



## **The Public Concept of Freemasonry – will it change?**

***An Address given by W. Bro David Reid, JD, on behalf of The Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No 305 to The Woburn Lodge No 25 in Waipukurau on 14th October 2010.***

Earlier this year two groups of Freemasons, many with their partners, visited Stonehenge in Wairarapa, which is similar to many stone circles found all over the world. This particular Stonehenge is designed, as are all the others, to catch the sun in a certain position at the equinox and to light a certain spot as the sun goes down. Consequently they all differ according to their latitude.

Men and women, wearing what can only be described as robes, performed the spring equinox ceremony. These robes could be said to be the dress of priests or bishops, warlocks or witches and other followers of pagan rites. There was burning incense, chanting and talk of god with a small 'g'. This god was not a specific god. This god was just god. This god could well have been the sun. This god could have been Milton's Supreme Geometer in *Paradise Lost, Book vii*, or the Allah who came into being in the seventh century following the influence of Judaism and Christianity on a prophet named Mohammed.

To me the whole ceremony and the behaviour of those present was an interesting experience. But in discussing it all with those who think a little further, the question was put, "but what could the press make of it?" They could say Freemasons were participating in a pagan ritual.

Some years ago, browsing the Internet, I discovered one item that the press could make much of, on discovering that certain Freemasons' regalia contained emblems representing a swastika. To me, not surprising, but to many it would have terrible significance if presented to create that reaction. I had seen it in various churches in Europe. Possibly all Freemasons should know about this so that they can justify it in a few words.

WBro J S M Ward mentions in his book, *The E A Handbook* (published in 1923), that the Master instructs the brethren thus, 'Brethren in the N E S and W will take notice'. It is clear therefore that emphasis is laid on the fact that the candidate is following the path of the sun, or otherwise why not employ the usual phrase, North, South, East and West?' But he is purposely using the cardinal points to replicate the direction of the sun, and Ward goes

on to say, 'Now the Swastika, which may be regarded as the lost 'sign' in Freemasonry, indicates the path of the Sun and is the emblem of life, whereas the Suwastika is the emblem of life beyond the grave.... and travels in the reverse direction to the Sun, e.g. W S E and N. .... the road of the spirits.'

That was all very well in 1923 as it was before the Nazis hijacked the Swastika (it had been used as symbol by youth groups and others in Germany almost since the unification of the German states in 1871). Did reference to the Swastika disappear from Masonic literature after that disastrous event? No it did not.

The swastika was of course stigmatised in the western world after the import of Nazism became apparent to Western Culture, however, it must be remembered that this emblem of life and good continues to be used by Hindu, Buddhist, and Jainist cultures. Bernard E. Jones refers to it in his *Freemasons Guide and Compendium* (1950). He says, "The true swastika indicates the sunrise direction or 'sacred circuit,' the false one (curiously, the one debased by its adoption as a Nazi symbol) the anti-clockwise direction." Jones' diagram over the caption 'The Cross' shows the swastika in both directions. Of course on an ensign with the through sign it would be seen both right and left facing on opposite sides. More curiously it appears that my research has shown the Jainist, Hindu and Buddhist swastikas are the same pattern as the Nazi one as seen on land and was therefore the true German swastika, which was right facing. As stated above and contrary to what Jones says, Ward explains it as moving in both directions for different reasons. The use of an emblem that has a history of at least ten thousand years to Palaeolithic ivory carvings in the Ukraine, and the undated but very old Scandinavian fylfot – translated as four-foot and referring to the four heavy pillars at the four corners of the earth - can hardly be seen as a Freemasons association with Nazis. But what could the press make of it?

Now moving forward to today, 'The Dominion Post' reported some details of a High Court hearing on 29th September 2010 that, "Last year the secret society's highest body in New Zealand, the Grand Union, lost the tax exempt status it had held since 1933." And later "Acting for the Crown, Tania Warburton argued that many of the activities of the Grand Lodge were primarily for the benefit of members, not the entire community. She said its membership, limited to men over the age of 21 who reached the rank of master mason, was too exclusive for a charity."

The newspaper then quoted part of, I assume, the summing up by the Judge. "He concluded that the activities of Grand Lodge, and Freemasonry in general, 'do not benefit the public other than indirectly and intangibly by seeking to produce members who are better citizens.'" The newspaper, for whatever reason, chose not to say that if the Freemasons applied for charitable status for their Fund of Benevolence they would get it.

Apart from the obvious errors, but only obvious to a Freemason, and the taint of political correctness, reinforced by error, no mention is made of the charitable work that is carried out by individual Lodges. The recent defibrillator programme, lodges providing them for ambulances, beach lifesavers and fire services, being an obvious example. Freemasons make no mention of the fact that nearly all the money used for charity is derived from that donated. Not only do Freemasons give they also supply most of that which is given. The failure to be granted charitable status is compared, by The Dominion Post' with Greenpeace and the Sensible Sentencing Trust. Is it coincidence that of all those rejected two organisations generally considered left leaning and right leaning were named in a newspaper that is selling to the middle of the road majority consumer? The article successfully created a picture of Freemasonry as a self-indulgent secretive society of little consequence that has accepted defeat. What is it that the popular press do not want to see about Freemasonry?

*The Short Talk Bulletin* of January 2010, Masonic Service Association, Maryland, USA, published a paper by MWBro Norman Buecker, PGM of the Lodge of Illinois, "Freemasonry: Its place in the World", and he tells us that Freemasonry uses *symbols to teach basic moral truths, thereby impressing on the minds of its members the cardinal virtues of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth that should apply to their everyday activities. If this description seems rather trite, maybe out of place in this cynical world of today, we need only remember that there is a real need for what are, somewhat scornfully, called, the old-fashioned, out-of-date, virtues.*

Perhaps Bro Buecker had read, or read of, a reminder of the need for those old fashioned values expressed in a letter published in the NY Times, dated 5th December 2007 and written by Matthew B. Dwyer, responding to an article by Harry Mount, who is among other things a Latin scholar, extolling the virtues of studying Latin. Mr Dwyer says *the most important lesson I learned through Latin Mr Mount did not mention, that glorious civilizations fall only when they fail to uphold the ethical values upon which they were built.*

Bro Buecker goes on to say in his paper, *as we look around we find frustrated individuals and unhappy people. Everyone is demanding more rights, more security and a desire for more things. Our community problems such as drugs, gangs and corruption are increasing.* He asks "what does Freemasonry offer the world?" Let us rephrase that question and ask, "What can we learn from Freemasonry which will help our modern world?" Bro Buecker says, "First, Freemasonry does not deal with the mass media".

In acknowledging that the mass media crafts public opinion, I ask if that last sentence is correct - is Freemasonry making a mistake? We are all aware of instances in which the media have done their best to destroy a person's reputation in their endeavours to secure a larger audience and sell more advertising space. A man's adopted daughter is convicted of using an illegal substance. It runs in the newspapers for days and weeks.

Why? Pictures of bathroom facilities are published a few days before an international event is due to start, showing unfinished work without mentioning that the photographs are two weeks old. I ask you; do house builders clean the bathroom two weeks before you move in? It's done the day before. But think of the impression that those pictures created. Did the publishers wish to condemn the organisers - because they certainly did?

Bro Buecker continues; *it - Freemasonry - works with and through the individual. In our Fraternity the individual is all-important. He is considered the most important thing in the world. Our communities are made up of many people and to have a happy community the people must, individually, be happy. In our form of government, the individual is all-important; he is a vital part of this nation's governing body.* Bro Buecker goes on to say, "As Masons, and Americans, we believe the government exists to serve the people". To me this last sentence seems just a little idealistic, but if it remains the ideal, the actual should not be allowed to slip too far.

Bro Buecker tells us, *Freemasonry offers to the world a basic ideal that is being forgotten - every individual is important and his personal welfare counts.* Is this another ideal that has led to the condition the secular that society is in today? One must allow for everyone's (I dare not say) shortcomings for fear of offending someone, so will say differences, even if their differences offend my basic beliefs. I have to conform to the tolerant societies norms or will be castigated by those who believe they are correct – simply because they have no belief in any moral law and anything goes - as long as it does not upset their cosy world.

He continues, *before an individual enters a Lodge, he is asked, "Do you believe in the existence of God?" to which he must give an affirmative answer. In many places God is forgotten, even denied. Many of the "isms" consider God and religion as old-fashioned, out-of-date, superstition, an opiate of the mind. We as Freemasons consider God as the very foundation of Freemasonry. And without mentioning the Volume of the Sacred Law Bro Buecker goes on to say; be advised that Freemasonry does not concern itself with doctrine or the theology of any church or form of worship. It requires only that a Mason must profess a belief in God. Freemasonry does not teach how God manifests Himself to man or how man is reconciled to God. It is true that it tries to enrich a member's belief in God by instructing him in the moral law. It tries to do that for every member. Freemasonry therefore teaches tolerance for the religious beliefs of all men, to the point that we can and do meet together and pray together in complete harmony. To a Mason there is only one Supreme Being, no matter what name we give Him; Freemasonry affords men of all creeds the opportunity to meet together and to understand each other's beliefs. It is the only organization where political and religious discussion is prohibited within its walls.*

Here Bro Buecker touches on what is fundamental to Freemasonry - that Freemasons are men of good character who endeavour to improve themselves and make the world a

better place to live. We have to be wary that the tolerance shown by the 'tolerant society' and the 'tolerance of the religions of others' do not become confused. We have to remember what MWBro Barry McLaggan, Past Grand Master, said in two of his speeches: -

1. Let us make sure that the creeping paralysis of mediocrity in our society does not enter our lodges.
2. As Freemasons we should be above political correctness and cultural sensitivities. Stand tall and be proud of our Masonic principles.

And just think back to what the unknown Mr Dwyer said in response to an article by the well-known (at least in the UK and USA) journalist Harry Mount and ask how Freemasonry can help uphold the old ethical values.