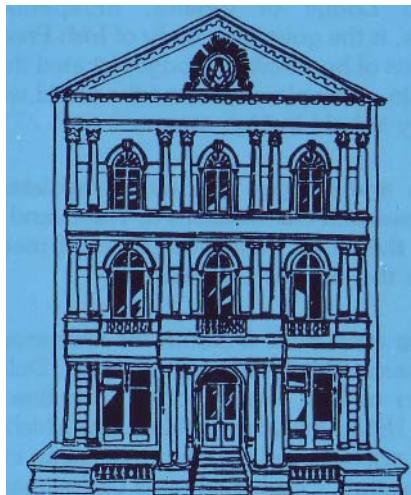


FREEMASONRY VINDICATED



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It happened on Monday, 14th October, 1996. Like the collapse of the communist bloc and the destruction of the iron curtain the 'volte-face' in the attitude of society came as an avalanche rather than as a flurry.

On that crucial date, Mr. Tony Blair, Leader of the Labour Party, in Opposition, proclaimed in a speech made in South Africa, that what is urgently needed is the promotion of A New Social Morality' on the basis, presumably, that such is in very short supply. That this is so, is largely due to the attitudes of members of society, fashioned by the prevailing mores of the self-help Welfare State where people are continually encouraged to think and act selfishly along the lines of a contradiction of President Kennedy's famous exhortation. In effect the individual has been encouraged by state-operated initiatives and the whole ethos of society to 'Think not what you can do for your Country, but think rather what your Country can do for you!'

For a very long time now people have been assured and persuaded at all levels that they have rights, rights and more rights to this, that and everything else. Not a soul has had the moral courage to interrupt this cacophony to point out that, along with rights, and in equal proportion, the individual has duties and responsibilities; for unless the mass on both sides of the equation is equal, then there can be no equilibrium.

No sooner had Mr. Blair announced his recipe for the solution to society's ills, though it would appear that to many it came as a flash of light in Stygian darkness, than others started to leap onto the band-wagon. The television announcer reporting his words confirmed that this had also been the tenor of the British Prime Minister's remarks in a speech to the Conservative Party held at about the same time. Later in the month, the widow of the headmaster murdered by a teenage pupil outside his school, Mrs. Frances Lawrence, announced that she intends to promote a campaign to instil the principles of morality in the minds of the youth of today by providing lessons in good citizenship for, as Mr. Blair had put it, 'there is something fundamentally wrong with society'.

The next individual to repeat the call for 'a Moral Rebirth' was no less a person than King Albert of the Belgians, on October 18th, following the appalling revelations of child-abuse in that country. He was closely followed by another highly reputable Body coming out along the same lines when the Catholic

Bishops Conference of England and Wales, as reported in the news on October 21st, and in the press on the following day, referred to the 'widespread abandonment of fundamental moral principles'.

The last individual of note, to date, to re-iterate these sentiments was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Most Rev. Dr. George Carey, who on October 25th agreed that it was necessary to enforce moral values in children, stating that morality starts in the family 'when parents bring up their children with firm boundaries'.

Thus we can be left in no doubt that there is a broad acceptance that social morality has declined to an unacceptable level and that leaders in society are now prepared to come forward and say so, no matter how unpopular this perception may be to many, because they recognise that it can be allowed to sink no lower or society will start to disintegrate - a process that has already started, to some extent at least.

These calls for a 'New Social Morality' and a 'Moral Re-birth' amount to no less than a Charter for Freemasonry; for the quintessential definition of Freemasonry, as stated in the Charge to a newly-made Brother, is 'the practice of social and moral virtue'. 'No Institution', the Charge continues, 'can boast a more solid foundation than that on which Freemasonry rests'. And, as we all know from our very first appearance in a Craft Lodge, we are taught that Freemasonry is 'a system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols', for we recognise the powerful role that symbols can play in retaining or reinforcing images.

Freemasonry has, in fact, been both preaching and practising these precepts in an organised context for not far short of three hundred years, and who knows for how long before that in the days of the 'time-immemorial Lodges'. The newly-made Mason is urged to study the Volume of the Sacred Law as 'the unerring standard of Truth and Morals' thereby learning how to discharge his duty to his God, to his neighbour and even to himself. The very emblems of the Order are symbolic of these two latter duties or responsibilities which a Freemason contracts to accept on becoming a member. The 'firm boundaries' of morality, as referred to by the Archbishop of Canterbury, are well-known to the Freemason and are, indeed, epitomised by our distinctive emblems. This is the other side of the equation which guarantees social equilibrium mentioned earlier and which in Masonic terms ensures 'both beauty and stability to the symbolic structure' of the moral edifice in whose building he is engaged - 'that Temple, not made by hands, eternal in the Heavens'. This attitude contrasts dramatically with the widespread perception by the large majority today, that they must maximise their 'rights' to the extent of taking out of society as much as they can get, without any acceptance of the duty or responsibility of putting back a contribution to keep and maintain equilibrium. Society today and for years past has become a greedy society and, as the Catholic Bishops Conference is reported as having stated, 'a greedy society is not a good society'.

Throughout its long history Freemasonry has not been short of detractors from amongst those who knew little of its teachings and practices and who were not in sympathy with it as an

Institution. These detractors are still with us today in many different guises but mainly in the shape of individuals or institutions which, conditioned by the debased values of today's society, either see Freemasonry as a competitor for people's allegiance or else as having some hidden agenda, since, in today's perception, it is inconceivable that an institution could have as its Aims and Principles any such altruistic motives as 'Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth'. Those of us within Regular Freemasonry know that our detractors are 'false prophets' who either know that they are wrong and are thereby malicious as well as being guilty of breaking the ninth Commandment 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy Neighbour'; or who are wilfully blind to the actuality of a concept they cannot grasp - that any institution should preach and practise un-selfishness, as opposed to self-centred greed and hypocrisy, which is the norm today.

For Regular Masons this is a time for joy and celebration, not to mention a little modest back-slapping, for from October 1996 we are in the van of this 'New Social Morality'. We are its foremost proponents, and those with the expertise, in this area. Our precepts and tenets should be the template from which the social reformers derive their patterns, and our educational modes should be emulated widely in disseminating, throughout society, the message we have been promulgating all these years.

For some time now there have been moves to discriminate against Freemasons in Local Government, the Judiciary, the Police and in other areas of employment. At a stroke these unfair and ill-founded practices have been negated by all these contemporaneous affirmations, from highly credible sources, that the very essence of Masonry is the antidote to society's ills; and that every effort should be made to introduce it as speedily and effectively as possible. No longer should Freemasons, as candidates for local government Offices and similar positions, be suspect; they should be sought after and encouraged to join such Bodies so that they may promote and practise there the lessons learnt in the Lodge; and where, in the words of the Munster or Bristol Working they would, for the benefit of all, 'conduct themselves out of Lodge as in Lodge, good men and Masons'.

Fate has thrown us a life-line; and neither the threat of Private Members' Bills to be brought before Parliament re Masons in public life, or judicial enquiries, are any longer relevant in the aftermath of that week in October 1996, when so many eminent individuals and institutions cried out for Masonic tenets to be taught to, and instilled into, the society of today and tomorrow. But we must not be complacent or lose our grip on this life-line, for an opportunity such as this may be another three centuries in coming. We must be prepared to 'let our light shine before men', be truly proud of our membership of the Masonic Order, be prepared to let people know what we stand for and that we are in the very forefront of this latter-day crusade that is now to be waged to restore morality, in all its aspects, into the everyday life of contemporary society.

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