

A Masonic Essay

## Masonry and the Rule of Law Society

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Why did men die of starvation for 6,000 years? Why is it that we in America have never had a famine?

Henry Grady Weaver, 1889–1949<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Over the past two hundred and fifty years, great changes have been wrought in western civilization. Peoples who once spent much of their all-too-brief lives warring with their neighbours now live in relative peace.

Why these longer periods of peace?

Entire classes of people who throughout most of man's history lived in abject poverty now enjoy relative prosperity.

Why is there now such prosperity?

One might be tempted to believe it was a technological/industrial revolution that brought us such prosperity and laid the foundation for peace. However natural such an assumption might be to us, it is erroneous.

Certainly, there has been a change. But that change was in the *minds* of men, and it produced a liberating force that has been almost irresistible.

Freemasonry, in my opinion, has been a major part of that force. Its placing of emphasis on the individual, his choices and his growth, its teaching of moral and ethical principles, its treasures of Fraternity, Liberty and Equality were the forces that guided the great political thinkers of the eighteenth century and the development of the Rule of Law that finally provided some measure of protection for the rights of the individual against the power of the state.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Weaver, 1953, p 12.

<sup>3</sup> A further discussion of this process as it related to the American Revolution and the development of their Constitution may be found in Baigent and Leigh, 1989, Part Four, pp

## **For Most of History, Society Was Tribal**

Almost without exception, every ancient culture was a tribal structure in which ordinary people lived in incredible poverty and fear while those at the top lived in splendor. Within that social order, individuals were literally slaughtered by the thousands. One only has to read the pages of *National Geographic* for grisly descriptions of how ancient and not so ancient people were treated. Not all human sacrifice was a religious ritual nor the punishment of criminals. In fact, in some societies human sacrifice was a routine affair whereby the community obtained a source of protein to supplement the diet — cannibalism.

Even the cornerstone, an important symbol of 'beginning' in Masonry, was once a method of sacrifice. Ancient man believed spirits would destroy any building they erected unless there was a spiritual defender to protect it. So humans were sacrificed — walled up in cornerstones or chambers from which their spirits would haunt the structure to protect it from the gods. Today, as a remnant of that ancient belief, we place ordinary objects in our cornerstones — books, pictures, coins and newspapers.

To understand the import of what has happened to change this picture, we first must understand where we are. We don't live in a Garden of Eden. We cannot have everything we want. Never could. Never will be able to. And this fact colours our thinking about our relationships with others.

From the beginning of time until the modern era, the belief has always been that man could only survive by banding together into a collective, by structuring the collective in a sovereign way and, to ensure the survival of that collective, by granting to it sovereign control over the members of the collective — sovereign control over the individuals of that society, that tribe.

The result of this tribal structuring was an incredible level of human suffering and death. Any ancient civilization and many modern ones have this vertically structured society where persons at the top, representing the whole of society, exercise the sovereignty of the collective over its members. Such kings, pharaohs, chieftains, shamans, or whatever they were called enjoyed incredible riches in comparison to the ordinary members of the tribe. Individuals were viewed as pawns, serfs or things to be used or abused to preserve the collective. It doesn't matter whether you are talking about a primitive culture, ancient Egypt, ancient Rome, or about our own culture just a few hundred years ago.

Society was vertically structured — top down. The individual didn't matter. Life didn't matter. What was important was the survival of the

herd. Power was characterized in such societies by violence and expressed by extreme wealth — all at the top.

That's tribalism! It was believed — wrongly so — that this was the *only* way the human race could survive. And so for thousands of years, the entire human race, save the top layer, literally scratched in the dirt.

Consider that as late as 1750, over half the people in Paris were destitute and living in the streets. Virtually everything they could produce was being consumed to provide them with food. Famine was a way of life. Plagues struck with frightening regularity. It was widely discussed in intellectual circles that the only way in which the quality of human life might be advanced was through a plague that would decimate the population.

In England things were no different. In 1750, the infant mortality rate among ordinary people was over 80 per cent. It was not uncommon for a mother to bear as many as a dozen children before her own young death, and not a single one would survive to adulthood. In fact, a common practice was to give the first two sons the same name because it was certain one of them would not survive childhood.

In 1700, England and Wales had an estimated population of 5.5 million and conditions were horrendous. In 1750, the population had grown by 1 million and conditions hadn't changed. But when the first census occurred in 1801, there were 9 million people, an increase of 40 per cent in the last half of the century. Only 30 years later, in 1831, the population by census was over 14 million people, a further increase of over 50 per cent.<sup>4</sup> They didn't lose their birth control devices. There was a dramatic fall in the death rate coupled with a greater supply of food!

All this happened because there was a change in attitude towards the individual human being. And Freemasonry, once it was purged of the Jacobitism that had politicized the early craft, had a part in what happened.

So why is there now prosperity and peace, at least in Western Society? Something changed! And it is imperative that we identify what happened because unless we know what happened, we could lose it. In fact, we are losing it!

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<sup>4</sup> Hazlitt, 1973, pp 16-17.

## An Epiphany?<sup>5</sup>

What had happened was that the focus of society shifted. It was essentially a religious change in world-view that brought about the most incredible change in culture and social order in the history of the human race. It occurred in the western world, out of the Judeo-Christian moral code — the ecclesiastical code. The notion that had dominated human history — that the collective was sovereign — was no longer paramount. Now what really mattered was the **individual**.

This change was based on the evolving world-view that **life was sacred** because life was **God-given**. Life was not given to the collective, not given to the divine king or pharaoh. Life was given by God to every *individual* on earth **equally**, and life is sacred because it is God-given.

There was an awakening to the fact that there is an order to the universe because it is *God-created*. Out of that faith in an ordered universe, in which a Creator gave life to every individual on this earth, a sacredness developed towards human life that had never existed before. No longer was the collective sovereign. No longer was the tribe most important. The new world-view was that the individual was sovereign because he was the creation of God, and therefore his life was sacred.

Therefore, the duty of society was **not** to plunder and subordinate that which God had created, but it **was** to structure itself in an orderly way to **secure that which was sacred** — the life, the liberty of the individual.

It cannot be overemphasized how drastically that simple idea has changed society as we in the western world know it — how it has changed everything. No longer is life something to be plundered and abused. Life, to each of us, is sacred.

## Creation of the Rule-of-Law Society

And so, there began to evolve from ecclesiastical law, a common law in the western world that was to secure, through the rule of law, the life, liberty and property, equally, of everyone.

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<sup>5</sup> Much of this analysis results from seminars conducted in Alberta in 1988 and again in 1990 by Robert Anderson, Vice-President of Operations, Foundation for Economic Education, Irvington-on-Hudson, New York. The connection to Freemasonry is the author's responsibility alone.

Frederic Bastiat said it this way in *The Law*:

We hold from God the gift which includes all others. This gift is life — physical, intellectual, and moral life.

But life cannot maintain itself alone. The Creator of life has entrusted us with the responsibility of preserving, developing, and perfecting it. In order that we may accomplish this, He has provided us with a collection of marvellous faculties. And He has put us in the midst of a variety of natural resources. By application of our faculties to these natural resources we convert them to products, and use them. This process is necessary in order that life may run its appointed course.

Life, faculties, production — in other words, individuality, liberty, property — this is man. And in spite of the cunning of artful political leaders, these three gifts from God precede all human legislation, and are superior to it.

Life, liberty, and property do not exist because men have made laws. On the contrary, it was the fact that life, liberty, and property existed beforehand that caused men to make laws in the first place.<sup>6</sup>

The function of this new society was to undergird and support the full potential of every individual to carry out their life to the best of their ability. In the western world, we began to talk about human rights — actually, individual rights — because they were the inevitable, rational consequence of beginning with the premise that human life is sacred because it is God-created.

Thus, a Rule-of-Law Society began to develop. For the first time in history, individuals began to view their relationships with others in a state of social co-operation. They no longer had to fear that their lives would be forfeit for the sake of the collective. Individuals then began to specialize and they exchanged their activities with one another through a rapidly developing market and by using a medium of exchange. Each of us, by being able to specialize, was able to contribute to a prosperity that would have been absolutely impossible without the willing participation of the individual as an individual. This is the true seed of the industrial and technological revolutions.

Thus it is that we can now enjoy things that none of us, as individuals, could ever produce. There isn't anything of a manufactured nature around us that we, individually and by the dint of our own labours, could ever hope to produce.

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<sup>6</sup> Bastiat, 1953, pp 5-6.

Central to this new society was the concept that freedom is not license. Weaver wrote:

Human energy cannot operate effectively except when men are free to act and to be responsible for their actions. But liberty does not mean license; for no one has a right to infringe upon the rights of others. Certain restraints are necessary, and they are provided in two ways:

1. Legal restraints — the passing of laws to be administered by governmental agencies and enforced by political power.
2. Moral restraints — which depend on individual self-discipline, logical reasoning, good sportsmanship, and a consideration for the rights of others.<sup>7</sup>

Weaver argues, however, that there must be limits to government, agreeing with Thomas Paine who wrote in his pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776) that:

Society in every state is a blessing, but Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil: in its worst state, an intolerable one.

Weaver adds:

...there's no escaping the conclusion that moral restraints are more efficient than legal restraints — which, incidentally, is just another way of saying that honesty and decency are profitable.

Right here the objection may be raised that "to depend on moral restraints calls for quite a change in human behavior." I won't argue the point — except to say that changes and further improvements in the direction of enlightened self-interest and personal responsibility are not nearly so difficult to attain as the unnatural changes that are advocated by those who would repress individual development and reduce human beings to the status of the beehive.

Progress lies in working in harmony with the fundamental nature of man which, for over 6,000 years, has suppressed individual initiative and kept human energy in a strait jacket.<sup>8</sup>

Freemasonry, from its inception, has proven the power of the individual and his ability to develop "moral restraint."

Freemasonry, The Progenitor?

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<sup>7</sup> Weaver, 1953, p 60.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p 62.

## **Freemasonry is freedom!**

Freemasonry teaches man the basis upon which our great, modern democracies are based. Freemasonry is where many of the leaders of society, side by side with ordinary men, were brought to this light. In fact, the formative years of speculative Freemasonry are characterized by the development of assemblies of learned and erudite men — writers, scientists, politicians, churchmen, intelligentsia — who spent hours debating questions of morality, social structure and scientific endeavour. From Elias Ashmole and the Royal Society, through the great French writers to Benjamin Franklin and the founders of the United States, Masonry provided a place where men discussed and clarified the great moral principles. More important, they demanded of each other by obligation that such principles be strictly applied and adhered to.

Freemasonry teaches the importance of the individual and of individual responsibility from the first moment before the door of the Lodge when a candidate is asked if it is of his own free will and accord that he makes his request to join, through the northeast corner lecture when each is put to individual test, and through ascending the staircase to receive his own wages of a Fellowcraft, to his representation of Hiram Abif, a Master of all Masons who made the ultimate choice indicative of morality and personal responsibility. Freemasonry professes the importance of the individual and of individual responsibility in its objective of taking a good man and making him better. The focus is always on the individual who is exhorted to labour diligently in building his own moral and Masonic edifice.

The principle of the sacredness (or sovereignty) of the individual is, I believe, embodied in the Masonic symbol of the point within a circle. One of the first things we are taught after being brought to light is that the Masonic use of the compass is to keep us (to circumscribe our desires and keep our passions) in due bounds with all mankind. We are taught that the point inside the circle represents ourselves, the individual man. We are constantly reminded it is our duty to keep that point equidistant from all points on the circle about us because the centre is that point from which a Master Mason cannot err. Mackey states it this way:<sup>9</sup>

...The lectures of Freemasonry give what modern Monitors have made an exoteric explanation of the symbol, in telling us that the point represents an individual Brother, the circle the boundary line of his duty to God and man...

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<sup>9</sup> Mackey, 1929, p 787-788.

He then embarks on a discourse explaining earlier, non-Masonic symbolism associated with the point within the circle and the two parallel lines touching the circle. Suffice it to say that this symbol has always held great significance for man in both pagan and modern religious ceremonies.

In commenting on the point within a circle and parallel lines, Coil states:

...Of all the symbols of Craft Masonry, this one offers the greatest problem for the symbologist. It came into the ritual quite late without explanation, and no one has devised a satisfactory one for it.<sup>10</sup>

Coil then outlines the explanation of the symbol given by "the Webb-Preston working" — which is extant in current Masonic ritual — and he comments:

...The trite explanation given above is doubtless an improvisation by Preston of some of the early English working and is neither clear nor convincing. Like some other ritualism, it has had incongruous elements stirred in to detract from the simplicity of the original thought.<sup>11</sup>

Further explanation of the origin of the 'point within' are contained in Jones' Compendium, but again, there is no satisfactory explanation of its Masonic Symbolism.<sup>12</sup>

Upon reflection, I accept Coil's notion that some incongruous elements have been stirred in to detract from the simplicity of the original thought. Those elements are the perpendicular parallel lines touching the circle and representing "Masonry's patron saints," a concept which, according to Coil, "is an inappropriate *Christian* emblem in Craft Masonry,"<sup>13</sup> plus the Holy Bible resting upon the circle. For Masonic purposes, the point within the circle, alone, is an extremely powerful symbol.

I have already put forward the concept that in our society the individual is sovereign because his life is God-given and, therefore, sacred. I have also explained that this has led to the evolution from ecclesiastical law of a common law in the western world that was to secure, through the rule-of-law, the life, liberty and property, equally, of everyone. Simply put, we are free beings, created that way by God.

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<sup>10</sup> Coil, 1961, p 479.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Jones, 1956, pp 406-408.

<sup>13</sup> Coil, 1961, p 479.

The essence of our 'Western' freedom — of our rule-of-law society — is that we are all free to do that which we wish, so long as it does not interfere with another's right to do the same. That is our right, but it is also our **responsibility**. Truly, therein lies the lesson of the point within the circle, the point from which a Master Mason cannot err.

For each of us, the point within the circle signifies our creation, and therefore our sacredness or oneness with our Creator. We are taught that the point is ourselves and that it is to be properly placed in the centre. In this position, the point also symbolizes the freedom of the individual. But it also symbolizes morality, being the point from which we, as Masons, cannot err.

But of what is the circle comprised? The circle is comprised of all the other 'points' of the creation from which we are to keep equidistant, by our own choice, our passions and our desires. By keeping ourselves thus circumscribed, we lead a truly moral life.

Further, there are created as many more points within the circle as there are individual points on my circumference, each representing an individual given life by God. Each of these has his own responsibility to maintain his own position in his own centre. The important thing is that the onus is on each individual to keep and perform the same.

The point within the circle teaches us that we are, indeed, free, and that we should express our freedom responsibly by circumscribing our own desires. In fact, it is our duty to God and as Freemasons to do so. This, for each of us, is the path to moral truth.

The great lesson here is that the essence both of our freedom and of our morality is our choice. F.A. Harper explained:

It is important, at this point, to note that morality presumes the existence of choice. One cannot be truly moral except as there exists the option of being immoral, and except as he selects the moral rather than the immoral option. In the admirable words of Thomas Davidson: "That which is not free is not responsible, and that which is not responsible is not moral." This means that free choice is a prerequisite of morality.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Original reference lost, but believed to be Royal Bank Monthly Letter. *The Freeman*. November 1987; back cover.

Or, as Henry Hazlitt said:

Liberty is the essential basis of morality. Only to the extent than men have the power of choice can they be said to choose the good.<sup>15</sup>

Freemasonry amplifies this in many other ways. We are charged with the truth that:

...there is no right without a parallel duty, no liberty without the supremacy of law, no high destiny without earnest perseverance, and no real greatness without self-denial.<sup>16</sup>

This charge is also dependent upon the sovereignty (the sacredness) of the individual, and upon each individual's willingness to be responsible for his own actions and to co-operate with others for the benefit of all.

Thus it is that the fundamental principles of Freemasonry are Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Thus it is that we teach the practice of the four cardinal virtues: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice — all individual endeavours — combined with the theological virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity (again individual endeavours), thereby demonstrating to the world at large that in Freemasonry is found the true import of the three great social treasures: Fraternity, Liberty and Equality.

It is no accident that the United States is considered the first country founded on Masonic principles.<sup>17</sup> Freemasonry shaped the outcome of the American Revolution, the development of the Constitution of the United States and the more famous Declaration of Independence. It is well worth reconsidering part of that Declaration:

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness...<sup>18</sup>

It is also no accident that Liberty, Fraternity and Equality were the watchwords of the French Revolution. It was the ideals of Freemasonry that drove the intellectuals and leaders of these developing democracies.

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<sup>15</sup> *The Freeman*, November 1987, back cover.

<sup>16</sup> *GLA*, 1993, 32.

<sup>17</sup> For further explanation of this idea, see Baigent and Leigh, 1989.

<sup>18</sup> *The Declaration of Independence*. United States of America, 1776.

But perhaps even more important is that these very same great writers and political leaders sat in Lodge with ordinary men who felt the same feelings of Fraternity, Liberty and Equality — with ordinary men who had seen the same light. No longer was the knowledge of the universe confined to an elite who ran society, it became the province of us all.

Well if all this is the case, why is Masonry in decline?

Perhaps Masonry has been *too* successful. The dream of an egalitarian society promoted by early Freemasons is now considered by most of us — Mason and non-Mason alike — to be a reality.

What was once a blinding glimpse of truth in the intellectual darkness has become the unappreciated daylight of our current lives. And although that same daylight continues to nourish us, its very brightness hides from all but the most curious the original light of truth — a light that now seems pale by comparison; a truth whose importance is no longer realized because of its familiarity.

We are like the astronomer who can no longer see the stars because of the light of the civilization around him. But does that require that he quit looking for the stars? Of course not!

So it is with Freemasons. The principles upon which our fraternity was founded are still the principles of highest morality based on the sacredness of individual life. Just because society has now become a rule-of-law society, based, in theory, upon that same sovereignty of the individual, is no reason for Freemasons to look for a new mission. In fact, if anything, and for the sake of us all, Freemasons must become better practitioners of their art.

Throughout history, there have been three foundations to power: Violence, Wealth, and Knowledge. Violence — the muscle, gun or stick — has a negative type of power, the power to punish and destroy. Wealth is one step up, for it also has the power to reward. But knowledge has the ability to move men to a higher level, the power to transform men and nations. Knowledge also has the power to limit the negative application of violence and wealth. Leaders understand the nature of power and they attempt to control access to that power. Knowledge limits that control. Therefore, knowledge becomes critically important in addressing the problems facing Freemasonry and society.

What we Masons must do, we must do as individuals. Therefore, it is extremely important to know what it is that we believe. We are often so busy doing what we are doing that we lose sight of whether what we are doing is consistent with what we believe. We must ensure that our rule-of-law society continues to be consistent with the principles that we know to be valid. We are the ones who can make a change, if only we will make

the time and have the patience to do our part.

The freedoms we enjoy do not simply exist — they must be won anew by every generation. Already we are seeing the re-tribalization of society with the creation of new groupings of people based on colour, creed, gender and sexual orientation, to name but a few. Protection of the rights of these tribes has been deemed more important than the preservation of the rights of the individual — rights that, by definition, includes the rights of all. Those outside the favoured tribes are discriminated against — treated as lesser beings.

Once again, those exercising power are taking us away from the sacredness of the individual and returning to the concept of tribal preservation — tribal rights. But Rev John K. Williams argues:

...the individualist views any claim that the "rights" of society somehow take precedence over the "rights" of individuals... as a meaningless claim. "Rights" can no more be predicated of "society" that they can be predicated of triangles. Thought through, all "natural" or "moral" or "human" rights are rooted and grounded in the autonomy of the individual human being. A being incapable of self-directed behavior cannot be the subject of "rights"; inasmuch as "society" is not even a "being" at all, let alone a "being capable of self-directed behavior," society cannot have "rights."

Indeed, when politicians and others refer to the "aim" or "goal" or "good" of a society or a state, almost invariably they are referring to the aim or goal or good of an individual or set of individuals desirous of coercively imposing one particular vision of the "good life" upon others.<sup>19</sup>

Our freedom is a trusteeship. Its survival depends upon us. The important thing is that each of us live and act in a manner consistent with those moral principles which we know to be true. Without that, our freedoms, our rule-of-law society will be lost.

Leonard E. Read put it this way:

A man has a commitment to his own conscience, that is, to truth as his highest conscience discerns truth, and every word and deed must be an accurate reflection thereof.<sup>20</sup>

That is the ultimate moral and Masonic edifice.

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<sup>19</sup> Williams, 1987, p 94.

<sup>20</sup> Read, 1964, p 5.

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