

Presented to the members of the South Australia Lodge of Research (SaLoR), Freemasons April 2005
by Edith Pringle

Brethren. The South Australian Lodge of Research is a most appropriate forum to discuss inclusion of women in regular freemasonry. In addition to other sources, I rely on the excellent works and wisdom of its previous Past Masters, and other Brothers of this Lodge who prepared a detailed submission to Grand Lodge, entitled Freedom of Movement¹ regarding this issue.

South Australia itself has a history of international leadership in women's equality. It is a State that perhaps due to its demographics, geographies and history that it lends itself to change. It is this need for change that I want to address. To achieve this one has to deconstruct the premises (excuse the pun) on which the argument for excluding women has been built and to properly construct an edifice based on sound foundations.

Back to the drawing board. Some say that Freemasonry has a base in the Ancient Mysteries, some say its history is in operative stonemasonry, others refer to the Egyptians, King Solomon's Temple, the Enlightenment of the 18th Century, or the Pythagoreans.

The Pythagoreans viewed women as equals, and whilst they lasted until the middle of the 300's BC the Pythagorean respect for women's minds lingered in the Hellenistic world for seven hundred years² Theano, a Pythagorean woman gave us the concept of the "golden section" of geometry. (Leinhart, J.H. Engines of Our Ingenuity). When Plato visited a Pythagorean order he modeled his own Academy on it. In his "The Republic" Plato wrote,

*The gifts of nature are alike diffused in both,
All the pursuits of men are the pursuit of women.*

Bro. Ward, Freemason and author of a number of books on the Ancient Mysteries stated that, "women undoubtedly were admitted into the Ancient Mysteries."

The ancient Landmarks were not ancient philosophies or practices but rather a few men's more modern interpretive lists based on their own perceptions of them. I will deal with that later.

The 18th Century saw links between women of first wave feminism and Freemasonry. Maria Deraismes, a feminist writer and activist was initiated into the Lodge Libre Penseurs, which in 1892 was a men's lodge. She was assisted by Georges Martin, a pro-feminist Freemason and oversaw the initiation of sixteen women into the first lodge in the world to have both men and women as members, creating Le Droit Humain. From these 'salons' as they were referred to, came discussions of women's suffrage and equality.

I put it to you Brethren, that the utilization of history and tradition as a reason or excuse for the exclusion of women is pure sophistry and out of plumb. If you were to build a temple of truth you wouldn't use it as a foundation stone.

All that I've said would not be a central issue, were it not for the fact that the exclusion of women is defended on the basis that it is an "Ancient *Landmark*". *Landmarks* being ancient and (supposedly) unchangeable precepts of Masonry, the standards by which regularity of Lodges and Grand Lodges is judged, However, since each Grand Lodge is self-governing and no single authority exists over Craft Masonry, even these supposedly-inviolable principles can and do vary, leading to:

We look at Andersons³ Charges of a Freemason, later codified by Mackey as the Landmarks of Freemasonry. As Anderson is long dead, Lord only knows what his importation or understanding was when he wrote this text, but one thing is clear, he exceeded his brief in many areas, including the exclusion of women ***on the basis that this a time immemorial practice***. Because we ask, what time-immemorial frame was Anderson referring to?

1 SaLoR No 216, Submission for Oct 2000 Conference, "Freedom of Movement — Reg 34.1.5"

2 Osen, L.M., Women in Mathematics. Cambridge, MA. MIT Press 1974 www.uh.edu/engines/epi213.htm

3. Anderson J. Constitutions 1723

I have argued that the excuse used to exclude women being made on an historical/traditional basis is sophistic. Even if it were ***not*** so, we need to keep in mind that, 'to declare that an idea is inviolate because

our ancestors originated it, and not because it is ethically and morally correct is to indulge in subjectivism, It is to evade. And therefore such traditions are morally repugnant.⁴

Andre Beteille (Time of India) deals eloquently with this and says :

"...classes, communities and parties that are unable or unwilling to cope with the strains of modernization invoke the *sanctity and inviolability* of the national traditions in order to resist it. They use tradition as a shield to protect themselves from many things that cannot and should not be resisted. Their passions are not fuelled by the love of tradition I concur with Bro. Carter when he stated the policy for excluding women is itself an innovation to the body of Freemasonry"⁵ In 1858 Mackey wrote his list of landmarks, please note the changes that have occurred,

"Candidates for initiation must be men, un mutilated (not a cripple), free born, and of mature age. these landmarks cannot be changed"

The meaning of mature age has changed, the organization would not dream of turning away any man who was crippled in any form, nor would it exclude anyone on the basis of any interpretation of the meaning of free born.

Freemasonry clearly excludes women on the basis of sex rather than gender.

Feminists challenge the belief that the biological make-up of men and women is so different that certain behavior can be attributed on the basis of sex.

Gender is created socially, not biologically. Sex determines such matters as physical appearance and reproductive capacity, but not psychological, moral, or social traits.

Gender roles are not fixed, but change according to social, environmental, economic and technological trends. Freemasonry has not, cannot and should not exclude homosexual men, transgender or intersex identified men. Its basis for exclusion is biological based. The ceremonies that rely on the baring of the chest highlight this.

If being flat chested or owning a penis carries some mysterious quality that men possess and women supposedly don't, what is that quality?

I can find no rational justification for excluding women, treating us unequally, or differently. Of course there are paradoxes in discrimination, a man who is sent to war may feel discriminated against because he has a good chance of being killed and a woman may feel discriminated against because she is prevented from defending her homeland. However, the moral and legal tenets of non-discrimination are clear whether they be espoused in United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Resolution 217A(iii), 1948), Equal Opportunity Act SA 19847, Sex Discrimination Act, or We all know what the spirit of those laws intended. In my discussions with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, for the purpose of writing this paper, I learned that the organization of Freemasonry had neither applied for or been granted an exemption from the Act. It would be difficult to understand how they would be able to use grounds for permanent exemption and they have yet to receive a formal complaint. In an interesting paradox the Grand Lodge in England had cause bring its own complaint of potential discrimination against itself.

Its representative, quoted in British Parliament Hansard had this to say to the Select Committee in 1998 after talking about the charitable role:

Most reasonable men and women in the country will recognise such giving and, however eccentric they think freemasons are, will, after considering the issues carefully, not support legislation that discriminates against one group of citizens in the way the Home Secretary proposes; for to discriminate against one group of citizens.

Am I not a citizen? .-

4 <http://members.tripod.com/antibjp.definitions/tradition.html>

5 Carter, P. A, Why we should now admit worthy women, May 1991. N.S.W. p2, 2.2

6 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, New York, Dec 1979

Australian Treaty Series 1983 No.9 Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

7 Equal Opportunity Act, South Australia, 1984

http://austlii.edu.au/au/au/legis/sa/consol_act/EOA1984250/index.html

8 Sex Discrimination Act, http://austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/sda1984209/index.html

This leads to the keystone of this issue, the morality, for this goes to the nub of what being a Freemason is all about.

Immanuel Kant, a Philosopher is regarded as one of Europe's most influential thinkers. In his work, written in 1785, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*,⁹ Kant helps us come to grips with defining what is moral and what is immoral. He formulated a Categorical Imperative in three different ways:

1. Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.
2. Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.
3. All maxims as proceeding from our own making of law ought to harmonise with a possible kingdom of ends.

In Kant's view, immorality occurs when categorical imperative is not followed; when a person attempts to set a different standard for themselves than for the rest of humanity. Enlightenment is a concept that is also at the core of Freemasonry. Kant is regarded as the last major philosopher of the Enlightenment. In his essay written in 1784 entitled, "What is Enlightenment" Immanuel Kant defined as follows:

*"Enlightenment is man's leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. Such immaturity is self-caused if its cause is not lack of intelligence but by lack of determination and courage to use one's intelligence without being guided by another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: **Sapere aude** [Dare to be wise]*

To adhere to the practice of excluding women is sexist, is discriminatory, its legality is questionable, it is built on a false historical basis, it's based on an immoral principle, it is illogical and is inconsistent.. I encourage you to act upon it in an enlightened way. Deeds, not words. If not you, then who? If not now, then when?

Dr Martin Luther King said, 'gradualness is a luxury of the privileged and a tool of oppression. He said that the moderate admonition not to make too much of a scene "*grows out a a tragic misconception of time.*" *"It is the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that cures all ills. I am coming to feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than the people of good will.*"¹⁰

Justice delayed is justice denied,¹¹

In conclusion I ask you to apply the square of morality, the level of equality, and the plumb rule of justice. To be true Freemasons, acting under the motto of enlightenment. I formally apply for membership to the South Australian Lodge of Research, No 216 as a full and equal member, who among you will propose and second me. Edith Pringle

9 Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1785

10. King, Martin Luther, Dr.

11 Magna Carta, 1215CE "To none we will sell, to none deny or delay, right or justice"

N.B. IT IS UNDERSTOOD Ms PRINGLE HAS BEEN NOMINATED AND SECONDED FOR MEMBERSHIP