 'Yes it was built because of this.' All right I am Con, the first one to speak for the negative. I say that there is ample evidence in the derivation of the Masonic ritual and other historical documents, whether they be religious or otherwise, that the manipulation of names and facts was used quite freely by the original writers to illustrate a point of view and to suit their specific purpose. They want the building of King Solomon's Temple to be a part of our ceremonies because it is an illustration showing the progress. All right they manipulate the names and facts. There is no existing tangible evidence. We do not have any plans. We have reconstruction re- this and re- that of the various uses of the Temple, and of the appearance, etc., which are all actually very much based on hearsay at the time. So we have little or no tangible evidence, but we do have a very real universal belief that in fact all religions and philosophies build the perfect temple to symbolize man's conquest of self and his devotion to his God. In other words all civilizations throughout the ages have built a supreme temple. Many were actually built but many were only built in the minds of men. Each of us in our own way builds a temple of our lives, ending with the house on a hill with a view over the lake and whatever. We build that temple. These stories are passed from generation to generation and all with the same hope and ultimate salvation of man. We must remember that the story we tell in masonic lodges of Solomon's Temple and the legend of Hiram Abif are really illustrating the aspirations of a very clever, talented individual who was beset by trouble and problems. The trouble and problems in our illustration in the Hiram Legend are Jubellum, Jubalee and 16.

Jubellum and they really are personifications of our three major problems on earth, that is ignorance, superstition and fear and they are a representation of those basic emotions that we all have. We do not understand it, we are ignorant, we are fearful to go forward. We are steeped in prejudice and superstition because of our backgrounds, but in our legend in the temple we feel those three emotions, ignorance, superstition and fear. Hiram Abif is slain but he is raised again. The Mohammedans, the Christians, the Masons live again through the raising of Hiram Abif from the grave. It is a natural illustration, a sequence every known religion of any major stature has always had this sequence of events. The problem, the disaster and the resurrection. We do in lodge. This is what makes it vastly interesting and when we take all the symbolism and the future that is indicated by the masonic lectures, there really is no other philosophy on earth that gives man the opportunity to explore himself if he will but give time to it as a mason. So, speaking to the Con of the debate I say that it is a mythical temple, never built, but ever envisioned.

The lodges have these questions to answer. Should we break the routine of

lodge practice and devote a real part of our time to debate. It has always seemed, I think to every incoming Master, every incoming Grand Master, every incoming officer of any stature within the lodge, within the Masonic framework. When are we going to have time to break step and talk about masonry. It takes a strong, firm hand at the helm of any lodge to make sure that he has a definite proportion of the time of the lodge allocated to such meetings, as we are having today, some special event to hold the attention of the lodge, to show them that there is more to masonry than parading candidates around the lodge and putting them through degrees which, by repetition and lack of explanation and enlivenment, naturally become somewhat boring. Masons everywhere will be surer, wiser, broader in their vision, more flexible in their stance with debate. They have had an opportunity to ask the question, to get some of the answers, to have broadened their stance. They feel surer, better balanced on their feet. If I go to a cocktail party now and I happen to wear my Masonic ring as I did the other day and someone says, "OH! That is one of those secret groups. O.K, my stance is fairly broad. I do not get knocked over that easily; I was able to explain to this lady something of masonry. No secret words, mind you. You can become better citizens in your community if you can give and take and discuss.

There is no reason why a mason can not give a qualified opinion on sewer project at Clover Point. He does not have to deal with Masonry, but his masonic training gives him the basic philosophy to make him a leader in the debates of the area in which he lives. When I said "Let us discuss it in open lodge", the Worshipful brother this morning said -"Lets have five minutes for some gem, something that sparks a little discussion." It is so essential. I feel deflated if I go to a lodge, go through a routine ceremony, I go downstairs and find the brethren are more interested in either having two drinks before they sit down or sitting down so quickly because they want to get the next bus home, then I feel as if I have missed it; I missed the meeting; it did not happen. It needs the spark of individual input into the lodge, and by individual input I do not mean that you pick on the known workhorses in the area in which you live. There is lots of talent in every lodge, .in most of the walks of life, who can contribute to masonry. Another thing is that in preparing for debate, if I pick John Jones to debate in the team on a subject that he can't even spell, he has to go to the library. He has to go, because he is not going to be made a fool of in open lodge. Not that the purpose of debate is to make a fool of him, but he goes to the library and from that moment on his stance is surer. By his third debate, people will be fighting in line to get in to hear him, because he is taking the time to give something to the lodge. You can not give anything to the lodge without keeping a part of it for yourself.

In conclusion brethren I am flattered Don Waken said that he came all the way down Island to hear this talk. Mount Newton debating team will meet any lodge at any time and debate any subject of their choosing and Masonry will be the winner.
