

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY OF INDIVIDUAL LODGES

This Short Talk Bulletin is adapted from a challenging paper given at the Southwestern Masonic Conference in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1974, by Brother Marvin L. Anderson when he was Deputy Grand Master, Arizona.

It was said long ago, and has been repeated many times, that to solve a problem, that problem must first be defined. To correct any situation, we must be aware of the situation as it exists.

Our Masonry, as we now practice it, is called "Speculative." According to Bernard Jones: "Freemasonry's Guide and Compendium," "To speculate is to take a view of anything with the mind; to consider anything mentally." It comes from the Latin which means, 'I see' or 'I look,' and from the Latin we have several other words, such as spectacle, spectator. In the 17th century meaning of the word, anyone who was given to contemplation, to thoughtfulness, was indulging in speculation. The speculative man was the idealist, not the man of fact and practice.

Speculative Masonry arose to distinguish 17th century Masons from operative or stonemasons. Most 20th century men do not want to be spectators within their organization. Speculative is a descriptive word in an historical sense, but the concept of tranquil contemplation is not helpful today to encourage Craft Masonry to be active.

J. Fred Latham (PGM, Oklahoma) said: "Some 260 years ago the foundation for the present day structure was 'poured.' For the first fifty years our Brethren cut and tried, fitted and revised, adopted and discarded many ideas and procedures. Since that time, some 200 years, we have, more or less, let things drift. Our forefathers of the revolutionary days were extremely active in public affairs and accomplished much outside the lodge room. It would appear that Freemasonry has resigned itself to those accomplishments and is unwilling to do much thinking of our own."

"We, of the present day, need to bestir ourselves and begin to do something besides expressing lovely platitudes and referring to ancient accomplishments. They were great and we should not forget them. On the other hand, we should use their accomplishments as incentives to attain greater things in this age. We should try to do as much under present day conditions as they. That would give us a real job."

We do owe a civic duty as Masons. Most Worshipful Brother J. Clay Thrash, stated: "Masonry's role is self-evident. Its work is done when it has, un-obstrusively, in the dissemination of its precepts, and by example of its brotherhood, fitted people for a sound, well informed citizenship, capable of electing responsible representatives of government 'for the people, of the people, and by the people!'"

To take this further, Masonry is the system of brotherhood, but it is also the system of order, and if order is not enforced, love and peace and harmony will be of little avail. Paul the Apostle called for submission even to a pagan government, because it was trying to promote some kind of harmony in a pagan world. This demand is still with us, for any power that brings order out of chaos is working in the name of the Supreme Architect of the Universe.

J. Lewis Monical (PGM, Arizona) told us: "If we are to regain the stature of former years, we must move Masonry out of the lodge room and make it a powerful, constructive influence in community, state, national and international affairs. The Masonic body, as such cannot act, but we as individuals and Masons, can certainly do our part. We must speak out through the public platform and the public press. We must assume a positive attitude in public affairs. Hopefully, such action will provide a powerful modern awakening for Masonry today. The time is coming, it may even be here, when societies like ours must come out in the open with a public declaration of aims so all men may see in all this political confusion that there is one body with strong and worthy ideals."

In the first degree, we are charged to be true to our government and just to our country. From Morals and Dogma we are told: "This degree teaches us that no free government can long endure, when the people cease to select for their magistrates the best and the wisest of their statesmen; when, passing these by, they permit factions or sordid interests to select for them the small, the low, the ignoble and the obscure, and into such hands commit the country's destinies. There is, after all, a 'divine right' to govern; and it is vested to the ablest, wisest, best, of every nation.

"A democratic government undoubtedly has its defects, because it is made and administered by men, and not by the Wise Gods. It cannot be concise and sharp, like the despotic. When its ire is aroused it develops its latent strength, and the sturdiest rebel trembles. But its habitual domestic role is tolerant, patient, and indecisive. Men are brought together, first to differ, then to agree. Affirmation, negation, discussion, solution; these are the means of attaining truth."

Our present government is seen by many to be crumbling into ruin, It has lost much of its effectiveness because Americans have lost trust in it. The crisis has been long in the making. Long before the present flagrant corruption and moral bankruptcy in our government, it was axiomatic with sophisticated citizens that first rate people seldom make a career of politics.

Because we have entrusted civil government to men of mediocre ability and shabby morality, we now have the reverse of what we want, yet we're "asking for it" by our cynicism.

This nation has reached a point in distrust of government beyond which it must not let itself drift apathetically any longer. We now have two apparent options: (A) Let "government of the people, by the people and for the people" run right on down the drain; or (B) take a full turnabout and return to the kind of government our forefathers designed for us.

If the choice is Option A, there will be a time of anarchy and chaos. Then the "Savior of the Republic" will ride up to the "rescue. " Government will be restored with a vengeance, and it will

be for the people, but not of and by them. Nations drift into despotism and dictatorship. As Chesterton said: "A despotism is a tired democracy."

If the choice is Option B, it will be up to Masonry, the church, and other institutions which influence the public mind to reeducate the nation about the worth and dignity of public service in government. It is a truism and a notorious fact that a nation gets the kind of political leaders it deserves; and its deserts are determined by its expectations and demands. If we expect third rate people and demand nothing better, that's what we get. If what we get in the end is Option A, it will be because in that fleeting moment, when we were still free to choose, we wrung our hands and said: "Well, that is politics. It's a dirty game, so we have to put up with the dirty people who play it for the rest of us. Who wants a saint in the White House? "

Masons today, especially the younger ones, desire to act together as a Fraternity, not as individuals only. We have fostered this idea in DeMolay and continued it in our own Craft. Historically, Masonry steers a wide path from involvement as a Fraternity, but as individuals, we do the Fraternity a great disservice if we do not involve ourselves in the task of bettering our schools, our community and our government.

This stance of un-involvement is sometimes unpopular, unattractive and perhaps in some ways accounts for our decline in membership, and NPD suspensions. We might also consider this as a partial reason for nonattendance in Blue Lodges because of increasing commitments to appendant bodies of Masonry. Our Craft traditionally prevents the sponsoring of Boy Scouts and other good works which the member can do in our other Masonic organizations.

We return to the definition of the problem. How can our beloved Craft find its way out of this predicament without radical change? Radical change is not desirable, nor is it necessary.

Nothing forbids the members of the Craft from joining others within the Masonic family to act in civic duties. From Morals and Dogma again: "Masonry is action and not inertness. It requires its initiates to work, actively and earnestly, for the benefit of their Brethren, their country, and mankind. It is the patron of the oppressed, as it is the comforter and consoler of the unfortunate and wretched.... It is the advocate of the common people in those things which concern the best interest of mankind.... Its fidelity to its mission will be accurately evidenced by the extent of the efforts it employs, and the means it sets on foot, to improve the people at large and to better their condition. "

Specifically, what can we do? Our real civic responsibility is to convince the world by our actions that we are Masons. We should do those things which provide leadership in improving the physical, moral and emotional status of our environment. We should sit in on school-board meetings, announce our support of well-qualified and fair-minded candidates for public office. We should support community drives for blood banks, traffic safety and community beautification. We should support our DeMolay, Rainbow, and Job's Daughters, not only with advice and money, but with our presence.

In fine, we should provide, with our actions, the kind of a public image which the whole world can admire and will wish to emulate . Most Worshipful Brother Marvin E. Anderson's address is P.O. Box 217, Coolidge, AZ 85228.