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THE 1990 ROBIN HEWITT MEMORIAL LECTURE



**FREEMASONRY 2000
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The privilege of being invited to contribute to any small part of Freemasonry is a great honour. On *more* than one occasion in the past few weeks, I have had grave doubts about the wisdom of my accepting such a privilege.

Most of us have devoted some time, and have derived much interest from the study of Masonic history. It is my hope that I may stimulate your thoughts by examining some of the possibilities and action necessary to benefit Freemasonry.

Let us try to look into the future.

From our viewpoint in this year of 1990, we must surely acknowledge that changes have to eventuate. Indeed, in the light of present declining membership some changes are obviously necessary. The important questions are:

What changes? How can we influence them? How can we direct them to the benefit of our great fraternal organisation?

Our first priority is, in my opinion, to change and improve our public image. Public image is very important and any steps we may take will, I suggest, be observed very carefully and reported by the media. The Grand Master Mason of Scotland has commented on the present popular practice of knocking anything that is good, established, and old, and he emphasised our need to have an excellent public image. Apparently in England they have already started to provide "television courses" so that senior office bearers can handle the media more effectively. We must forget past reluctance to publicise our organisation this change could be essential to our survival.

Our public presentation today consists primarily of having a number of buildings with the words, "Freemasons' Hall," the square and compasses and the date of completion displayed over the entrance. There are of course many Masonic publications in our libraries, but we could hardly claim that they will attract much public attention. Our most prolific source of publicity can be attributed to our detractors. What do we do to publicise our charitable work? Not Much! For example, many service clubs have their activities reported in local papers often with photographs proudly telling of

their achievements. Yet our community contributions that are often greater, are never heard of. We have to do what they have done, "seek publicity."

We must dispel our "secret society" image, and as quickly as possible. Many local newspapers have a section devoted to the publication of community news. We should take advantage of this. Perhaps every Lodge should have a Press Officer or Public Relations contact who will regularly supply the media with information. We need the services of P.R. or journalistically trained people to present our story to the media, in the correct manner. I have no doubt that we need to seek as much public exposure as possible, and I am equally certain that we will be doing this by the year 2000. In many, perhaps even in most constitutions, membership has been declining in the last decade. We must therefore find ways to arrest the decline and reverse this trend in the years leading to 2000. It would seem to me that the older we become, the harder it is to accept change. On the brighter side, I expect that maintaining most of our traditions will not be difficult. It is surprising how many respect and enjoy tradition and ceremony, even young people.

Let me now direct your thoughts to another area, that of solicitation and introduction. In most fraternal associations, a member can take a visitor to a meeting as his guest. In most instances this visitor could be a prospective member, we cannot do this. Lodges must therefore arrange opportunities for members to bring non-Masonic visitors. I visualise "open nights" or "friendship nights" when such visitors can be 'Men into the lodge room. Visitors must be given some indication of what we do, how we do it, and why we do it.

The first question most visitors ask is usually, "What is Freemasonry?" What an indictment this is on the world's oldest "fraternal organisation" that this question even needs to be asked. It would seem to me that very little amendment would be necessary to allow visitors to witness the closing of a lodge. Perhaps we could consider introducing occasional meetings commencing a little earlier than normal, have a short meeting, close the lodge, retire to the Festive Board, and have a "Guest Speaker." These meetings, or at least the latter part could be attended by visitors and could include the ladies. We do need to very carefully consider our attitude toward soliciting, I would expect that our old practice will have to be discarded. We need to establish a recognition that to be invited to be a Freemason is a signal honour, and indeed is only extended to those considered worthy. We need to establish and elevate the public esteem of our organisation.

Proposers and sponsors of candidates must accept a far greater responsibility, and a candidate who "falls by the wayside," should be considered as an embarrassment to them. Regrettably, our past performance suggests that we have admitted too many who have not been of adequate calibre. It will have to be the task of all of us to be very careful in the selection of anyone we sponsor.

I have the opinion, that there will need to be fewer lodges, and less "orders" if we are to survive. It has already been suggested in some quarters that there are in fact too many orders. Many of the most enthusiastic and active Freemasons have their contribution seriously diluted by over-exposure. They try to serve too many masters. It would be sad if this diversion of interest was to contribute to the demise of all Freemasonry. The present situation is hard to understand, we have lodges handing in their chargers, and on the other hand sometimes new lodges are being consecrated, and new orders being established. In some other organisations, who seem to be progressing very well, they have only one club in a district or a town, they pre-select and invite new members. Our practice here in Western Australia of meeting at 7:30pm and having a supper afterwards also may also need to be examined. In some other constitutions lodges meet after work and on completion of meeting have a "dinner." Would this help us in city centres? Rather than brethren driving home after work and then feeling they do not want to or should not leave home again that evening ?

Do we need to lift our standards ? Have we been guilty of making Freemasonry too cheap? o we need also to consider the frequency of our meetings?

Overseas, some craft lodges go into recess for four months in midsummer. They meet only eight months of the year (some of course, meet fortnightly during that time), others meet only four times per year. Should we recess from November to March? With modern family pressures this break could prove to be most advantageous.

In the next ten years the question of dress must be carefully considered. There may not be any change required and I have no doubt that our standard practice of "black tie & dinner jacket" has a great deal to commend it. Many younger people seldom wear a suit, so they would need to purchase a suit anyway. Although I see no real problem in wearing a "dark suit" it should be remembered that when all present are wearing our customary dress of dinner jacket, it does bring us to "on the level." There are a number of lodges overseas who wear dinner jackets only for their installations, and some wear lounge suits at all times. However, I have no doubt that by the year 2000 we will no longer be wearing "white tie & tails."

I know that any comment I many make with regard to ritual will bring forth some opposition, but I must suggest that our ritual will have to become more "symbolic." For example, changes to our ritual to make certain that our meetings are short enough to allow more time in the South will be advantageous. By this I am not suggesting anything that would either change the message or the "Antient Landmarks."

May I give you some food for thought in relation to the initiation ceremony? We already advise the candidate that certain things are symbolic. I believe that the most important part of his preparation and instruction is the "internal" part. There is evidence to suggest that future candidates will decline to participate unless we update. Some younger people could consider the "external" part undignified, and I see no reason why we cannot make some changes to it.

Our words of recognition and signs must be kept as our identity, they began as you know for recognition of one mason by another. They must be retained, but I do think that some of the rest of our ritual could be updated towards the thinking of year 2000.

If these changes also help to reduce time spent in the lodge room and present some further opportunities to being in non-Masonic visitors to witness parts of our ceremonies, it could be to our advantage.

Our next contemplation is how much should we involve our Ladies? I think it is inevitable that their participation must increase. There are constitutions where during a latter section of the Installation Ceremony, wives actually accompany their husbands to the East during the investiture by the Worshipful Master. The whole family can be present and share in the pride and the importance of the event. We already see in the country lodges in Western Australia that the ladies who have prepared the installation banquet are then invited to be seated with their husbands at the Festive Board. I have no doubt that both the present modern wife, and those of the future will be prepared to help and participate. It will be to our strength if we make certain that they are not expected to accept the status of "caterer and waitress." We need to seek, welcome and appreciate their support.

The Installation of the "Centennial" Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Victoria in 1989 was a public occasion. It provided an excellent spectacle for the men and women present, along with an opportunity for great public relations. I expect all Grand Installations to be open to the public before the year 2000.

At Lodge level, I can see no reason why Ladies could not attend after the re-admittance of ". . all Freemasons." It would not be difficult to adjust our present ritual to make this possible. Why should F.C's and E.A's also not see their new Master invested with his regalia?

Probably the greatest disease we suffer among our members is apathy. I would dearly love to be able to suggest an antidote for this. Every member, even though who seldom attend, thinks that his Lodge will survive, even though they may be going through a "sticky patch" Which Brother would want to be remembered as the one who put Lodge in "darkness?"

Brethren, it can happen. Soundly defeating apathy is one answer to seeing Freemasonry successful again in 2000. Can we find a solution to this? Can you suggest a solution? In the recent past we have been subject to considerable criticism from various religious bodies, and in relation to this I would like to quote from our current Grand Lodge of Scotland Year Book. A very good article

written by Bro. The Very Rev. John D. Rymer, Dean of Auckland, deals at some length with this issue. I think that one section is quite relevant. He says:

Because the world is modern, it does not follow that it is the best conceivable world that it could be. To my mind it is not. Nevertheless, we have to recognise 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 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 civilisation 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 realise their potential. It is the commitment to these beliefs and values that Freemasonry must always uphold.

Pope John XXIII, when he called the Vatican Council in the sixties, used a word to justify the gathering together of Bishops. The word was aggiornamento. By this he meant that the Church must bring itself up to date in the modern world. It is for those who direct the destiny of Freemasonry to eliminate from its language and from its ritual that all that does not communicate well with serious-minded people in contemporary society.

Language of the past is only valuable when it includes within itself eternal truths about God and Man. The Book of Common Prayer, in its elegant language, does much to encourage us to appreciate God as much in the twentieth century as it did in the seventeenth century. However, within it are certain accommodations to the cultural prejudices and ignorances of its time now being abandoned in modern prayer books.

We need as Freemasons to consult very carefully about the possibility of eliminating the language of penalties in our current practice. In saying this, I am not in any way devaluing tradition Or an appreciation of ritual. I applaud a language within the Craft that is slightly different from the language that we would find on the streets.

I also would contend that regalia is invaluable to maintain the memory of our history. Further, tradition should not be cast lightly aside, as it is the means by which the mind of one generation is handed on to the next. We must use the best of the past, accept what is valuable from the present, and hand on the essence of Freemasonry to forthcoming generations. Thus, we must not sit still and be a ghetto in the midst of contemporary culture. . .

All of us here have a part to play to try to ensure that we are the greatest fraternal organisation in the year 2000. We can be proud of our past history, and our charitable performance, but we cannot rest on our laurels, we must work hard to keep that record.

Brethren, I do not expect that you will agree with all of my predictions, questions or suggestions, but if I have in some way provoked you to think about some better ideas for our future, I shall be well pleased.

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