

Speech 10 Let's talk about Make No Innovations in the Body of Masonry

In my first presentation we began the discussion of the WHY for our Brethren to have as their “elevator speech” if someone asks them about the Craft, for our new Candidates to better appreciate and fully embrace the Craft as members. We examined how society is still catching up to our ideals of LIBERTY, EQUALITY and FRATERNITY. How we must be on guard for charlatans who attempt to make a mockery of our good intents, and who like the COWANS of old seek to profit at others expense and leave carnage in their wake through their self-serving incompetence. We next pictured ourselves in Lodge with this Brother Rudyard Kipling, feeling the warmth inherent in his poetic words, the equity and the power of their message: of brotherhood, loyalty, unity between races and classes. This led to a discussion of FRATERNITY and its interrelationship with Benevolence, an act of kindness or an inclination to be kind, the quality of someone who volunteers or offers support to others. How Masons though the benefits of what we now call networking, gained and promoted the benefits of education, governance and justice. Groups of like-minded men, of varying classes, politics and religious beliefs hoping for a better tomorrow met in secret, found common ground and mutual respect for one another. Consequently, Justice was born, reinforced by Fortitude, the practice of patient pursuit when meeting obstacles, which allows us to overcome our fears and remain resilient, even in the face of adversity. To do what is right, even when others criticize us perhaps in the majority, taunting us that our actions or beliefs are “outdated”. Most recently we discussed Temperance: individual restraint by practicing humility and modesty instead of arrogance, from extravagant show of luxury, and restraint from rage (through calmness and self-control). Prudence also differs from the other cardinal virtues in that it is not an end, but a means. One must be prudent to pursue justice, fortitude, and temperance. Without Prudence these other three cannot come into existence, no matter how many other requisite characteristics are present.

Through the last 600-years of history that began with common citizens having no direct connection with their Creator, no property rights, no legal protections, and little prospect for self-improvement shackled by a brutal class system. Yet throughout that entire time, groups of like-minded men, of varying classes, politics and religious beliefs hoping for a better tomorrow met in secret and found common ground and mutual respect for one another: “Monarch themselves thought it not beneath their dignity to patronize our assemblies and exchange the scepter for the gavel”. And they carried those lessons back with them in their various stations in life. Has they been discovered; the consequences were severe, including forfeiture of life itself.

Noting this span of time, few received literary education save nobility and the clergy, so learning and recognition became physical, hence our dramas and modes of recognition both of which were closely guarded. Concurrently, nobles in the Templar Order and other aristocracy witnessed corruption many forms in privileged society and sought to bring it in check. In short, they found common ground, and mutual benefit. The nobles gained practical lessons from the craftsmen, and the craftsmen though the benefits of what we now call networking, gained the benefits of education and governance.

Under the “Summary of the Ancient Charges and Regulations” there is a requirement that “You admit that it is not in the power of any man, or body of men, to make innovation in the body of Masonry”. What does this mean to our beloved Craft? In short, everything. There must be a reason that an organization that has existed intact for such a period of time is still viable and functioning in this day and age. That basis is the unchanging nature of who we are, what we do, and what we stand for: the Ancient Landmarks. Any attempt to disrupt one or more of these basic factors results in chaos or, at least, significant disruption. Given enough opportunity, even those distortions will correct themselves in due time if no other interference is introduced, but the interim discomfiture to the populace can be very painful.

Tinkering with the law of the land, especially misguided decisions by judicial activists who base their rulings on personal bias rather than on the Constitution, has caused grievous harm to our society. Those actions have inflicted further mischief when the irrelevant decisions were used as precedents for additional meddling in what has been proven to work for more than two centuries. Individual grand lodges have the right to lay out their constitutions and codes the way they see fit, but none of those provisions can violate the Landmarks; doing so would invalidate their Charters. The penalty is severe, as by violating this basic set of guidelines would change the essential fabric of this institution. Strict adherence is necessary to extend the historic nature of the Craft into the foreseeable future.

Every Mason is inculcated with the necessity to adhere to these ideals. He is told through his initiating, passing, and raising how the basic laws work, and the Landmarks are available to him. Some modernists may claim that “we must change with the times”. If that were the case, why did we not change during the previous centuries? Many organizations have changed, have lost their roots, their purpose, their reason for being, attempting to acquiesce to the convenience of the day. And so they are gone. The longevity of the Fraternity exemplifies that such ideas are inappropriate in our institution. That Masonry has survived these many years while governments, and even nations, have come and gone is a marvel. Undoubtedly, the teachings of the fraternity made a substantial contribution to that longevity. During the turbulent centuries, we have seen that proponents of LIBERTY, EQUALITY and FRATERNITY are often the first targets of violence, persecution loss of opportunity, even in recent decades. Were they perfect, hardly, but they tried to be better and carried society with them incrementally. Society is still catching up to our ideals, even in recent years, that began centuries ago, passed through OUR oral tradition, refining good men into better ones through safe and respectful discourse from generation to generation. Almost every publication in recent times deals with some aspect of “change.” But is change for its own sake, or for the temporal convenience of our modern world a wise course of action. Our forebears thought “no”, as hasty decision can be difficult to unwind and may in fact be impossible once done. Growth does not come from tearing things down, but by building them up. Fads, politics of the day, demagoguery are manifestations of corruption, snobbery, and discrimination. When a Brother passes into the tyled recesses of a Lodge, he leaves behind life’s sometimes stressful or frantic turmoil for time, regains balance and perspective through his Work with the Brethren, creates harmony, happiness and cooperation towards shared purpose. You leave behind the ‘NOISE’ of the World to hear the inner voice of the Supreme Being guiding you toward the right outcome. When you leave the Lodge you carry those right outcomes with you, and thereby contribute to the happiness of others. Masonry

adorns the inward man, there is no need for outward trappings of luxury, nor to covet it, if we are focussing on the inward qualities of our peers and developing the same within ourselves. To function at this level of higher learning, requires a good man who is neither opinionated nor controversial, in order to possess the necessary foundation, followed by the practised skills of calm reflection to unlock the best potential a man can be. To truly achieve Masonry's benefits takes a lifetime, requires collective work with others, leveraging the right mix of talents, experiences, abilities and skills in order to come to a successful conclusion.

The question, both practical and philosophical, is whether we can change without innovation. Whether we are to continue our society in its present form or adapt to the society we anticipate in the new millennium. This is the challenge that lies before us, as we emerge from COVID, weather societal upheaval, even the prospect of global conflict. But we draw strength from the fact our predecessors also faced these tribulations, and yet emerged over time better than before. It was not by making innovations but rather by calm reflection and interpretation of what has gone before, realizing that the answers were always there, they were just shadowed by the constructs of their own making. *Know thyself.*