

## **WALoR 1992 TRANSACTIONS Vol.42 No.01.1**

### **THE 1991 ROBIN HEWITT MEMORIAL LECTURE**



#### **FREEMASONRY TODAY AND TOMORROW**

**BY M.W.BRO CURNOW KNUCKEY O.A.M.G.M.**

I feel that it would be quite superfluous for me to even so much as contemplate telling members of this Lodge, anything of R.W.Bro. Robin Hewitt, of his love or Freemasonry and or his efforts in its interests, so by way of introduction, I will content myself with saying that I am tremendously honoured to be delivering this Memorial Lecture and I thank the Lodge of Research for extending that invitation to me. I will do my best to do it justice.

What to talk about? I agonized over this for months and all sorts of fancy thoughts went through my mind. I purposely did not look back through the records or enquire as to subjects upon which others had spoken. They are individuals and so am I. Different people have different skills and I am confident that we will all, at some time in our lives, have marvelled at just how skilled some persons are in oratory. They have tremendously fertile minds and are thinkers who, through sheer rhetorical ability, can inspire others to great heights.

We are all aware that the message, which Freemasonry seeks to convey, is conveyed by means of contemplation of various tools and implements which were and, to some extent, are still used in the construction of buildings and that Freemasons are exhorted to endeavour to pattern their Wes, and behaviour generally, on the message which such contemplation inspires in them. It has the added feature though that it encourages us to do our own research and to place our own interpretation on not only the tools and implements but the written word as well.

And that brings me to the interpretation I place upon some words in the Volume of the Sacred Law, Exodus chapter 3, verse 14 "I am that I am". Some of you will be familiar with those words. I choose now to take them out of context, because those words emphasize to me that I am what I am. I am an individual with my own particular strengths and weaknesses, with my own opinions and my own sense or direction. So it does not matter to me what other speakers may have talked about. If we agree, so be it. If contrary views have been or are being expressed, that at least should stimulate thought and discussion. Those of us, who are not able to be so creative in our thinking, have to accept that fact, but that does not mean that, in our own way, we cannot exercise our minds as to how we see the future.

This evening, I aim to state how I see Freemasonry today, but more particularly, what may well be the position tomorrow, being say 10 years hence. So far as Freemasonry today is concerned, what are its strengths and its weaknesses and what of its image ?

The strengths undoubtedly are its teachings, its principles and its philosophies. In a word, 'morality'. Freemasonry is a means by which those who belong to the Order are taught moral principles, ethical standards and are aided in character building. Morality is its thrust and always will be. For those of us who belong to the Order, we do this very well. Generally speaking, I believe we do quite well in practising brotherly love, relief and truth. We enjoy one another's company and we have a mutual trust. Freemasonry also is undoubtedly an influence for good in society.

It is a weakness, or certainly one area where we are breaking down, that we do not seem to be able to get our strengths through to the community. It is also some sort of a weakness that we do not involve ourselves more in the many moral issues currently being discussed in Society. If we seek to maintain high moral standards, should not Freemasonry take a stand in the public arena ? Should not we stand up and be counted. Somehow we must demonstrate to Society that we have standards and that we abide by them, thus setting an example. Can we have influence in any other way at the moment ? Perhaps not to any great extent, but I am sure we will in the future, if plans for the future are developed and implemented now; plans which are flexible but leading us into the next century. During the past twenty years, Freemasonry throughout Australia and New Zealand has come very much more out into the open, to the extent that there is not much further we can go without opening our doors to the public at large and this could not seriously be contemplated. The mystique would be gone and there would be nothing left in the way of secrets to bind us together.

However, if Freemasonry is to once again become a force and is to maximise its potential for good in society, then we must have a strong membership which requires a steady stream of new members, as I said before, being good men and from all walks of life. To achieve this, some changes will have to be effected.

But perhaps before we contemplate what changes may be made, should not we first ask and then satisfy ourselves as to why we want to make them? Why do we see it as important that Freemasonry should grow? If Freemasonry in Western Australia closed down tomorrow, would it be missed and here I am talking about Freemasonry per se, not its byproducts, that is its charitable work ? Do you, each of you, want to see Freemasonry flourish and, if so, why? Does it have to do with our own personal egos? What impact does Freemasonry presently have on Society that justifies its existence? It can only be an influence for good if it is seen to be an influence for good. I can anticipate that my next question may cause some anxiety within our own organisation, but should not we, as an organisation which stands for high moral standards, express views in the public arena on such matters as drug abuse, homosexuality, sexual promiscuity, for example ? Should not we be stressing the importance of a happy family life in rearing children to well adjusted adulthood ?

Certainly each of us enjoys Freemasonry for what it has to offer us as individuals, but what when we have gone? Unless Freemasonry is having some impact on Society, it is almost purposeless and will not be attractive and is really at risk or dying. It is interesting to reflect on what changes may be effected in the next 20 years. Again I am not necessarily advocating all or any of them, but I believe that if for no other reason, pressure from within the membership will ensure that they are addressed.

I don't propose to deal with all possibilities; in any case there would be many that do not immediately come to mind. First, let's consider our requirements for dress and, at the outset, I must say that I do not favour removing the requirement for a dinner suit, yet I know there are many who do, including some Freemasons of long standing, who are older than me. I believe that the wearing of a dinner suit helps remove distinctions among men and that it is symbolic of the fact that we meet on the level. But what of the white gloves and white tie and tails ? I am aware of the symbolism of the white gloves and I quote from the Freemasons Guide and Compendium:-

*"There is a time honoured tradition, both in Masonry and outside it, of the wearing and giving of gloves. As Masonic emblems, aprons and gloves are closely associated and have the same import being emblems of innocence and purity of heart"*

The same Compendium states that back in 1772, the Master addresses an Initiate in these words:-

*"Put on these gloves, their whiteness is the symbol of purity and of the innocence and purity of heart "*

I will come to the remainder of that quotation later when dealing with the subject of the involvement of women. Presently white gloves may be dispensed with in certain circumstances including, in the Perth metropolitan area, if the weather is oppressive, which means that they are virtually never worn in summer months. North of the 26th parallel, the optional tropical dress does not stipulate the wearing of gloves at all. In the Royal Arch Chapter, being the only other Order recognized by the Grand Lodge of Western Australia, it is not seen as necessary or desirable to wear gloves. Inasmuch as the white gloves and the apron have the same symbolic import, the message of purity and innocence can be derived from the apron, which means that nothing is lost symbolically if the gloves are dispensed with. Additionally, if they can be dispensed with for part of the year without detracting from the ceremony, they can be dispensed with for the whole of the year.

When tails are worn, the white gloves and tie are appropriate. However, one State in Australia made the statement in 1990, that they believed tail suits would be a thing of the past within 5 years. Costs are now such that young, or even middle aged middle income men are having to give more thought as to how they can justify a large financial outlay for evening dress. It is only a matter of time. Some five to six years ago, evening dress requirements were modified so that soft shirts and cummerbunds replaced the stiff shirt with winged collar and vest. The turn of the century could well see the phasing out of tails. A survey recently conducted in New South Wales produced some interesting comments concerning the ritual and Freemasonry generally:-

*"conservative/ staid/ old fashioned/ lacks impetus/ tired"*

*"incompatible with family life/ would like to involve wife"*

*"update, read and modernize the ritual"*

*"Freemasonry has an old fashioned image"*

However, a series of seminars conducted in Victoria for the 'under forties' and which produced a series of recommendations, included *"that the ritual and the dress requirements remain the same-* Note that view was expressed by the 'under forties'

During my primary school and Sunday school days, I learnt the Lord's Prayer in the only form in which it was known at that time. Any modernized form is still anathema to me, but how does the younger generation see it? Recently, together with several other Western Australians, I attended a Church service in another State, and, by way of introduction to his address, the Minister told us that as a result of pressure from both the old regime and the younger generation, his church now alternated, one Sunday using the modern prayer book and style and every alternate Sunday using the older version. I understand that the majority of churches in Western Australia, be they Anglican, Uniting or Roman Catholic, now use modern versions. The older generation Freemasons may be reluctant to change from the existing ritual to a more modern style of language, but there may be an inevitability about it and we must, at least, listen to the views of the younger generation or risk the consequences.

How do we see the Church's attitude towards Freemasonry by the year 2000? I ask that question acknowledging that, so far as most churches are concerned, there is nothing to wonder about. Again, so far as I can determine, none of the churches have a stated policy as being anti-Freemasonry, but certainly some of the individual bishops and ministers, as well as vestries and parish councils, do. However so long as Freemasonry maintains its present position, then any incompatibility, which is perceived by some to exist, cannot be attributed to Freemasonry.

By the year 2000, I believe the Church and Freemasonry will be working much closer together, each having a need of the other in working for the common good of society and the maintenance of moral standards. There have been scores, perhaps even hundreds of occasions over the years, when I have uttered the words *"The continued prosperity of our Craft is, to a very great extent, dependent upon the continued support of our ladies"*

That is all very well when we are talking about the wives of men who are already Freemasons, but Freemasonry has to overcome what is seen by some that because Freemasonry is for men only, it is family-divisive. The words are uttered from time to time *"When will we and why don't we admit women into the Craft"* - A question similar to that was asked on an A.B.C radio interview in Western Australia only two months ago. Craft Freemasonry, as we know and practise it, is essentially for men only. Our ceremonies are based upon the skills of artificers who were

exclusively men and the working tools used by men, almost exclusively, even today. In any case, there are similar organisations which cater for women. It is very interesting to hear the remainder of that quotation from the Compendium, which I read a few moments ago when speaking of gloves, because two pairs were presented.

*"This other pair is for the use of the ladies; you will present them to her who holds the first place in your heart- If the entrance into this respectable temple is not accessible to them, it is that we dread their beauty and the force of their charms"*

I remind you that was in 1772. However, we must provide for our wives and sweethearts to a much greater extent than we do at the present time. This must and will be done. It is only the ceremony in the Lodge Room that is exclusively for men. Women could join husbands at festive Boards. Lodges could have formal meetings every second month with every alternate month being a harmony/ social type night, One facility which ultimately will be available in every Masonic centre is a Ladies' Lounge- a comfortable inviting room, where women can meet and enjoy one another's company, instead of being at home, perhaps by themselves, and perhaps feeling very much at risk. Successful lodges will be those which are family-oriented and are active in community affairs. Freemasonry, as a whole is involved in the community, providing living accommodation for the aged and scholarships and post-graduate grants for students. More and more private lodges are supporting worthwhile charitable organisations and schools and as the level of financial support for many of these groups continues to reduce, so will the opportunity for private lodges to involve themselves in the community grow. We must take advantage of and accept that opportunity.

Brethren, it may be that my presentation tonight does not quite meet the requirements of a lecture; rather was it an address. I hope that you found what I have had to say of interest. I hope it will provoke you all to thought firstly and then to action, because, as my father so often used to say *"If somebody does not do something, nothing will be done"* and to quote my predecessor *"If it is to be, it is up to me"* and that means each one of us personally.

Worshipful Master, I appreciate having been given the opportunity and the honour of presenting this Memorial Lecture this year and I thank you all for listening.

2579 words