

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
650 Fisgard Street, Victoria, B.C. V8W 1R6

**A MASON IS OBLIGED, BY HIS TENURE TO OBEY THE MORAL LAW**

An Address to the 43rd Annual Inter-Provincial Conference  
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by

R.W. Bro. George W. Baldwin D.G.M.  
Nechako Lodge No. 86 G.R.B.C.  
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9.

Thank you Bro. President, Brethren, you will notice I have used the word 'law' here in the title and that of course reflects upon my occupation and I'm speaking this morning about law. I was telling Bro. Bingeman about Murphy's Law which all secretaries are familiar with - 'if a thing can go wrong, it will,' and I've discovered over the years attending conferences anywhere east of B.C., what I call "Baldwin's Law". You know B.C. is the next to the last in Canada to wake up. Only the Yukon is later than we are but whether we go to any conference in the east and of course Banff is the near east, we always seem to be slated first, so Baldwin's Law is that British Columbians anywhere in Eastern Canada get to go first on the program, even it is only 8 a.m. I also was asked in a personal letter the other day from an old friend of our family, a man who was a junior officer when my father was Master of the lodge in Vegreville Alberta, M.W. Bro. Sam Hardin, to pass on his regrets for not being with us and his good wishes for a successful Communication. He said that he missed the last two meetings but attended the Banff Conference for 18 consecutive years. He believes you should be proud of this Conference for being the best Masonic instruction given in North America. Regretfully, he will not be able to attend as on the same weekend, they are having the New Year high holiday services, and both Marie and he will be attending services for the two days in their synagogue. I fulfilled that obligation for Brother Hardin, and now here is my paper.

Two-hundred and sixty years ago these words were written by Dr. James Anderson in his famous "Constitutions of the Free-Masons," as the opening words of his oft-quoted first charge concerning God and religion, which was the basis upon which Freemasonry ceased to be purely Christian, and became open to all monotheists.

However, my purpose is not to discuss the universality of Freemasonry, but rather to explore the meaning and application of these words. They are all simple, short words, and not difficult to define, except for the concept in the last two.

What is "moral law"? Law, we know to be a body of rules accepted by the community to govern the actions and interactions of its members, whether we speak of common law, masonic law, international law, and so forth. But to add the adjective "moral" creates a concept which we all profess to understand yet none of us can give it a ready definition. Indeed, churchmen have for centuries debated their various definitions, and the field of moral theology is filled with countless volumes written by learned scholars, as varied as the knowledge or understanding of the authors.

Even so, I am emboldened to write this paper and add a bit more, not, I trust, to confuse, but rather to provoke thought and meditation.

Morality has been defined by one cynic as just an euphemism for public opinion, and that our behaviour is determined by social pressures rather than ethics. I sincerely believe that Freemasonry has no place for such cynics, and that our concepts of morality and ethics must depend on our faith in God, and our desire to understand more fully His ways.

Our ritual is filled with references to morality. Although many moral precepts are adverted to from time to time in the ritual, yet no specific code of moral law is set forth. But we must not conclude from this that the study of moral law is superfluous. Rather, we should emphasize that the danger of the present age is not over-analysis, but vagueness. The present-day lack of any definition in moral matters is close to disastrous. There is a wide-spread feeling of indifference to the truths of moral law.

Hence, I begin by saying that, notwithstanding the influence of social conditions on moral concepts, Freemasonry developed in an age when Christianity and the Reformation were fundamental factors in society. I firmly believe that the fundamental principles of our Canadian society are still grounded on the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, and that these teachings are no less valid to non-Christians in our community, for there are parallel teachings found in the sacred writings of the other monotheistic religions, which unfortunately are unfamiliar to most of us.

10.

I also believe that it is fundamental to any concept of moral law that we accept the principle that man has the freedom to choose between good and bad, right and wrong, in all his actions, and also that however corrupt he may be, he retains an innate power to perceive what is good and right, and to aspire to it; in short, a conscience

Having stated these principles in the broadest terms, how can we apply them in our daily lives, inside and out of our lodges? This very question often raises a very real dilemma. Although we profess that our institution is open to all good men, yet we cannot conceal that among our ranks are those who, from time to time, will transgress the bounds of the moral law. Take, for instance, the example of a member who is accused and convicted of some crime involving immorality - it may be something as simple and commonplace as theft. How should we, as Freemasons, react to one of our brethren who falls into such a situation? Do we condemn him out of hand on the mere accusation of another, or do we reach out to support and uphold him, with our brotherly love and relief until such time as he is lawfully convicted of the charge against him?

HAPPILY, I find a solution in the words of the "Charge at Passing", where we are taught that in the decision of every trespass against our rules, we are to judge with candor, admonish with friendship, and reprehend with justice. Our judgment should be withheld until all the facts are known and candidly examined. During that process, we are morally bound to take care that we do not act upon suspicion or innuendo alone, and that we do not withhold or withdraw the hand of friendship from a brother while investigating the charges against him. However, when judgment has been fairly arrived at, then our moral obligation takes a new dimension, for, in the event of conviction a duty then arises to punish the transgressor justly according to the circumstances. In many cases of a clear breach of the moral law, the only appropriate penalty is expulsion or suspension

from membership. In other cases perhaps an admonition to the erring brother will suffice. It is not right simply to let the transgressor resign his membership, or to be dropped from the rolls for non-payment of dues. Each of us should understand that if we transgress the moral law, then our brethren are morally bound to punish us. Such a punishment does not preclude future forgiveness, and in due course, a brother who has been expelled or suspended from the Order may petition for reinstatement.

Nor is such action a case where the brother is twice punished for the same offense. The crime against the state for which he has been convicted is not the same as the offense of unmasonic conduct, or a breach of the moral law, for which the lodge will punish him.

I raise this whole subject, because I feel that it is one that we are not fully addressing in this country today. In many of our sister jurisdictions in the U.S.A., THE ANNUAL PROCEEDINGS REFER TO NUMBERS OF MASONIC TRIALS AND EXPULSIONS. Yet, how many of us in our own lodges ever have taken such steps?

A recent example that came to me was of a brother charged with an act of fraud. One past master of his lodge recommended that he take a dimit. In my opinion, this is completely wrong. If the brother is found to be not guilty, then his membership in his lodge should not have been in any way affected. But if he should ultimately be convicted by the courts, then I believe that it is morally wrong, both for us and for him, simply to let him withdraw from our Order. We must stand up for our principles, and declare to the brotherhood and to the community, by our actions and his masonic punishment, that we do expect obedience to the moral law.

Having said all that about the wrongdoer, I would like now to turn to the others in the lodge. Is their moral duty at an end when they have "punished" the wrongdoer, or do they have a continuing, and ever greater, duty to extend comfort and consolation to him who has been condemned? I believe that if we fail to recognize this obligation, then we may fall victim to the sin of false pride, of overbearing righteousness, and narrow-mindedness, that will be equally harmful to our Order. In conscience, we must always stand ready, after condemning and punishing the wrongdoer, to assist him in his rehabilitation

11.  
among us and other men, and to assure him of our brotherly concern and support when he is most likely to need it the most. If we fail in that, then we too have failed to observe our masonic obligations, and have broken the moral law.

CONCLUSION (After open discussion.)

Bro. Moderator, thank you very much for that discussion. It certainly was worthwhile for everyone here, myself included. You talked about the methods of treating offenders and I think perhaps you may have inadvertently misled us here but as I see it, there are three forms in which the lodge may punish a transgression. They are - expulsion suspension or admonition, or acquittal as the case may be, To allow a man to demit or be suspended for non-payment of dues I don't consider to be a method of treating or dealing with an offender. Bro. Green was talking about the swings of public opinion from the rigidity of the Victorian times to the freedom of the flower generation. I maintain that Freemasonry provides the stability that must always be there and whether the swings in the outside world go left, right, . up, or down, we must remain firm and stable. We talked about the possibility of a codification and the moderator referred to the numerous churches within the Christian church and I'm sure that within other major monotheistic religions, there are divisions among them as

well,.Once any of us sit down and endeavor to draw out of the sacred rights, there's the Old Testament, the New, the Koran, the writings of the Sikhs, or what have you, we inevitably choose and select those writing that we want to emphasize and we may miss some other point. It might be very important to you or some other person so the danger in codification as I see it, becomes selective and becomes my interpretation if I am the one who is doing the codification and I feel the danger is there. I don't think the code is simply the Ten Commandments as has been suggested by some of the speakers. I think the code is found in the Sermon on the Mount, and found in other teachings of Moses, Solomon, David Mohammed and of the Sikhs, and of the others who have sought to find what the will of God was.

The laws of man are the criminal code, the narcotics control act and a number of things, the motor vehicle act-whatever you wish, but we also have to know what offenses are contrary to the laws of God and that I think is the hard one that none of us will ever find a codification for, and will always strive to find and will keep striving till our dying day Thank you.

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