

WALoR 1992 TRANSACTIONS Vol.42 No.02.2

THE RELEVANCE OF FREEMASONRY TO SOCIETY

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Worshipful Master and Brethren.

We take up the historic story of THE RELEVANCE OF FREEMASONRY TO SOCIETY from roughly the time of the end of the Dark Ages. We note that at that time, what we call Freemasonry today, did not exist as such.

Again at that time a deep recession was ending and Craft Masons were in demand as architects, engineers, builders, tradesmen and artificers required to build the, now in fashion, Gothic cathedrals, monasteries, forts, great walls, country homes and castles. We will note the relevance of these Craft Mason Guilds and Companies to the English Society generally.

We will see how the landed Lords and Gentry and the Ecclesiastics built bridges of friendship with the Craft Master Masons and that they then quickly came to meeting with them in the local taverns to enjoy a beer and share their insights.

We will plunge through changes to the Craft Masons' Guilds to another period of unemployment and religious and political disenchantment and much speculation over the future form the society should take.

We will observe the dialogue between the lords of the land, the newly developing social philosophy of the masons and the ecumenical support of some churchmen such as the Rev Dr. Anderson and the Rev Desaguliers.

In other words, we will review the 900 years from say 1100 A.D. and, I hope, each decide 'THE RELEVANCE OF FREEMASONRY TO SOCIETY'.

We will look at the basic fears facing the leaders of Freemasonry today, noting that they work, administratively, not to offend the Antient Charges or the Landmarks of the Craft.

We will remind ourselves of how our forefathers DISPLAYED AND IMMORTALIZED their craft arts by not only making cathedrals their Master's Pieces, but by bequeathing them to society beyond their time, reminding ourselves of the size and shape of the task we have entered into AS SYMBOLIC, SPECULATIVE BUILDERS within society.

As our final thought, we will note that we also live in a complex political and religious society that uses the adversarial, opposition method of government, a method that has unfortunately tended to creep into modern Lodge habit, developing the 'them and us' mentality, while the Royal Art of Freemasonry teaches that we live in love by plumb rule, level and square toward each other, our family and society generally.

I conclude this lecture by claiming that this Western Australian Lodge of Research is in a position of advantage. We are those equipped to be the exemplars of the Royal Art; we have the records of the antient story and the responsibility to learn, to teach, to interpret, to motivate and display "THE RELEVANCE OF FREEMASONRY TO SOCIETY".

BACKGROUND TO A NEW SOCIETY

At the top of English society, in the twelfth century, was the King, his Court, the Dukes, Earls and Knights followed by the Sheriffs and the Clergy.

Land ownership was the King's, won and held by constant battles with the neighbours. The victors, who ruled for usually a short time, were nevertheless regarded as the 'upper classes'. The army, in-service staff and all trades people, including the vast variety of mason craftsmen, were known as the 'lower classes'.

It is important to recognise the difference between these two groups because that social difference became, in many ways, the catalyst that caused the development of Speculative Freemasonry, the death of feudalism and the birth of democracy.

You know how the upper classes, the landed gentry, lived in idle luxury produced by the craft peasant lower classes. They were kept subjugated in poverty and even slavery under the feudal system. But note; the situation that looked like a cruel disadvantage was that which was their making and what appeared to be an utopian advantage to the lords was their undoing. You see, while the lords of the land idled away their lives, the peasants were doing their schoolwork. They were working the soil and its produce; daily in touch with the elements of the earth. They knew the secrets of the earth and its fruit; so much so that they became SKILLED, even SCIENTIFIC, CRAFTSMEN and co-workers with the natural forces of God's creative universe.

The Masters of the Craft were in constant demand to fix and make everything including the problem of the castle plumbing which no lord would know of the practicalities. Nothing was built or maintained but by the men of the Crafts. Even the clergy, who had tried to develop themselves as the intelligentsia of all men, envied the arts and sciences of the peasant craft masons. Priests and Brothers of the church travelled from Como in Italy to join English Craft Lodges to learn the arts.

It was the in-service English nanny who educated the very young within the castle homes of the lords of the land and it was the tradesmen who ran the apprentice school for craftsmen. Is this or is this not a relevance to Society? The lower farm classes produced the income for the landed gentry; then the gentry employed other craftsmen as architects, engineers, builders, masons etc. You know the story, I am sure.

The clergy wrestled to set themselves up above the kings. They wanted to create a theocracy, but the materialistic kings offered them a purse and simply used them to bolster a system that they wanted to look as if it was divinely ordained. It was seen as a sham approving the rich man's hedonistic way of life and Henry the Eighth especially demonstrated this.

The peasant craftsmen were church attenders, firstly because of royal decree and secondly because many were genuine humble believers in the God they found in nature and the Church, both Deistic and Theistic. The God of the natural world first, because that was the level they lived at, the area of the heart and then the doctrinal, theological, cerebral system of the catechism that was imposed by the preaching, proselytizing church.

From earliest times the trades people themselves, in their associations, demanded, amongst other proofs, that men declare their faith in one God. This was not hard for the workers in the raw materials of the earth. They found intelligence in nature plus that they themselves were intelligent and therefore co-workers with nature, with God. Remember that at this time there was general illiteracy; there was no such thing as a Bible; printing machines had yet to be invented. The people, generally, were quite illiterate but they had a rapport with nature's laws and those were the workings of the Lord of Life.

There came the peasants' revolt in the fourteenth century during which the lower classes asserted themselves for better pay and conditions. Printing came, then the Reformation. King Henry released the masons from the obligatory church attendance and the previous demand that they have patron saints in each organisation. The lords of the land grew tired of funding great cathedral building programmes and besides the Gothic style was now out of fashion.

So many cathedrals had been built because the clergy persuaded the local lords, who provided the money, that the Lord of All was about to come and they had to have a great house,

better than anyone else's, in which to receive Him. So unemployment was again settling upon the lower classes. But, by now, many craft masons were a new middle class because they had experienced three hundred years of good employment.

BRIDGES OF FRIENDSHIP HAD BEEN BUILT

Because the church and its benefactors, the lords of the land, employed all the professional and trades people, a two-way line of communication had developed and was apparently enjoyed. The upper classes had come to appreciate the arts and skills of the workers and we imagine them often discussing how the church steeple was going to be built taller than their neighbour's and not fall down, as many did.

The London Company of Masons, who we see as a central trade union office, enjoyed the privileges extended to their members by the ruling classes. So when the busy round of employment dried up, both parties would meet at the local tavern, in a private room apart from the rowdy rabble, to discuss serious social issues affecting them all and those especially who were affected by the politics and religious struggles of the day.

Clerics met with them to keep the finger on the pulse of what might be current developments. Remember that many clerics had joined the closed shop membership of the workers' Guilds, many of which were to become the masons' lodges; 'lodge' meaning simply a gathering of people, but a new element was developing.

As a group, they were heartily sick of what was going on in Church and State. Plots were the order of the day with the assassination of kings and archbishops constantly being plotted. The common people and now those princes and priests who had joined the Lodge, were utterly sick and tired of the church religion and politics of those days and years. Their tavern meetings were a refreshing change, a relief from the stresses of everyday life. They developed fraternal fellowship and quickly ran to excesses in eating and drinking as a reaction (See the Hogarth pictures). They came to ban any discussion of religion or politics. They wanted placidly to recognise that all men are created by one God and are therefore brothers, whatever their class or calling in life.

Further to this, the masons had developed their counterpoint philosophy of life. Instead of embroiling themselves in the theology of the church they, being by experience naturally in accord with the rules and laws of God's earthly material environment, developed a natural (deistic) religion. This they symbolised in their working tools. Thus nature philosophy was reviving. (See V.S.L. Romans Ch.1 v.20).

This they kept secret to themselves because they treasured it and refused to admit anyone to this knowledge who did not qualify as worthy to keep good faith with their earthy trade perceptions. They embodied these exclusive ideas and the initiation into them under the old workers' guild system. This required that the Old Charges be preserved but they added to them, after much speculation, over several hundred years on a continuous basis.

The Lecture and Charges became the method by which they educated the initiates into what was, now, being regularly called 'the Lodge'. Thus out of the Craft Trade Guilds developed symbolic and speculative Freemasonry with any man welcomed as a brother while he declared himself to have faith in the Great Architect of the Universe and recognised all mankind, of every colour and creed, to be Brothers. They were united. " Let a man's religion or mode of worship be what it may, he is not excluded from the Order, provided that he believe in the glorious Architect of the heaven and earth and practise the sacred duties of morality. Masons unite with the virtuous of

every persuasion in the firm and pleasing bond of fraternal love; they are taught to view the errors of mankind with compassion and strive by the purity of their own conduct, to demonstrate the superior excellence of the faith they may profess."

" Thus Masonry is the centre of union between good men and true and the happy means of conciliating friendship amongst those who must otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance" (Page 9 of the Constitutions of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia- The Charges of a Freemason)

The Reformation had come in the 1500's; printing was invented and eventually a Bible produced. Slavery was abolished. Kings were beheaded and archbishops slain; there came a slump in employment again once London had been rebuilt after the Great Fire of London in 1666. Joy and happiness were found in fraternising with special friends.

To guard against disruptors, the new thinkers used the old trade idea of a closed membership shop to protect them from the evil outside world. They became a society with a secret not only of their Initiations, Masons Word, modes of recognition and ceremonies, but of their way of keeping faith in God and working in harmony with the laws of the living God. They, the workers in particular, had founded a new social order that united mankind rather than divided.

They went on to influence the founding of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, the Royal Society, Charity hospitals, orphanages, extending traditional care for their unemployed and indigent people to the whole community. The masons were totally engaged in and relevant to their society. It was exciting. So much so that kings and princes and men all over Europe joined. The major opponents were those whom Henry the Eighth found troublesome.

The idea of a classless universal democratic government of the people by the people, has always had its problems. The matter of democratic freedom was and still is a difficult subject. As then and now the idea that only certain elite classes of people are fit to govern will always be contentious and by some, in certain places, a subject to be avoided. Freemasons decided not to discuss politics and religion in their lodge meetings. As such their style was positively relevant to society. With balanced views they patiently carried on as its architects, engineers, builders, employers and trainers of apprentices. Their relevance was that they were socially a caring people.

Now, while the Freemasons had moral codes for responsible living, they did not design these exclusively themselves. The villages each had traditions emanating from local councils, courts and city life; the relationships between businesses, land tenancy, sports clubs, marriage laws, even death; and scattered amongst the society was a Hebrew influence.

From the time of the return of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem, under the Philistine King Cyrus, there developed a Universal Concept emanating from the Jews of that time. The concept was; there is only one God and therefore all people are brothers. The Christian tradition is based upon the Hebrew, but it had departed from the concept; one God-one People. This has caused great divisions.

Those men developing Speculative Freemasonry embraced the Hebrew idea. We believe in; the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of all mankind. The idea was and is only threatened by sectarian and or political ambitions.

The permanent Lodge was inside and alongside the Christian Church, their employers. A 'church' being a gathering of people as also the word 'Lodge' indicates. Both church community and lodge set the rules for being a good man based upon Hebrew law.

That was until King Henry the Eighth and Martin Luther caused a hiccup with the start of what is termed 'the Reformation'. The Age of Enlightenment also provided for tolerant acceptance of Free-Church protestant ' dissenters' within Lodges and the community.

So we come to the eighteenth century when some 200 independent lodges were meeting throughout all England to enjoy fellowship in a philosophy learned from Hebrew tradition and of

great worth and interest to thoughtful men. It had in its possession, something men everywhere were wanting and would go to great lengths of labour and sacrifice, and still do, to obtain.

It is this possession which is the true and royal secret of Freemasonry. Where is that secret today ? The belief that all men are born free under God; with the freedom and right to think and work as they feel God requires freemen to do; that is without a mediator between them and God and without discrimination because of rank or fortune. The Freemasons, encapsulated the principles of democracy that our world today craves so much. Feudalism died and slavery to the ruling classes finished.

The dawning of Symbolic Speculative Freemasonry, although often chaotic, was one of the greatest achievements of history to which peoples of the world are in debt. The fathers of the craft must forever be remembered as those to whom the world is indebted for winning and passing on the democratic way of life.

CHARITY is one particular practice of craft masonry that has blossomed under Speculative Freemasonry and which has been of immense idealistic relevance to society but is practised very little by the community at large.

The love of all men equally as brothers; especially the unemployed masons seeking assistance by way of money or work, which they got, was of real practical relevance to society, because it meant that masons cared and provided for their own. Beneficiaries could then give back, in charitable thanksgiving, as they again prospered.

Human nature opposes charity. When people develop what they feel is a God- given self confidence, their egos tend to dominate others with a superior air; they consider themselves right above all others. When two free parties think this way, you have two immovable objects. Masonically you only have to examine the battles between the Antients and Moderns in the 18th century to see this.

Fortunately and ultimately they settled down to recognising one centre for charitable unity, Grand Lodge; not for superior reasons but for the practical purposes of unity. This required a charitable attitude from all.

Then, the first Grand Lodge having been established in 1717, it was not long before it established a Board of Benevolence to care for widows, orphans and the homeless; those needing hospital care. This charity attitude permeated right through all Lodges around the world and has grown into many other forms of expression.

But remember, charity is neither the lords (reference. See Lords in the Book of Constitutions) nor the landed gentry buying favours. Charity is the surplus of the productive harvest of the labour of society's builders. Having properly provided for themselves, they gave and give of their abundance to the needy as a thank-offering to God. The early Lodges' social charity appears to have been the idea that developed into the first service club. Rotary, the first, was formed in 1905.

But the Lodge is different in nature; it is first a standard-setting brotherhood of loving charity seeking God's Will and then a service to society.

WHAT ABOUT TODAY

The Grand Lodge of Western Australia Educational Pamphlet No.1 'What can I tell my friends about Freemasonry' says " If we hide our membership by mystery and secrecy how will men observe the goodness of Masonry; how will they be able to form a favourable impression of the institution and how will they know whom to approach when they desire information about it" (Page 3)

The opposite to 'hide' is 'reveal'; this implies PUBLICITY.

In our society today, publishing and making Freemasonry relevant is the same as it ever was. Firstly, the Master Mason knowing what the LANDMARKS are by studious research and discussion can Secondly, live a life in harmony with and in defence of those principles taught in our rituals, and thirdly, by being prepared to stand up and be counted a FREEMASON with all its character evident in every aspect of our lives.

MARKETING IDEAS REQUIRES GREAT THOUGHT AND SKILL

New ideas tend to frighten, especially those of us getting on in years with our fixed and rigid ways, a very natural tendency which needs adjustment. This fear is today evident in the indiscriminate, ill-informed and negative overview of seniors to younger masons. The result is that the present and the future are being chained, too often, to an ill-informed and unchangeable past. Remember, there is nothing more past than 'past'.

Today, masonic speculation becomes cocooned in the dying secrets of good men and true, who met on the level and are dying despondent from trying. There is a falling away from Lodges, an apathy, an 'oh, what's the use' attitude that is sapping the energies of good men and true who only hang on in because they see that there is no alternative to the Royal Art. They pray for a breakthrough, for a revival of the relevance to society of pure Antient Freemasonry, because we and our community need it.

Where will the break through come from ? Where is the work of the Speculative Ideas Freemason and who will hear him ? What, today, will we leave as our Master's Piece, obvious and evident to society. Having worked myself in business, the church and Lodge, I observe that the greatest enemy is personal COMPLACENCY; that is to be satisfied with things as they are.

The answer is again as of old, INSPIRATION. (Lord Tennyson said " Inspiration is 95% perspiration"). Inspirational answers will come from the man who has and is learning, often painfully within himself, on the altar of God within, his conscience, as he studies the raw, natural and obvious, materials, the Almighty God, has given into his hands; it is by knowledge of the materials available at hand, that man learns the sciences of how the living and active God works in society.

It is thereby man becomes the co-worker, master mason as he once was, the hands and feet, the voice, the visionary, the bridge builder between peoples, nations and the maker of Master Pieces. The size of the task is so vast it is overwhelming, but each man can do his bit in his land and place of opportunity. " He that is faithful in that, which is least is faithful also in much " So says the Book.

Today, the Freemason needs to be a living example in the work-a-day world as it is; whether in government, the Public Service, Unions, Private Enterprise, the Churches and other religious organisations, or in his marriage, family, sporting and all aspects of community life. But, you note, he is already that and ask ' how can you measure the vastness of his influence ?. You cannot, except that you note that his society generally is still in a slide further into material hedonism, crime and corruption.

WHAT THEN HAS TO BE DONE ?

The Master Mason has to demonstrate, through a lifestyle, just what is a Freemason and I do not mean just ritual excellence or the number of Orders he belongs to or visits he can total up in a year. I mean each mason, tracing out practical visionary ideas as if from the heavens, laying plans and crafting his interpretation of the Will of God for himself and society; designing his Master's Piece not just for his Lodge but for the world. That then is the theory, but what is the practical significant Master Piece required in our society today?

In simple terms, our forefathers found virtue in WORKING. Not work for its own sake, nor 'bull at a gate' brainless physical 'busy busy', but by taking up the materials needed for the task, studying their characteristics and then finding within those materials and at the same time in themselves, the laws God has created so man can be a co-worker with Him to construct with plumb, level and square.

The old ones saw themselves as working with the laws of God in the minute particles of His Universe; not afraid of new boundaries reaching out in faith, which is generally understood to mean 'acting upon the revealed will of God'; explorers and adventurers in the geometrical sciences of life. This still goes on but those who are our scientists are not members of Lodges.

Have you ever noted that the world community loves little people and old people because of their natural smiling, unprejudiced spontaneity towards everyone. Then can you not equate that attitude of love unprejudiced, charitable and friendly towards all as the Fraternal Love of the first Charge of a Freemason? I can.

The Americans gave us this idea: "What the mind can conceive and believes, it can achieve" ; meaning that the Great Architect does not give us ideas or visions impossible for us to turn into reality.

Some will ask how vague can you get? What on earth does this lecturer mean! I mean, we, through creative thought, discovering the divine technology. The mind behind the universe's geometrical methods and our God-given speculative imagination in an atmosphere of critical freedom, seeing how to always BUILD society and may we never attempt to excuse ourselves from the task on the grounds that we are not educated.

We are more educated than the men of the eleventh century. This suggests to me we are wrongly educated or educated in wrong things. Besides, in reverse circumstances, we would be offended if someone accused us of being ignorant or illiterate. We are so full of escapist excuses. That has become our habit. Remember our forefathers who built cathedrals, they could not read and write, but they, out of their need to experience life at its fullest and for employment worked from the rising of the sun to its going down, to BUILD; not only buildings but society.

We are too soft, overly tender and easily distracted into pleasures, unwilling to put our shoulders to the wheel of faith and solving problems. Dont you agree ? Right at this moment someone is saying to himself " this lecture is too long, I want a drink".

Let me ask you; what is the chief value of the Old Testament V.S.L. to us today? Its value lies in that it is full of stories about people, developing societies, winning and losing. There we find our models, not legally to be imitated (Solomon had 800 wives) but to learn from them and trigger our own inspiration. Guided reading of the V.S.L. is a good place to start searching for answers to what has to be done. Do as our forefathers did several times in a day. Start with God in prayer and the Book (recall the symbolism of the 24" gauge). Prayer is often not telling God but silently waiting upon Him, for the design.

And in case some of you are reflectively asking " What has this man, talking so boldly to us now, done in this cause ?" Let me answer you from one fifteen year stint of my life. Before joining the Lodge, I worked seven days a week, for no material gain, to minister to the social needs of common people and especially the Aborigines of Arnhem Land, as a community building missionary.

I make this reference to also introduce again the undeniable fact that there are many men who do not nor ever have belonged to a Lodge, or studied books of models of society, but who get on and perform the labour of building society making this world a better place to live in without ever belonging to a Lodge or seeking a 'gong' of recognition. Open our minds and think as FREEMASONS. Under God, we can do all He shows us needs doing.

A very important question today is "why are our young idealists and community building men not joining the Lodge? The answer quite simply is because they do not know what Freemasonry is. Its public profile is not visible. The public press do not find anything newsworthy about our Freemasonry. This we need to change.

We can and need to display that ability of the Lodge that is preserving the senior years of members and their wives in happiness and in good health, by keeping them active mentally and physically in ritual and ceremonial work and providing therapeutic charitable activities by way of service to others. This was the first benefit I observed in the Craft when I joined. Our old men keep their marbles because they are not bored and do not live on a complete diet of T.V and know how to entertain themselves.

We need to display the Craft's ability to build bridges of charitable tolerance and friendship between ethnic groups and their different religious expressions, showing them that they can have their particular way of keeping the faith and how respect for each other's freedoms does not need to lead to aggression, especially including the aborigines on our doorstep.

We need to draw plans and implement them for the young school children, our youth, the unemployed, the homeless and the despairing, proving to them our way of life arising out of our universal philosophy of this life and how it can be spent.

But you exclaim "That's all taken care of by governments" Is it ? Are we influencing our governments as did our forbears? Do we not have corruption within governments still? Why the increase in road deaths often caused by excessive alcohol; why deaths in custody, divorce, fraud, bashings, rape, breaking and entering and stealing? Why are our senior citizens frightened and on the international scene, wars and rumours of wars?

And with all this need in our society why on the local Lodge scene, do we still have egos wasting their lives, competing for so called 'higher orders' honours, using the Blue Lodge membership and buildings to recruit and develop themselves while the work of Symbolic Speculative Freemasonry waits for the labourers to get to work and make their Master's Piece ?

Why do we still have unnecessary conflict with churches? Because we are not meeting and treating them and each other as on the level of love; because the vision of what is upright, reaching from God down to man and from man up to God, our modern Tracing Board, is not clearly defined.

Preserving the LANDMARKS, every Worshipful Master's pledge, is not achieved because we are not sure, in our generation, of what they are and not agreed as to what they are. We, the masons, are no longer architects and builders influencing society, but labourers confused. Our whole emphasis is perfection in appearances.

We work hard at emulation in ritual and ceremonial but the real work of Speculators, that of thinking and drafting the ideal society, is not being performed in our masonic society. We avoid moral issues. 'Have I loved the Lord my God with all my heart and with all my strength and my fellows as myself? Is the incarnation of the mind and will of God manifest in me?'

THE LORDS OF THE CRAFT

Human nature finds it easier to find fault than to produce leadership and I am sorry to be chiselling out mortar in order to rebuild. It is easier to criticise than to make a contribution. Whoever claimed that life was meant to be without problems? If we did not have a problem, we would not have a task; and if you think that heaven is the state of having nothing to do, talk to the

unemployed and some of our senior citizens who are bored out of their minds for the want of something to do.

The ethics of Masonry is as it is in the V.S.L. It's LABOUR while it is yet day. The Book tells us that all our days will be a life lived by the sweat of our brow. Why then have we changed it to relaxation and pleasure?

We have good men and true willing to lead our Craft Centre, our Grand Lodge. Plucky men willing to work as I have prescribed. They need us and know that the workers have much to offer. Indeed in many area we have skills that they have not, but consider their basic problem.

How do we make Symbolic Speculative Freemasonry new and progressive in today's society and yet not offend the Landmarks or any Principle taught from antient times? That is not an easy task for any man.

You, yourself, grapple with every Charge of a Freemason, every moral responsibility, in prayer, before God and draw up the tracing board for the future; that duty will moderate your criticism and be humbling because the task is daunting, but be not weary in well doing. That is our Grand Task together.

In so doing, we will be thrown on to the mercy and love of God and that should cause us to be patient, tolerant of others, understanding, kindly disposed and by the grace of God, make us helpful. Then humbly communicate, but not in the adversorial manner of some. Our Royal Art is to work by the plumb, the level and the square. Allocate time in Lodge to discuss these subjects by way of preparation:-

A. The meaning today of each CHARGE OF A FREEMASON as found on page 9 of the Book of Constitution.

B. In your everyday language the meanings of our Ritual Charges and Ceremonial.

C. List, in the light of the above lecture, today's tasks for Symbolic, Free and Accepted Masonry.

D. Find out from the Constitution which of the many, so called, masonic orders are legal and recognised at our Communications.

THE EMINENT PLACE

Responsibility falls squarely upon the Western Australian Lodge of Research to be exemplars of the Royal Arts. The Grand Lodge and all member Lodges can expect no less. Why? Because this Lodge has the historic record.

We have in our hands the Old Charges and all the teaching books. It is we who have access to the source of knowing the RELEVANCE OF FREEMASONRY TO SOCIETY.

Will we not WORK with the materials God has given us?

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