

FREEMASONRY'S FUTURE

The following Short Talk Bulletin was adapted from a paper presented by R. W. Brother Allan D. Wakeham at the District Grand Lodge of North Queensland in July of 1989. Although speaking to an Australian audience, Brother Wakeham has identified issues common to all of Freemasonry. His generous use of quotes interspersed with his own thoughts presents a challenging, forceful and thought-provoking paper. --Editor

From his excellent address "Masonry in the Modern World" Brother the Very Reverend Dean J. O. Rymer, Dean of Auckland, New Zealand said:

"Because the world is modern, it does not follow that it is the best conceivable world that there could be. To my mind it is not. Nevertheless, we have to recognize that nothing stands still. We live in a world of change. If all aspects of life were altered we would repeat mistakes in every generation. There are some values that will be permanent, whatever changes happen in societies. It is these values that we must preserve, whether we are the Church or civic authorities or Freemasonry.

It is for Freemasonry to discover in its own self- understanding that which we must never surrender. Belief in God is necessary for any civilization to continue. High moral standards accepted by a community are necessary if people are to live together. The respect for the value of individual persons is obligatory if individuals are to realize their potential. It is the commitment to these beliefs and values that Freemasonry must always uphold.

It is vital too that the prospective candidate knows what sort of society he is entering before he signs on the dotted line.

If we ourselves cannot see in our organization a purpose in the community which is wider than our internal aims then we will never draw into our ranks the type of men we need, neither will we be able to convince the world outside that it is an organization which has a beneficial influence on the affairs of the community at large.

Freemasonry has a place in the future by providing an interest for that increasing number of early retired men. 65 years is no longer the bench mark for retirement--in many instances it is happening ten years earlier.

Of equal importance is the need to recognize that the future of Freemasonry rests with younger men. If effective changes are to be made, decisions must be made by the younger person who holds a stake in the future rather than the older person nearing retirement from work and business activities.

The experience of age has an important place in our leadership but it must not be allowed to dominate and exclude or deter youth."

Another excellent address "Freemasonry Tomorrow" by W. Brother Stanley Mussared comes to us from the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and I'd like to reiterate some of his remarks.

"One hundred years from now, in the year 2088, will Freemasonry be a flourishing, and cherished part of human society? The answer to this question depends to a large extent upon the quality of Freemasons living in 1988. It will depend upon the depth of our thinking. It will be determined by the nature of our perceptions and insights about our broader society, about Freemasonry, and about the relationship between the two.

The immediate years ahead will be more challenging than those of the past. Superficial thinking, so common in our society, will not provide us with the necessary course of action. For the extent to which Freemasonry is truly able to identify real needs, and to align itself to those needs, is the extent to which it will endure into the future. Herein may lie a sense of purpose--a sense of purpose which can provide renewed vigour and energy for individual Freemasons, for lodges, and for the Masonic movement as a whole.

Freemasonry has a solid foundation in unchanging principles, it can be a marvelous training ground in ethical sensitivity, but its effectiveness and its future, will be hindered if it turns its searchlight exclusively on itself, and neglects a study of that larger society which exists outside the lodge room."

According to Hugh Mackay writing in the Sydney Morning Herald, "There is hardly a convention or an institution of Australian life which has not been challenged by the extraordinary rate of economic, social, cultural, political and technological change which has hit us, and has gone on hitting us, during the 70's and 80's.

What are some of the elements in this transformed society that may have an important relationship to Freemasonry? Our sociologists are increasingly drawing our attention to the emotional insecurity present in Australian society. They are pointing to the breakdown of vital support systems, especially the family, community, and friendship. Only about 1/4 of the nation's children are being raised in stable two parent families with access to grandparents and kinfolk. The divorce rate not long ago touched the level of 200 couples in every 1000. Loneliness, isolation and an obsession with privacy have become characteristic of life, especially in the cities. We are told that radio is re-emerging as the dominant mass medium partly because it offers the therapy of companionship to an increasingly lonely and anxious society."

Ross Conway, a Melbourne clinical psychologist, suggests that contemporary Australians are so insecure, that we have a fear of acknowledging or revealing our real concerns. Many of us have become expert in 'transpersonal defence'. This means that we are using devices such as cars, sporting crazes, TV and poker machines, to deflect attention away from the lack of true warmth and feeling in our souls and in our relationships with others."

How many of us in Australian society are aware of our potential as human beings? Are we interested in making the effort to develop that potential? Do we look on ourselves as pilgrims with a clear sense of purpose and firm spiritual foundations? The evidence suggests that for

many contemporary Australians such a vision of life is laughable. Rather, these modern times are those of the lowest common denominator where the question "What can we get away with?" is being asked in all aspects of life. The cult of the individual, where self regulation and self-seeking replaces social dictates, has become increasingly prominent. Tribal allegiance is becoming subservient to the selfish pursuits of the individual.

At this very point many Australians, especially young Australians, should be asking--How can you expect me to have such a spiritual vision of life? How can you expect my spirit not to be impoverished when in addition to all the changes and social effects described earlier, I see around me high unemployment rates, including teenage unemployment of about 10%, commercialized sexuality, gaudy consumerism where I am often implored to buy goods that I do not need, a constant loss of life in news telecasts every night. How can I maintain a lofty vision of life when any vision I have is being battered by these types of social forces? How can I have feelings which are capable of being inspired when my cynicism has been strengthened by the emotional poverty I observe in my social environment?

Such questions are surely a comment on our modern society. But there are people, including young people, who are very much aware of these social aspects but they make this additional point. Society may have made me cynical, but deep inside I feel the beginnings of a vision. My life would be a pilgrim's journey, but who will help me withstand society's battering ram? Who can assist me to make that spark of idealism grow into the bright flame of which it is capable? Such people are surely asking that all those institutions which are concerned with values should stand up and be counted. Are they saying--Masonry where are you?

Sir Zelman Cowan in an address to Grand Lodge in 1982 suggested that a democratic society can respond to the problems which technology brings in its wake by insisting that the whole instructional process be permeated with a concern for values. Science and Technology may create a wasteland--not because science and technology are bad--but because they tell us little about values."

M. W. Brother Harold Coates said in February, 1985, "It is essential for young people in our community to know that they have Freemasonry's understanding, help, encouragement and moral support. Unless young people are properly influenced and guided there are no grounds for hope, for Freemasonry, for freedom, for democracy, for a standard of conduct consistent with our Masonic teachings."

The challenge to Freemasonry comes in how it translates its values for its members, and for the broader community, especially the younger members of that community. The challenge comes in HOW it can help people to overcome the poverty of vision and the poverty of relationships outlined earlier. If Masonry can find ways of doing this its future is assured.