

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

### **FREEMASONRY IN COMMUNITY**

by

M.W. Bro. J.S. Hogg, P.G.M.

Vancouver and Quadra Lodge No. 2, G.R.B.C.

1985 - 1

The remembrance of the year 1968 brings back to my view many vivid scenes. It was an important year in my life, for many reasons, one of which was, that in the month of June of that year, I was installed as Grand Master.

One of the most vivid memories of that year, was an event that made an indelible imprint on my mind. At the Banff Conference held in that year, the President of the Conference invited a Social Psychologist, a Dr. Tyler, who was at that time a Professor at Brandon University. Dr. Tyler was invited to sit with us the delegates, and to take part in our deliberations. There was note of humour. We were somewhat startled to learn that we might be subjected to psychoanalysis; and Dr. Tyler was very much in awe of what he termed, our exalted positions; as he informed us that he was only a Master Mason. He was very quickly advised that we were all only Master Masons and that we would not, nor could not, aspire to anything higher. This remark certainly broke the ice.

The Conference proved to be a most enjoyable occasion. It was an extreme pleasure for us to have the companionship and the warm friendship of this most enlightened Brother Freemason. On the final day of the conference Dr. Tyler informed us that modern society was in danger of losing the spirit of community. To illustrate this, he stated, that if it was possible for him to accompany one of us back home to our own neighbourhood, he would wager a little game with us. He boasted that he would make money on the deal. He said he would pay us fifty cents for every neighbour we were able to name on the block, starting with those on either side of us. On the other hand, he said he would charge us twenty-five cents for every neighbour we could not name. With sadness in his voice, he confessed that he, himself, would not be able to pass this test. Dr. Tyler stated, that when he first moved to his present residence in Brandon, he very quickly learned the name of, and formed a friendship with most of the neighbours in his street. He said, that in just a dozen short years the neighbourhood had changed, and that he scarcely knew the neighbours on either side of him.

What has happened to modern society, and what is continuing to happen? To quote Michael Ingham, "The fact is that many North American citizens do not experience community as powerfully or as clearly as many of the world's poor and oppressed people. There are many reasons for this. One is that we have lost the experience of community. Members of industrial and technological economies no longer live in communities. We live in societies. The distinction is important. Communities are closely knit together. People are bound by common values and shared traditions. Communities conserve social relationships and generate a mentality of inter-connectedness. People who live in communities feel a strong sense of belonging. They have a strong communal identity, and do not experience themselves primarily as isolated individuals

Societies, on the other hand, are diverse, scattered and pluralistic. They have few common values or shared traditions. People in large urban centres are bound together not by shared values but by shared interests, usually economic ones. Societies by their very nature tend to promote individualism, the

quest for personal success and happiness. By promoting self-interest they weaken identity. It is not commonplace to observe that in the middle of vast modern societies people are experiencing a loss of themselves and their roots. Consequently, there has arisen a new search for community.

1.

People who have grown up in communities tend to have a communal outlook. That is, they see the world as a world of relationships, an inter-dependent network of people all connected with one another. They experience themselves as part of this whole. People shaped by life in societies tend to see the world as disconnected and diverse. They experience it as a place to be exploited, as a field of opportunity. Society dwellers are accustomed to think in competitive terms, to ask how they can gain maximum advantage from the situation. Success and happiness in this mentality are viewed in economic terms. We define ourselves by what we possess.

The disturbing thing to many of us is that just when we could have been heading towards global community, we are, in fact, heading towards global society. Again; there is an important distinction. There are many examples of global society mentality. One of them can be seen, for instance, in the Fraser Institute. The Fraser Institute asks us to see the world as a marketplace, a field of opportunity where great economic benefits are to be gained. Those who adapt to the conditions of the market will be allowed to do well. Those who do not will become poor and must not be rescued because if they are, they will not adapt. The market must determine how people are to behave. If left to itself it will bring us a high standard of living. This philosophy is what we used to call Social Darwinism. It proposes the survival of the economic fittest, and pictures people as cast in essentially competitive relationships with one another.

"The Greek word for community is 'koinonia' . It is a very rich word, suggesting a strong sense of belonging to one another and to God. It conveys an image of harmony and reconciliation, of people living in peace and justice in faithfulness to the whole community and to God the Creator." (End of quote).

But where does Freemasonry come into all this? It is my sincere belief that Freemasonry is one of the strongest remaining bastions that stands against the inroads and assaults which threaten and weaken community. It, therefore, should be our duty, and certainly, very much to our interest and welfare, to strengthen and bolster our beloved Order against the insidious apathy which exists in the world today. It is an apathy that breeds in the lives and actions of many people, a lack of interest in and a lack of caring for the welfare of others.

But how are we to accomplish the task of strengthening our Freemasonry and furthering its benign effect on community? Perhaps one of the best answers to that question is, to encourage good Masonic habits, particularly that of frequent attendance at lodge meetings.

Habits, bad and good, how they matter! Yes, for habit is a great moral force, and like all else in the moral universe is subject to certain laws. Look at two of these:

I. Habit diminishes feeling and increases activity. Many illustrations are ready to hand. For example the musician. At first all sorts of very active feelings assail,--dislike of the grind of practice, inability to use fingers deftly, a slow laboured activity of body and mind; then by practice, conquest. The feeling of hindrance falls away. Spontaneity results, brilliance

of execution follows. Take a department of life, from the artisan to the politician or the thinker, and this rule applies.

2. Habit tends to become permanent, and to exclude the formation of other habits. Observe, for example, how you hold your pen or pencil in writing. You may or may not do it awkwardly, but you find it very difficult to do it in any other way. So it is with the major portion of our acts. Habit becomes second nature. We all tend to do things at a certain time in a certain way and do them almost, if not quite, unconsciously, and only by a severe effort of will can we change the habit.

Apply these laws in the moral realm. Here, as elsewhere, all sorts of hindering feelings arise. It is not easy to reach spontaneity; indeed it is very hard to qualify as a saint. The inertia of the body, the lure of temptation, the longing for the prizes of this world, the lust of the eye and the pride of life, all these tend to make us shirk our daily, hourly, duty and practice. Yet unless the mind is gradually

2.  
exercised in thinking worthy thoughts, in doing the things that earn approbation, we cannot hope to be as our Masonic peers would have us to be. Practicing Freemasons are the world's great need; Freemasons by habit. Hence the need for unbroken regularity in all those overt acts which express the Freemason's desire to extend his good works into community. Regular attendance at lodge is not the stupid and useless thing some imagine it to be; it is sound common sense.

Man is an instinctive being. We all know we possess the instincts of 'self-preservation, acquisitiveness, self-indulgence, the instinct of racial preservation. We also know we have the herd instinct which urges us to associate with groups of our fellow men and build society; but may we, with equal certainty, say man possesses a community instinct? His history and evidence of pre-history, such as we find in the various strata of the earth, proclaim that community, in some sort, is as old as prehistoric man, and if we may not call that which thus expressed itself an instinct, it nevertheless proclaims man to be a communal creature. There is evidently an element in him, a constituent of his spiritual being, which seems to be as native to his constitution as any instinct we may name; an original element that causes him to crave the warmth and benefits of community. Further we find, as we turn the pages of his history, that the perversion of this element has wrought great harm to mankind, whereas tightly directed, we observe it has brought incalculable blessings to him. Is it so very different today? At bottom, is not much of the conflict of life as we know it, a conflict between true values of community and a lack of those values? A conflict of warring values and our appreciation of and attitude towards them?

The great question every heart must settle for itself is this: What do I most sincerely value? What is most precious to me? Is it money and the things money can buy? Is it prestige? Is it power? Is it ease and comfort - self-indulgence? Or is it moral character and spiritual well-being? How do I really appraise life? Is truth more precious to me than riches? The good of greater worth than opulence? Beauty of soul more to be prized than my progress in society? What do I seek, think about, strive for? What is the answer? Whatever it may be, - that is what I worship, - that is my God.

\*\*\*\*\*