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## **Fraternal Associations, Fraternal Orders and Freemasonry**

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### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 A Millennium of Change**

We are now living in a time-warp, the transition from the 2nd to the 3rd Millennium. The 2nd Millennium has been a millennium of profound and incredible change. The earth's population has increased from 263 million to more than five and a half billion, projected to soon become 8.7 billion. In the last thousand years, many lands were discovered and settled by Europeans; North American Nations were constituted; and waves of Asian and African settlers joined Europeans in immigrating to many continents. During the same period the great Cathedrals of Europe were built and rebuilt; present-day Western-type Universities were founded in Europe and thence spread throughout the world; and great European empires were created and destroyed. There are now enormously large incorporated cities spread throughout the world, more than 50 megalopolises in all.

#### **1.2 Scientific and Technological Changes**

Scientific and technological knowledge has expanded incredibly. We have many new disciplines, new scientific and technological discoveries and new inventions, all of which would have been considered unthinkable centuries ago. Disciplines like chemistry, atomic physics, algebra, trigonometry, neurology, neuroanatomy, psychiatry, and psychology, to name a few. Scientific discoveries like subatomic particles, brain waves, electromagnetism, radiation therapy, and nuclear energy. Inventions like the steamship, the automobile, the airplane, the radio, television, the jet engine, the computer, and others too numerous to mention.

Some men and women still alive in the early 1990s, and I knew one, had gone from living in the horse and buggy age to living in an age of jet propulsion, to an age in which man had set foot on the moon. They had seen intercontinental air travel at speeds defying imagination; they had seen the launching of vehicles destined for interplanetary exploration. Very likely intergalactic travel will be

achieved in the next millennium. Intergalactic space travel may become not only an imminent possibility but also an imminent necessity.

### **1.3 Social, Cultural and Political Change**

Many changes have taken place in the social order as well. For one, there have been massive population moves from towns and villages to huge cities inhabited by millions of people, some cities and states equaling in population the size of a small country. The population of the state of California, for example, is greater than the population of all Canada. There have been amazing transformations in musical, literary, architectural, and artistic forms, in building materials, as well as changes in political and economic structures, and also in the way we wage wars.

An astonishing variety of fraternal and social organizations, including scientific, professional and self-help associations, have been formed to cope with the increasing diversity of human needs and interests. Associations like the Royal Society of England and the Royal Society of Canada, the National Science Foundation of the United States, and the Russian Academy of Science and Technology. Merz estimated that in 1927 in the United States alone there were more than 800 different fraternal associations, not counting professional, social and self-help organizations. By 1927, nearly half the population of 60 million held membership in some fraternal group. The awesome population explosion of recent years is putting enormous pressure on our social, political, economic, and cultural institutions.

Planetary resources are diminishing and being threatened by increasing pollution. The leading Nations of the planet have established a United Nations organization to cope with these pressures and threats. The globe's leaders are now asking what are the limits to the pollution that the planet can tolerate and the numbers that it can feed. Can the planet tolerate another world war? The threat now is not to millions of lives. The danger is now the very destruction of the planet itself. Political institutions have undergone and may yet have to undergo radical change. The choices so far have ranged from theocentric governments to parliamentary democracies to republics to bureaucratic feudalism. What next?

Landmark changes have occurred in civil rights for women and children. We have become more humanitarian. Women, for the first time in the history of the western world, have been elected heads of nations. What a change! The earliest year in which women were allowed to vote in the U.S. was 1917; in Britain, 1918, and only if 30 years of age; in Germany, 1919, if over 20 years old. In 1909 the first women were admitted to German Universities; in 1913 the first woman magistrate was appointed in England; in 1917 the first woman was elected to the House of Representatives in the United States Congress. The issue of women's place in society and women's rights is still being debated in state assemblies and in religious institutions. For the first time in history, peoples of the twentieth century enacted child labor laws and labor unions were organized to protect the working class.

## **1.4 Perspectives for Discussion**

I have made the above observations to put our discussion of the fraternal movement in an historical and cultural perspective. It is against the background of this relatively recent and extraordinary surge of social, political, technological, cultural and intellectual change that we must temper our judgement of the past performance of fraternal societies and their future prospects.

My purpose in presenting this paper is not to enter into an exhaustive study of the nature and history of fraternal orders or Freemasonry, or to debate their relative merits. Rather, my purpose is to question what inner drives, what environmental pressures and what historic events have made it desirable for men to form fraternal associations in the past. Will fraternal orders have to change if they are to continue to satisfy our inner drives and to survive the pressures on them to adapt themselves to the present unprecedented historic events shaping the future of the human race?

What psychological, social and cultural purposes are now being served by the existence of fraternal orders? Are these purposes unvarying or must they too evolve? Do fraternal associations simply help us to perfect our nature? Or do they serve as well the economic, social and political interests generated by special interest groups? Are they a response to a survival instinct or are they as well a response to a vision of a richer life? Let's consider another more important question: are the personal aspirations and the socio-political events that have led to the establishment of Freemasonry, and other similar orders, sufficient to keep fraternities alive and prosperous? Or will changing times and unforeseeable events likely lead to the decline and demise of most fraternal associations?

In the first part of my paper I shall describe fraternities in general. Then I shall describe some theories about human motivation as they may relate to fraternalism. Next I shall briefly report some research about trends in North America affecting membership in fraternal orders like Freemasonry. Finally, I shall say something about what the future may augur for fraternities as we now know them.

What are the future prospects of order like Freemasonry? Is it an elitist organization struggling for survival in a society, in a world, which is increasingly egalitarian, democratic and republican in character? Is it likely to become an anachronism in tomorrow's world, if it is not one already?

## **2. Fraternalism**

### **2.1 Definition of Fraternalism**

I will use the word fraternalism rather than phrases like fraternal orders or fraternities or fraternal societies, when referring to the phenomenon of fraternal associations. It is more general and inclusive. One encyclopedia defines a fraternal order as "an organization whose members are usually bound by oath and which makes extensive use of secret ritual in the conduct of their meetings."

They are usually gender exclusive (men or women, but not both), but not necessarily.

A fraternity, then, is a group of people, which may or may not be exclusively male or female in membership, voluntarily bound together by oath and making extensive use of secret ritual. Freemasonry and the Odd Fellows are among the best-known fraternal orders, both originating in 18th-century England. Most American fraternal orders were established in the 19th century. They were formed for the special purpose of, or for the benefit of, particular groups, such as the Patrons of Husbandry. The Grange, for instance, was founded to improve the lot of the farmer and, for a time, the order was an important political force. The Roman Catholics had The Knights of Columbus which was free from the oath-taking requirement, which they opposed. Other orders were founded when insurance companies did not insure working men, thus making available to the working classes insurance policies with sickness and death benefits.

In the 18th century, fraternities, usually with Greek-letter names, were established among American college students for social purposes. Members were initiated by invitation. The oldest Greek-letter fraternity, Phi Delta Beta, was founded in 1776 at the college of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. After 1830, the Greek-letter fraternities began to be supplanted by literary societies, and later, after 1870, many professional and honorary fraternities were established to give recognition to scholarship in various fields.

Phi Delta Kappa is a prominent and politically powerful Greek-letter fraternity for educators. It is a strong political lobby in both the United States and Canada. Many Freemasons here in Canada and the United States belong to it. Membership in it is by invitation and involves a ceremony of initiation and the taking of an oath. Prior to the 1980s, membership was restricted to men only. This is no longer the case. Membership in Phi Delta Kappa in the Toronto Chapter, the one with which I am familiar, as in the case of the Freemasonry in Ontario, has been declining in recent years.

## **2.2 Secret Orders and Benefit Societies**

Schmidt, in his book on Fraternal Organizations, distinguishes between secret orders and benefit societies. Among the secret societies, Schmidt lists Freemasonry, the Odd Fellows, the Elks, the Knights of Pythias, the Shrine, and the Eastern Star. Among the benefit societies are the Order of Foresters, the Knights of Columbus, the Independent Order of Foresters and the Royal Arcanum. The key characteristics in Schmidt's definition of a fraternal organization are ritual and secrecy. The ritual is to inculcate moral values in the membership. Another feature of fraternalism, is the "lodge" system, a "lodge" being a local unit.

Schmidt estimates that 2000 fraternal societies have made their appearance in North America since the mid-1800s. Since most secret societies have left few or no historical records, any figure would be an estimate only. Alexis de Tocqueville,

in his two-volume study of Democracy in America, noted a North American propensity to form associations for commercial and industrial purposes and for moral and religious purposes.

The difference between a secret society and a benefit society is not always clear. Each may have features of the other, so it is not always clear whether a fraternal order is a secret society or a benefit society. In a secret society, defined in its narrow sense, the role and function of ritual is paramount. The ritual is not only secret but also the principal mode of communicating moral values. Benefit societies place less emphasis on ritual. In fact, over the years many have dispensed with rituals and secrets. Whether a society without ritual can be called a fraternal order is a matter of legal definition regulated by state laws of incorporation. Some orders without ritual initiation as part of their constitution have state charters describing them as a fraternal organization.

The need for benefit societies emerged in the late 1800s because of the lack of social security or social welfare programs to guarantee working men and their families' financial security. No old age pension plans or unemployment insurance benefits or insurance provisions in the event of a death in the family were available to the laboring classes. The benefit societies, then, were organized for the specific purpose of establishing life and sickness insurance for the working classes.

Most benefit societies were nonpolitical, but not all. The Grange, for instance, expressly sought specific social changes to benefit the farmer. Yet, it was also a fraternal order similar to secret societies in character inasmuch as ritual, degree work and social events were part of its program.

Other fraternal groups, without the insurance feature, were formed mainly for the purpose of fellowship and to inculcate in their members principles and tenets of virtue and morality. As the social welfare state expands its housing, medical, unemployment, educational programs for the working classes, there is now little need for the benefit features of fraternal societies and hence little reason for people to associate for that purpose.

### **2.3 Secret Societies and Secrecy**

Fraternal orders practicing secrecy have been known to exist for thousands of years, as far back as the Egyptian Mystery Schools in 1500 BC. Some scholars claim that the orders of knighthood during the crusades also practiced secrecy.

Freemasons do not claim to be members of a "secret society". They claim that Freemasonry is a "society with secrets". A truly secret society, of course, would be one whose existence is known only to its members. Such a society would not keep public records either of its membership or its activities, nor would it keep minutes of meetings. Neither would it apply for a state charter of incorporation as a publicly recognized nonprofit organization.

The secrecy feature of fraternal orders has perhaps led people who are nonmembers to be suspicious of them. This is probably a characteristic which works against them. Members of secret societies also tend to take their oath of secrecy quite seriously. What is usually secret is the ritual. In the case of Freemasonry, however, while the members will not discuss the ritual or the signs of recognition with nonmembers or the uninitiated, anyone who is really determined can find publications that would tell as much as anyone might want to know about the society. It's the signs of recognition that are usually the most carefully guarded secret of all secret societies.

Recent exposés of secret "criminal" fraternities tend to make people even more suspicious of all secret societies and the people who belong to them. Recently a cover story appeared in *USA Today* about the Asian Triad Associations. According to the article, the Asian Triad Associations, resembling the rise of the Mafia in the West, were created for political purposes. Seventeenth-century rebel groups united to overthrow the invading Ching Dynasty and to restore the Ming Dynasty to power. They united under a "leader" or "general" who was assigned to a region. In the early phases of the association, members were bound by oaths of blood brotherhood.

Triad secret societies were once political organizations protecting the members from hostile and corrupt forces. Now their original purpose has been lost and they are treated by the civil authority as criminal gangs who use the name and rituals of the ancient Triad Society for their own evil purposes. These gangs are involved in extortion, prostitution, illegal gambling, gun dealing, alien smuggling, and drug trafficking.

Legitimate secret societies, which operate within the law and are legally recognized by the civil magisterium, are constituted of law abiding men who dedicate themselves to moral, virtuous and upright living. If legitimate and praiseworthy secret societies are to be respected and are subsequently to avoid suspicion about their purposes, then they must be considerably more open and visible to public scrutiny. As society becomes increasingly desirous of openness (witness recent legislation giving citizens more open access to public information, and witness also the past policy of glasnost in the Communist block of nations), then fraternal orders known for their practice of secrecy will have to become more sensitive to public demands for information and openness.

## **2.4 Ritual**

Also important to fraternal orders which bind members by oaths of secrecy are their rituals and their various degrees. Some fraternal orders see ritual as the essence of the order. The ritual is designed to communicate to initiates "high principles, virtue, brotherhood, morality and religious values." The idea of having degrees is to communicate different specific truths with each degree.

It is often the feature of excessive secrecy which has been criticized by members and nonmembers alike. Some orders, like the Grange, have dropped their ritual.



Members critical of the ritual feature of their orders complain that the ritual is too long, too antiquated. Some orders have modified their ritual; others have reduced the number of degrees. Some have removed parts of the degrees that have become offensive, anachronistic to the culture. Preference today seems to be for rituals and ceremonies that are relatively brief. In fact, there are those who are convinced that the use of lengthy, outdated rituals probably accounts significantly for declining memberships and the low attendance being experienced by many fraternal orders.

### **3. Motivation**

#### **3.1 Theories of Human Motivation**

What is there about human beings that continues to make membership in fraternal orders appealing? This is really a question about human motives. Why, indeed, do people join fraternal orders?

For the sake argument only, let's propose that men are by nature inclined to socialize, that their intelligence compels them to live in community. Recent evidence tends to confirm that this is so, and furthermore that the source of this tendency is the brain itself.

#### **3.2 Instinct Theories**

Is man born with the instinct to be a joiner? Is it part of his inborn nature to be gregarious? Some scientists point to the existence of three distinct brain systems, one called the R-complex or reptilian brain which regulates the degree to which we are gregarious or loners, pacific or violent. The degree to which we respond to fads is also controlled by this part of our brain, and most likely our sexual orientation. Another of the three brain systems, the limbic brain, is responsible for autonomic functions like digestion, breathing, sleep, and other similar functions, like the immune system. Then, there is, of course, our capacity to think and to reason, for which our cerebellum or cerebral brain is responsible.

These three brain systems seem to be autonomous in function, yet delicately interconnected and interdependent. They enable us, to some extent, to control through cerebral brain mechanisms the expression of our instincts and the operation of our autonomic functions. At the same time our limbic and R-complex brains can interfere with our ability to think and reason. Occasionally one or more of the three brain systems malfunction. Then our behavior can become unmanageable and self-destructive.

This evidence suggests that if we weren't Freemasons, we would probably belong to some other group to satisfy our gregarious instinct. The theory, on the other hand, does not explain why anyone would choose one group in preference to another --Freemasonry as opposed to the Ku Klux Klan. It only suggests that the desire to isolate oneself from others is not characteristically human. It may be divine, but definitely not human.

What is truly and characteristically human is not that man is Homo erectus (an animal that walks upright) or Homo sapiens (an animal that knows), but that he is essentially and consciously gregarious, a social animal. It is this characteristic of human nature, combined with a highly developed intelligence, that in the evolution of the species has led men to establish towns, cities, city states, nations, empires, and, of course, fraternal orders.

If the instinct theory, on the basis of the evidence just described, is correct, then fraternalism would naturally be very human indeed. The problem of declining membership numbers, then, is not rooted in an aberrant human nature, but more likely can be attributed to the fact that men have many means for satisfying their gregarious instincts, especially in large urban centers. This theory also suggests to me that men are inclined by nature to be cooperative.

### **3.3 The Needs Theory**

Maslow's theory of human motivation is based on the idea that men are driven by certain needs and that these needs are hierarchical. Among the hierarchy is mentioned the need for survival (food, water, shelter). Another is the need for safety (physical and psychological security); the need for belonging (love and acceptance), as well as a need for approval, recognition, and self-esteem. When these needs are not satisfied, we are motivated to find ways of satisfying them. When these needs are satisfied, on the other hand, motivation decreases and we are not inclined to want more.

However, Maslow's theory suggests there are other needs, higher order needs, needs dealing with man's intellectual achievement, aesthetic appreciation, and self-actualization. These needs differ radically from lower-level needs. They are not so easily satisfied. When these needs are met, motivation does not cease; instead, it increases urging us on to seek greater fulfillment. Once successful in our pursuit for knowledge and understanding, we are likely to strive for even greater knowledge and understanding. The motivation to achieve these higher-level needs can be endlessly renewed.

Maslow's theory has the advantage of getting us to look at the whole person, his physical, emotional and intellectual needs and to see them as interrelated. But it does not help us to predict what needs will be important to us at any given moment in our lives. We may, for example, deny ourselves safety or friendship to gain knowledge or to engage in artistic pursuits or to fulfil our highest aspirations and ambitions.

In applying this model of human motivation to Lodge, consider, for example, if Lodge becomes for someone a fearful, unpredictable place, and you don't know where you stand, the model says you would likely go somewhere else where you feel more secure. Also, lower-level needs for security and comfort could conflict, theoretically speaking, with the higher-level needs of the fraternity to have members increase their knowledge and understanding of Masonry and also the needs of the institution for restructuring.



What about Maslow's theory and fraternity membership and attendance? First, that all people need to feel safe, secure and accepted. Secondly, people are unlikely to stay with activities or get involved if they are made to feel insecure or incompetent. We need to plan activities that meet the needs of the membership and are thereby likely to increase motivation to attend lodge and to want to participate in the work of lodge. Of course, there are legitimate objections to trying to meet the needs of others. It is exhausting and time-consuming work.

### **3.4 The Environmental Theory**

If this theory is correct, given a choice, we would naturally seek the greater pleasure and avoid the greater pain. If forced to choose between two painful or unacceptable situations we will choose what we perceive as the less painful. When the choice is between the acceptable and the unacceptable, we will seek out the acceptable and do everything in our power to avoid the unacceptable.

Anxiety is explained by this model in terms of the emotional conflicts we face in our choices, for example, in having to choose the lesser of two evils. In terms of lodge, the conflict might be something like this. I enjoy meeting my friends and the social hour afterwards; I dislike the business part of the meeting and some of the ritual. If I choose to avoid what displeases me by staying away from lodge, then I also miss seeing my friends. If I choose to attend lodge, then I have to endure the unpleasantness of the meeting and the ritual. The theory states that if on the whole meeting my friends and socializing with them is more pleasing to me than putting up with the meeting and the ritual is unpleasant, then I will be more likely to attend lodge meetings. However, if the unpleasantness I experience is greater, then I will probably not attend, or make excuses for not attending. Yet, whatever I choose to do, I will have to put up with doing something which has unpleasant consequences for me.

If what I have said is typical of human beings, our behavior would seem to be governed by a system of rewards and punishment. Unfortunately, this model of motivation leaves some questions unresolved. We are not always able to predict the results of our choices. We don't always know what will be rewarding or threatening. One man's reward may be another man's pain. The model is only as good as our experience. We can say with hindsight that if attendance drops in lodge, whatever is happening it is not rewarding enough to generate attendance. However, if each lodge were to try to give most members what they want, what pleases them, would we be able to keep the traditional landmarks of Masonry? Would Freemasonry as we know it survive? Could it still be called Freemasonry? However, if we do not give people for the most part what they want, what pleases them, would the membership not vote with their feet by walking away? Would that be an end to Freemasonry anyway? An interesting dilemma, if this model is indeed valid, which I doubt it is. The model, allow me to suggest, is only partly true. It does not take into account our cognitive nature, the fact that we can give meaning to our experience, a meaning that may take us beyond considerations of pleasure and pain. We do make sacrifices for the sake of duty and principle.

### 3.5 The Cognitive Theory

Cognitive models of human motivation are based on the assumption that we are strongly influenced in what we do by our beliefs and our values. Accordingly, we would tend to do some things not because others would approve and reward us for doing so, but because of their inherent value to us or from a consideration of principle. People are naturally motivated to explore, learn, and have fun. Some people like to learn simply for the sake of learning, not simply for the sake of present reward or future promotion. Some people join fraternal orders because it means a lot to them personally to do so. Some attend lodge because it is somehow meaningful to them. Prospective members would have to know something about the fraternal order they are planning to join if joining was to be based on what is meaningful to them. Finding what is meaningful to members would also be an important strategy when planning events which one would hope would attract attendance.

### 3.6 The Functional Autonomy Theory

In the course of my University studies one article had a profound impact on my thinking about human motivation. The principle of psychology announced in that article remains to this day an important part of my thinking about motivation, as important as Pavlov's theory of conditioning and Freud's theory of the unconscious. It's called the principle of **the functional autonomy of motives**.

Before describing Allport's theory of the functional autonomy of motives, I would like to recall an important Aristotelian-Thomistic principle of psychology, namely the idea of habits. Everything we learn through experience becomes habit. Much of what we do as adults is learned in childhood and continues to be done by us, not consciously and deliberately, but unconsciously and out of habit, like tying our shoe laces. We eat at certain times of the day because we are used to eating at those times. It's a matter of habit. We may eat at those times whether hungry or not. Likewise, we may have the habit of reading or attending theatre, or we may have the habit of keeping our appointments on time. We usually acquire such habits early in our youth. We do not reflect on why we do these things or even whether we really enjoy doing them; they are simply a part of our lives because we are used to doing them. They have become habits, part of our routine of living.

For example, not telling the truth would be difficult for someone if they were in the **habit** of telling the truth. A deep-seated habit, once acquired, can seem so natural to us that we may feel we were born that way and there's nothing we can do about it. For example, how would you feel about wearing or not wearing your hat in church or when seated in a concert hall? Habits become second nature to us. To change habits, even though they are learned behavior, can be exceedingly difficult and painful, and sometimes downright nearly impossible, like an addiction to drugs or food. It is the task of psychotherapists and psychiatrists to help us deal with unwanted habits, especially those we decide are bad or harmful to us, like drug or food addictions.

The functional autonomy principle suggests another way of thinking about human motivation, quite different from any other theory. In the mature personality, for instance, habits, skills and behavioral patterns originally developed for instinctual satisfaction may become self-motivating and independent from their historical causes. For example, whatever motive a Mason may have had for joining the order, that may no longer be what motivates him to continue attending meetings or participating in Lodge activities.

For Gordon Allport, who first published the theory in 1937, human motives in the adult human being are contemporary and independent of the original drive. Allport wanted to account psychologically for the uniqueness of each personality and wanted to oppose the idea of trying to reduce personalities to historically elementary motives. He also wanted to account for phenomena like a human's lasting, stable interest in something; the persistence of habit when the incentive has been removed; the endless variety of human goals; the compulsive behavior that continues after the original reason has disappeared.

Habits, of course, may themselves become driving forces. At first, I may attend Lodge because I want to become a Master Mason. After becoming a Master Mason, I may still attend Lodge regularly because I like meeting with my friends or because I enjoy the ritual.

#### **4. Trends in Fraternal Associations**

##### **4.1 Fraternal Societies in Early America**

From 1760 to 1830 secular voluntary organizations, like the Freemasons, developed gradually along with charitable organizations, fire societies and professional societies. They were centered mainly in Boston and supported the republican concept of citizenship. They provided opportunity for personal recognition, self-improvement, and mutual reinforcement, all of which were important in the culture of the times.

From the 1800s into the early 1900s large numbers of people joined women's clubs and civic groups. Secret fraternal societies and fraternal orders were very popular. Between 1880 and 1900 there were more than 460 fraternal associations and by 1901 an estimated 600 orders had 5 million members. The most popular and prestigious was the Ancient and Accepted Order of Freemasons, predominantly white, male and Protestant.

Scholars have alleged that societies like Freemasonry and the Odd Fellows, among the largest organizations in the late 1800s, conferred middle-class respectability on their members. Others have claimed that fraternal associations helped develop working class solidarity. Local lodges seem to have varied in three ways: as substantially working class; as including also equal numbers from white collar occupations; or shop owners and skilled workers. To quote one study: in effect, these orders helped institutionalize bonds between the working-class and the business class and to provide status and unity in an otherwise discordant, disorganized social community. The societies provided opportunity for upward

social mobility, as well as setting standards of acceptable behavior, indirectly exerting some social control over society.

There are those who maintain that the forces operating to attract membership in fraternal societies and in determining the continued existence of a society like Freemasonry were social rather than psychological. Others suggest the appeal of secret societies was more psychological, or equally psychological and social. For example, the appeal of an order like Freemasonry with its Old Testament orientation, its monotheistic teaching, its rationalism and universalism, its ritual and the practice of a moralism that was exemplary rather than crusading, would have appealed to late 19th century immigrant Reform Jews and older American nonevangelical Protestants. Also, to quote one researcher, (fraternal organizations like Freemasonry) were strong in great relief work, fraternal solicitude for members, unselfish and self-sacrificing acts of personal devotion, and in teaching of right ideals and habits of action.

#### **4.2 Patterns of Growth and Decline**

Several studies of the growth and decline of Freemasonry and related societies have been published in the United States. Similar studies have not been undertaken in Canada, but we know that the patterns are similar. In the state of Maryland, for example, Masonic membership increased from 8000 in 1900 to 48,000 in 1960, and then declined to 36,000 in 1985, a drop of 12,000 members. Correspondingly, the population of the state in the same time period has steadily increased. Membership in The Odd Fellows also grew to 23,000 in 1925 and declined to a low of 1200 in 1985; the Knights of Pythias membership is at a low of 1000. A study of the records shows that the 1920s were the last year of significant growth for orders and fraternal societies.

### **5. Future Prospects**

#### **5.1 Reasons for the Decline and Its Implications**

Why has membership attendance declined among fraternal societies? To find an answer to this question, Masons in the states of Maryland, Kansas, Missouri and California have recently questioned their members. There are some difficulties with interpreting the results of the surveys. The difficulties have to do with the sampling. Nevertheless, it may be instructive to examine what these surveys show, whether or not we can directly relate to them. The reasons most frequently mentioned were:

- \* time conflict with work
- \* no longer live in the area (of Lodge)
- \* unsafe meeting locations
- \* inconvenient meeting times
- \* dull, long, uninteresting meetings
- \* no transportation

Small communities were found to be more likely to have better attendance and attendance tended to be poorer in large cities. Also, a member's activity in Lodge

tends to peak after 10 years. Masons who belong to city Lodges seem to prefer monthly meetings, while members of country Lodges prefer biweekly meetings.

When asked what would entice attendance, most replied that they would like more Masonic education. They would also like to see regular attendees be more sensitive to the embarrassment non-attendees may feel upon returning to lodge after prolonged absence. Others wanted more family activities, more involvement in community affairs, more entertainment at meetings, a more relaxed atmosphere, less formal dress at meetings, and more interesting meetings. Many questioned the time spent opening and closing Lodge and in the business part of the evening.

The declining public interest in Freemasonry and related societies has been attributed to factors such as urbanization, anonymity, secularization, and resistance to organizational change. Their usefulness is passe. Society no longer needs them as agencies of social integration, social prestige, benevolence and religion.

Freemasonry, more than any other fraternal order, promoted a philosophy of life. That philosophy, as those who are Freemasons know, is based on allegory and legend presented in and through ritual. It has no order of worship. Hence it is not a religion. The order exists today, as it always has existed, mainly to preserve, transmit, encourage and enhance its philosophy through fellowship and service. Its procedures, customs and regalia set apart its members.

Critics from within complain that members sometimes make the ritual the be-all and end-all of Freemasonry. Others object to the requirement of evening wear. It's out of step with the times. Evening wear is not a standard item today. Few own black tie outfits and the purchase of this item of clothing can be excessively costly. Besides, no one makes it clear how evening wear enhances the substance of the order's purpose, namely, promoting a philosophy of life rather than social elitism, which evening wear symbolizes today. Evening dress is identified as the badge of the Yuppies, a generation presently out of sympathy with society. Seldom does one see celebrities appearing on TV in evening wear, except for events like the movie industry's academy awards. Even then not everyone is dressed in traditional formal evening wear.

Schmidt and Bubchuk suggest that Freemasonry is an anachronism to contemporary young adults raised in the latter part of the 20th century. It's now more than 200 years since the establishment of the institution. Values have shifted to egalitarianism, equal opportunity, and a more participatory democratic approach to management. Fraternal orders in their hey-day were an important part of male society when we were mostly a small-town society. There was a need then to help immigrants settle. There were needs for health care, job security, privately established orphanages. Fraternities provided educational opportunity for the many who could ill afford it. As Schmidt and Babchuk note: today, with increasing anonymity of the individual, and when pomp and ceremony are less

meaningful, institutions which work against the trend may be perceived as anachronistic and hangers-on from bygone times.

What does it mean to impress strangers? Conspicuous consumption is today's mark of the successful man or woman, not how much good you do. Status, if that is indeed why people joined secret societies and fraternities, could be found not by joining a lodge, but by joining exclusive country clubs and high profile professional associations.

We now have a plethora of volunteer groups: the Red Cross, the American Cancer Society, environmental movements, Rotary, Kiwanis, the large and prestigious American Psychological Association, the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Phi Delta Kappa, to name a few, as well as many science associations and environmentalist organizations too numerous to list. There are plenty of avenues for achieving status, of which Freemasonry is only one, and one which socially may not be highly prized. Let's face it, it's not the social norm today to belong to a fraternal order like the Freemasons.

The media seem to like to belittle fraternalism,. Freemasonry itself has been recently condemned from church pulpits and in religious publications. The culture of school and society do not encourage belonging to nonprofessional fraternal organizations. It's doubtful that public relations programs by themselves could be instrumental in causing great numbers to beat a path to the doors of Freemasonry. Nor would allowing solicitation likely improve the situation, nor public service projects.

At best we can only speculate about why anyone joins an order like Freemasonry. Human motives are complex. Scholars and scientists do not agree among themselves about the nature of human motivation. We might be able to say in general why men and women join fraternal orders, but to predict whether a fraternal order would appeal to any particular individual is either guess-work or sheer presumption. Some Freemasons, I imagine, would like to believe that people join to attain the knowledge of its secrets and mysteries and to benefit from the obligations of the brotherhood to each other.

Schmidt in his study of fraternal organizations concluded that there are four possible reasons influencing people to join a fraternal association: social integration, religion and morality, economic security, and social prestige. I would add community involvement, which Dr. Brent Morris mentions in his studies.

As we have already noted, immigrants, when arriving to new communities, look for social integration. This seems to be true today no less than it was in the early 1900s. In North America we are still experiencing influxes of immigrants desirous of social integration. Fraternities have been, were, and can still be one avenue to achieve that integration.



At the turn of the century economic security was high on the list of *human needs*. High on the list of *social needs* was the need for orphanages, old-age homes, many once built and financed by Masons, Odd Fellows, Phythians and other fraternal orders. The social welfare state had not yet emerged. There were no social security benefits, pensions, publicly run retirement homes, minimum wage laws, child welfare benefits, college and university bursaries. Health care provisions were limited, insurance programs were inadequate or non-existent. Conditions of employment were often deplorable, with no industrial safety codes to protect the workmen.

Social conditions have changed. We have a considerable range of job benefits and strict industrial codes for safety. Medical care has improved, as well as workmen's compensation benefits. Child welfare societies are now supported by government grants and public subscription campaigns. Pension plans are constantly being improved. All these social changes have perhaps diminished the need for most of the tangible benefits that were provided in the past by membership in a fraternal order.

The situation might best be summarized in the words of Charles Ferguson, the author of *Fifty Million Brothers*:

There can be no doubt, however, that the emphasis on the cash-and-carry benefits of brotherhood attracted swarms of members - good as well as bad. The lodge was a sanctuary which would protect them from the preying beasts of insecurity and want. The [economic] appeals of the lodge may seem to us quaint and overdrawn today, but they were addressed to realities on a plane on which men lived.

All lodges of the order of Odd Fellows in 1988 had to pay weekly sick benefits, which were considered a right of the brethren and not a charity. Eventually, the order acknowledged that this was attracting members for the wrong reason. They rescinded this regulation, deploring the type of person who would join simply for the promise of money. The damage had been done. The order declined in membership and today is practically extinct.

Issues of religion and morality have apparently been important to fraternal societies. Freemasonry is an example of one such society. When the Louisiana Territory was settled, there were no Churches. The settlers had to content themselves with reading the family Bible and attending the local Lodge, causing many settlers to identify the Masonic Fraternity as a religion. This opinion is still voiced by prominent nonmembers of the community.

How much social prestige is there today for someone who joins a fraternal society like Freemasonry? In the small-town society of the past, you could impress your neighbor by taking part in public ceremonies, decked out in regalia. Everybody knew everybody. Mobility was limited, anonymity hard to come by. Media like radio, television, magazines, and theatre were limited or nonexistent.

With more and more people moving to large cities, where you were more likely to be known by very few people, who was there to impress? Prestige comes now via the mass media, not by participation in Lodge activities. Decline in membership and Lodge participation can be attributed in part not only to a lack of organizational restructuring in keeping with a society constantly in the process of restructuring, almost every 10 years, but also the inability of fraternal orders to provide social prestige. Practically the only way a Freemason can expect social prestige is from within Freemasonry itself, by advancing in rank or by joining appendant bodies like the Royal Arch, the Scottish Rite or the Shriners.

When lodges get too big, it's difficult to maintain a sense of fellowship. After the end of World War II veterans flocked to join fraternities, some of them military fraternal associations. The lodges were inundated with candidates. Many new lodges were created to meet the influx of new members. Now the veterans are declining in numbers and there are not enough new candidates to replace them. Today, numbers are needed to finance a lodge, yet numbers may be an impediment to generating a healthy and rewarding sense of fellowship. One contemporary adage suggests that small is beautiful. For lodges this may be so.

The run-away inflation of the last two decades could well be another factor contributing to declining membership. Dues structures have been static. The unwillingness to raise dues in keeping with inflation and the declining income from initiation fees has probably had a more disastrous effect on fraternal associations than any other conceivable cause. Raising initiation fees or dues probably won't solve the financial woes besetting fraternal orders (or professional societies). An initiation fee that might have equaled a week's pay at the beginning of the century would only equal a family dinner at a very nice restaurant.

Dying fraternities seem to be like dying Churches, they want to believe that they alone have the truth and they alone are doing things right. They want to believe that if people walk away from them, then there is something wrong with the people, not with the institutions, or the leadership of those institutions. This attitude is typical of the self-righteous. To quote an insight coming from a favorite Masonic researcher of mine, Dr. Brent Morris, a past Grand Lodge officer of the Masons of Maryland:

[The leaders] are like small children whimpering during a thunderstorm: unaware of what is really happening, unsure of what to do, and frightened by the apparent chaos of nature.

And, again,

A Church with a failing membership will consider any explanation for its decline, **except** that its tenets are false or that its dogma is wrong. Similarly, fraternities equate suggestions of change with doubts of their fundamental, fraternal principles and mount a tenacious defense against all perceived attacks. Thus in the context of this fierce protection of organizational *raison d'être*, to intimate

that procedural changes may be appropriate is to advocate the abandonment of the ritual or to deny the principles of the order, to even hint that the Emperor has no clothes is to conspire against the state. Fraternal change is inevitable; the only question is whether it will be planned or accidental. Time alone will provide the answer.

Fraternal orders have been criticized for allowing ethnocentric and oligarchic tendencies to take over. Ethnocentric associations tend to see themselves as the center of everything; all other organizations and individuals are scaled and rated with reference to themselves. Oligarchy exists when the leaders of an organization repeatedly succeed themselves in one or more executive or committee positions over a number of years. The first is an instance of arrogance, which can easily happen when confidence is not tempered by compassion and love. The second reflects an impoverished leadership.

Oligarchy means simply rule of the few. Freemasonry has had a tradition of supporting democracy in the affairs of men and encouraging freedom of thought and expression. The institution has historically been opposed to dogmatism and authoritarianism and governance in the interests of the few.

## **5.2 The Ideal of Community**

Individuals need to be identified with others who have interests, problems and values in common. We need a community formed of members free to choose whether or not to participate. Such ties are looser than family, more fragile, and likely to go to pieces in the absence of conscientious dedication, effort and care. The word community is made of two words: com (together) and munis (ready to be of service). It means not only being in the same boat, but pulling in unison on the oars.

Social instinct seems to show up as a feeling of community, a feeling that goes beyond any practical benefits to be derived from cooperation. Companionship, tolerance, thoughtfulness, and generosity are the special ingredients. It is the feeling that is the driving force behind the success of a community. Once the feeling is gone, so is the membership.

The readiness to serve and to share is the essence of community. This is also the chief characteristic of the civilized person. The other side of the coin is selfish, self-serving, egocentric behavior, a kind of infantilism or behavior typical of primitive consciousness. The idea that everything is "me" or "mine" or for "me" characterizes the self-seeker who wants everything his way and is willing to be destructive to have his way.

The idea of community is perverted when the poor begin to support the rich in their life-style and when the weak support the strong. The outcome of such perversion is oppression and beastly barbarism. Democracy began when the traders and merchants of medieval Europe rebelled against the oppression of the strong and the rich.

The guilds of Medieval Europe, often associated with the idea of Freemasonry, were important to the growth of the civilized community as we know it today. At their best, they were community-minded. True, they acted primarily in the interest of their members. At the same time they did much to improve the life of all citizens. However, they became too narrowly focused on perpetuating their monopolies and privileges and hence when they lost their public spiritedness, they slipped into decline.

If the millennium is ever to *arrive*, it will have started in our own back yard. It will require a renewal of community spirit, one characterized by helpfulness, consideration, accommodation and mutual respect.

### **5.3 Restructuring For The Twenty-first Century**

Toffler, the author of *Future Shock* and *The Third Wave*, suggests that our present values and institutions are not so much in a state of collapse as they are in need of radical reorganization and restructuring. To map the outline of tomorrow's society we need a new vision. The book of *Wisdom* reminds us that without vision the people fail. The vision must be the vision of individuals, not the words contained in constitutions and ritual. Vision, after all, is what impregnates the subconscious mind and it is the power of that subconscious mind that not only taps into universal truth, but recognizes it as truth, and then brings to pass that which only the faint dream of and the strong achieve. The strength, however, is in the vision and in the belief in that vision and the power behind it to make it manifest.

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