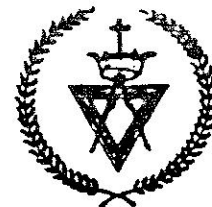


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What it Wrong With Masonry?

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Looking at several Fraternal Reviews from several Grand Lodges throughout North America, which I have in my file I found the following problems which were, by the way, very similar, at least at the close of the last century as they are today.

Unauthorized use of rituals, references to Masonic Homes, per capita, taxes, Reports from Grievance Committees, problems concerning non-payment of dues (what to do to stop this trend), what should be the penalty for failure to pay (suspension, removal from the records, or ?).

I finally came to the conclusion, that by and large the Reports of the various Grand Lodges a century ago were not drastically different from those written today. Many of the problems and concerns of 90 to 100 years ago, are the concerns of the Grand Lodges today. Perhaps the magnitude of the problems are not quite the same, perhaps the locale of the problems have changed.

Then, if we were to draw a picture of Freemasonry, in broad strokes only, the picture could reasonably well substitute for today's picture. Most of Freemasonry's problems then, and now, result from the nature of man and his basic failings. But this is not unexpected.

If one were to scan the newspapers of the 1890's we would find basically the same news items in print as today: murder, robbery, vandalism, extortion, crimes of passion, narcotics, drunkenness, forgery, arson, corruption in public life or office, a search for a higher standard through technological research and/or progress.

Actually, many of the Biblical stories recount the same type of behaviour, a behaviour reported by

other writers who predated the Bible by many centuries.

Man's basic nature has changed little from that of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel. His environment and surroundings have changed continuously and dramatically, but the animal remains almost a carbon copy, at least psychologically or in behaviour.

Finally, we come to the question at hand, "Is Freemasonry prepared to serve man in the new century ahead?"

Let us ask ourselves, "What will we find in the new century ahead?"

First, a continuing technological advance with the following striking advances, and even more:

(a) In the field of communications, the ability to communicate via thought transference will be developed. We call it, for the lack of better words, ESP or mental telepathy. In the next century, it will include, not only personal one-on-one communication with Uncle Joe in St. Louis, but mass communication as well.

(b) In the field of transportation, we will easily travel at speeds approaching, or even exceeding that of light. Personal "energy packs" for local airborne transportation will be common. It will probably be possible near the end of the next century to transport objects (and perhaps people) by first converting them (or it) to "energy waves" and then reconstructing the object at the final terminal by means of a sophisticated computer controlled reconstruction apparatus. I call this the Star Trek Syndrome.

(c) Energy will no longer be transmitted by wire, pipe or conduit, but, rather, by solar wave. Solar energy will have come and gone as an economical energy source, likewise gravitational energy. The exotic energy sources that will be in vogue are too

fantastic to even guess at in terms of today's technology.

(d) We will again receive visitors to our planet from outer space, perhaps from our galaxy, perhaps from beyond. In turn, we will be sending expeditions regularly to other planets. We will have long ago colonized the moon (Lunar Lodge No. 1?) and countless space satellites will circle our globe. I will not comment at length on the word "again" in the first sentence other than to say it means what it says - a repeat occurrence of an event that has already taken place.

(e) Probably the most dramatic progress will occur in the field of medicine. During the next century, almost any organ will be capable of transplant; not only transplant, but "manufacture" as well. Human bodies will be reconstructed much as we now reconstruct or remanufacture automobile parts. We will know a great deal more about the power of the body to regenerate lost parts. The span of life will be greatly extended with little aging process accompanying it. As a result, we will be faced with the moral problem of who will, and who will not, be permitted to continue on this planet, which, by the way, will be most certainly under the control of one government, if for no other reason than to deal effectively with other worlds.

The most striking development of all to occur in the field of medicine, and one that will have the greatest effect on Freemasonry, will be one of the greatest advances that are just over the horizon in man's ability to understand and to alter the human brain, and hence, to control the human personality.

Here, properly used, will be man's first (?) capability of "programming" himself. We say "first" but will not really be a first, for each of us has had the capability to live in God's image, but few choose to make the necessary sacrifices to do so, to practice the self discipline required to lead a moral life.

What we should, therefore, say is that now man will have the first easy way to program himself, to become near-perfect. Unless our basic human

imperfection again gets in our way and in our greed we program our fellow man for greater lust, greater personal gain, for greater material gain, we stand to make a significant improvement in man's development.

We might well see in the coming century the emergence of man's capacity to affect his behaviour in a positive direction, either through surgery, chemistry, or even, controlled breeding; probably a combination of the first two.

We don't think that we, as Freemasons, are "ready" for this today, any more than any group is "ready". In fact, many of us probably aren't ready to believe that the possibility of this exists.

As Freemasons, however, we can adapt with time and be ready probably to serve man's needs in the short-term scale, just as we have done successfully for the past 270 years.

And what are man's needs which cause him to seek Masonry?

- A need to be appreciated and respected
- A need to be associated with a status group
- A need for companionship
- A need to be "needed"

These are only a few reasons, and not dissimilar from the reasons man joins any other voluntary group. So long as Freemasonry offers an opportunity for an individual to gain the self-respect of his peers, and, at the same time, offers him an opportunity to be a contributing part of the group, Freemasonry will survive and will continue to serve.

Freemasonry will, however, have to be a little like a hockey team on any given Saturday. While no great team knows precisely what it will face this Saturday, or next Saturday (and certainly not in the next century), it meets each game, in its turn, scouting the opposition as thoroughly as it can, coaching its players to the best of their abilities, stressing a well-balanced offence "game plan", and then, once in the game, remaining alert to the opposition and receptive to changes.

So with Freemasonry, we must:

- Scout the opposition (man's disinclination to become a Mason, or a member's potential to become a "drop out", active antagonism by outside groups, etc.). How do we

Knights Templars
Heretics of the 14th Century

by V. Bro. R. Jack Meek
Council of 9 Muses

answer a man's needs to make him want to become a member, and to remain in good standing?

- Coach the players (members) to become the best of the abilities. This means to educate the members, stress good ritual, demand attractive temples (not halls). Halls are not part of our ancient landmarks, King Solomon's Temple etc., admit only respected members. We need to make Masonic membership "sought after" rather than "thrust upon one". Keep the standards high, get the members involved, develop leaders, and never put a man down when he tries to the best of his abilities, rather cheer him along the path with brotherly love.

- Develop a well-balanced offence and rugged defence. In other words, develop a program that will permit Freemasonry to meet the needs it can and should meet, still retaining its' basic fundamentals that characterize us as Freemasons.

- Finally, "hang loose", creatively respond to change within our basically accepted framework so to avoid vacillating to every whim and wind, and like a chameleon, change into something entirely and totally unrecognizable.

"But", you say, "isn't this what essentially Freemasonry has been doing for the last 270 years?"

To which we could answer "yes", and with a pretty good record of achievement. Freemasonry has weathered many a storm. It has been effective in adapting itself, within reason, to changing times, still retaining almost all of its' basic fundamental stones and ancient charges intact.

And with dedication, determination, self-denial and self-discipline, there is no reason why Freemasonry cannot continue to field a winning team at any given time.

The team we have today might not be able to win the game played in the year 2088, but it will acquit itself with glory this year.

And, by taking each year in turn, we will be ready to take the field, as a whole team, in the year 2088.

Think about it Brethren!

In the Second Historical lecture of the Order of the Temple, we are told that the Grand Master and many of his Knights were seized in the House of the Temple and thrown into prison by order of King Phillip of France and his subservient ally, Pope Clement V.

"Many were put to torture to force them to confess crimes of which they were innocent." These crimes were lumped together as heresy. Furthermore, the Templars were very wealthy.

The dictionary defines heresy as 'Departure from what is held to be true doctrine, especially when such opinions lead to a division in the Christian church.' The usual fate of heretics was to be burned at the stake, and this was carried out in Paris to the last man - who was Jacques deMoley. His martyrdom on March 18, 1314, was the end of the Order of the Temple.

Christianity has taken many paths during the 1990 years or more of its existence. One of the first variants was a Third Century thinker named Mani, from whom the Manichaeian philosophy persisted for several centuries. He was a Christian, but borrowed from various Oriental faiths, particularly Babylonian and Zoroastrian sources. Many held that Adam, Noah, Abraham, Zoroaster, and Buddha were prophets who had been sent into the world by God. Christ also was a prophet - not as the historical Jesus but as a contemporaneous person, - a phantom. He contended that Jesus neither suffered nor died. The doctrines of Mani, in part, were adopted by many so-called heretical Christian sects.

The principal opponent to this heresy was St. Augustine who, oddly enough, had been a disciple of Mani for some ten years, before his conversion to orthodox Christianity. The key word here is 'orthodox'; a word derived from the Greek orthostraight, and doxa - opinion.

It was Thomas Huxley, the brilliant champion of Darwin's Theory of Evolution, who said: "It is the customary fate of new truths to begin as heresies, and to end as supersti-

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tions." And from my notes in Philosophy 200, I have this directive from St. Ignatius of Loyola, who wrote, in his Spiritual Exercises: "We should always be prepared, so as never to err, to believe that what I see as white, is black, if the hierarchical church defines it thus." All knowledge does not involve truth. 'Credo quia absurdum' - I believe it because it is absurd.

The Roman church with the Pope as its fountainhead established what was orthodox and what was unacceptable. Various Popes during the Middle Ages would sometimes denounce a cherished belief, or declare acceptable thoughts that would be cause for excommunication or the stake a century earlier.

Two large groups of heretics were the Cathars and the Albigensians. Sometimes it is difficult for us today to distinguish one from the other. The Cathars denied The Trinity; Christ had no real existence, he was not truly born of Mary. He didn't eat, nor suffer, nor rise from the dead nor ascend into heaven. There is no purgatory, nor resurrection of the body. The Albigensians were also heretics and in many ways were very similar to the Cathars. Both were liquidated by the church.

We tend to be somewhat amused at the theological controversies centuries ago, when men argued interminably about how many angels could stand on the head of a pin. But quibbles go on to this day - as one is reminded by a recent dispute between two factions as to whether Jesus laughed!

Religious enthusiasm during the Middle Ages was easy enough to arouse but difficult to control. Many were in such movements for personal gain only. This is typified by the strong mercenary attitudes of the Genoese and the Venetians during the Crusades, who obtained a monopoly in transporting and supplying the Christian armies.

A good example of religious enthusiasm gone awry is the Children's Crusade. Actually there were two of them, both originating in the year 1212. One started in Cologne when a 10-year old boy, Nicholas, preached a Crusade of Love, and he was followed by some 20,000 boys and girls. The other started at the same time in France. Some of the more perceiving clergy tried their best to stop them,

but Pope Innocent III was deeply affected, and approved both groups. Most of the boys were sold into slavery in the eastern Mediterranean. Most of the girls were sold into prostitution. Only a handful returned. A noted historian, K. Setton, in his "History of the Crusades" remarks: "The Children's Crusade is interpreted as an expression of the Medieval Child Cult, related to such movements as that of the child-builders of churches, bridges, and associated in contemporary minds with the now powerfully developed feast of the Holy Innocents. In effect, it becomes a sacrificial rite, by which the new innocents offer themselves for the salvation of Christendom."

The First, Second, and Third Crusades all took place in the 12th century, one which is considered by modern historians as perhaps the most 'open' century in recorded history. Women, and Jews, the perennial second-class citizens of society, were accorded equality - more or less with the average man. But it didn't last long, and in the later Middle Ages, right after the Crusades, both were relegated to the kitchen and the ghetto. The world of men became narrow and nasty, religion was a matter of believing everything you were told, - Or Else! Witch-hunting didn't even need a hunting licence. The Western church became increasingly narrow-minded and intolerant. Christian and Moslem did quite a bit of sparring the Mediterranean but there was no organized warfare between them.

Sometimes repression went too far during the Medieval Period, and the safety-valve blew. Today we enjoy a few of those hard-earned privileges such as constitutional monarchy, trial by jury, parliament, and universities. But thousands, nay - tens of thousands of righteous God-fearing men laid down their lives for their beliefs. Now, at last, the smoke from the fire of religious intolerance has blown away, at least in our own culture, and man is free to worship as he will.