

"THERE IS NO ROYAL ROAD TO GEOMETRY" Euclid

by Bro. Garth Cochran, Calgary Lodge No. 23

Whereas a sound education has become essential to success in all areas of modern society and techniques of education have become increasingly sophisticated;

And Whereas the aids to instruction, such as the many visual and sound equipments now available, require some experience for their proper use;

Whereas Also, the Craft has so many skilled educators and communicators within its ranks;

Therefore Be It Resolved That all Masonic education should be directed by professionally-trained specialists in the Grand Lodge Research and Education Committee.

Gentlemen, this was to be the topic for debate today. It sounds like it should have been a hot one. But, despite the fact that this is a busy time of year, especially for educators, few Masons desired to take on the challenge. Not that I couldn't find masons with opinions. Almost everyone had an opinion, some very passionate, but none were willing to speak for the affirmative. Yet this resolution is worthy of consideration, if only for the process of clarifying one's own thought and creating a rational basis for what, at once, was an emotional response to the question.

This resolution is one that at first blush sounds worthy of debate. The premise would appear sound. More than ever before in history, an uneducated person is at a great disadvantage. Human progress has assured that. About half of human knowledge has been gained in the Twentieth Century. Simply making a living does not equip one to comprehend or use the knowledge that is now available.

A Newfoundland fisherman once became very successful by dint of hard work and a willingness to try new things to catch fish. No one on the coast knew as much about where, how or when to catch fish, or how to dry and treat them so as to get the greatest return from the market. The result was that he soon acquired the means by which to ensure his son would never have to gut and dry fish to feed his family. He could be sent to University, be educated and become a man of consequence.

The arrangements were made, the son was sent to St. "F X" as St. Francis Xavier was known, the grandest college in the Atlantic region. The father was so proud that he bragged to all and sundry about his son and the education he was getting.

Then the son returned home for Christmas after the first semester. After the greetings and tears subsided and the rum was poured, the father and son sat in the kitchen to talk.

"So, me son, tell me what you've been learning at school."

"Well father, one of the things I'se studying is geometry."

"Tell me all about it." was the command, for the father wanted to share in the glory of his son's new found knowledge.

But the son knew dad would never understand the complex concepts he was studying at the time so he decided to start with one of the basics.

"Well, one of the most basic of all things I've learned is  $(\text{pie})(r)^2$ ."

His father reached over and fetched him a severe clout on the side of the head. "Pie are square! Pie are square! You dolt. I send you to university and you learn pie are square. Everybody knows pie are round. Cake are square!"

The point is: much of the knowledge so accreted over the past century has been technical in nature and as such is available to specialists more than to the public in general. But we must have the various avenues opened unto us at an early age in order to determine the direction we wish to follow for the rest of our lives. Some of us will be fishers while others will pursue the ultimate geometry. So it would seem that there must be some knowledgeable and accredited person to direct our first steps.

If we accept that premise and apply it to Masonry as in this resolution, then we must consider how this would be done and whether that would be appropriate.

First, the resolution would require that professionally trained specialists are required. Are we talking of educators? Or communicators? or, perhaps, professionally-trained Masons?

There is no profession of Speculative Mason and therefore no professionally-trained ones who could train the rest of us. But, truly, that argument is absurd. The point here is to ask what kind of training would be required? What curriculum vitae would be required of candidates for the post of Masonic educator. How do you decide what a man's qualifications are?

For example, in 1969, the federal Department of Forestry fired all its tree physiologists. Those at the top decided that they didn't have to know how a tree grew because they knew that they did, in fact, grow. But instead of putting the physiologists to work on silvicultural projects, they let them go, including some of the top experts in the world. Because these men had spent their careers to this point studying which foods a tree utilized in order to grow, they weren't allowed to sprinkle different fertilizer formulations on the forest floor to see which promoted tree growth faster. A very good friend of mine, a PhD in tree physiology, ended up teaching high school in B.C. as a result. He wasn't even allowed to do that without going back to University to get another degree.

What can, and likely will happen, is that we will lose sight of a man's masonry in the quest for technical expertise that isn't truly required. There is hardly a man in this room who couldn't with a few moments instruction operate any of the audio-visual equipment or teaching aids referred to in the resolution. Besides, being a professionally trained educator (which is how I take the sense of the resolution) would not guarantee they know how to use such equipment, especially the latest class, computers.

But that's not to say that the skills an educator has in communicating and in teaching are not required. It is simply to point out that professionally trained ones are not the only ones with such skills. Nor are they the only ones who can pass such skills on to others. There are many in the craft who are not professional who do this already. The Masonic Spring Workshop is proof of this as is the work of Fiat Lux Lodge itself.

More important, requiring professionally trained educators or communicators would remove the right of a Mason to serve his Craft as best he can. I am neither a professionally trained educator, nor a professionally trained communicator. I am a scientist who became a writer/broadcaster because that's what I was interested in. I'm good at my job, and I teach people every day. Yet I would not qualify for any position on such a Grand Lodge Committee as would be required by this resolution.

Second, the resolution would require that all Masonic education be directed by such professionals in the Grand Lodge Research & Education Committee. This carries two implications: that the Grand Lodge Committee must develop suitable programs for use within the Lodges and that it would not only have the power to direct that such programs be used, but that only such programs be used. This would be essential if the committee were to maintain direction of all Masonic education.

But this would also create Masonry by rote. Sir Josiah Stamp called this process "The inculcation of the incomprehensible into the ignorant by the incompetent."

Most important, however, directing education from the Grand Lodge Committee would remove individual responsibility for the construction of the Moral and Masonic edifice we are all enjoined to build. For many, if not all, of us, the fun would be taken out of the Craft.

This brings up the third point: that the resolution calls upon all education to be thus directed. That, clearly, is impossible. As Dr. Galen Starr Ross points out: "Anyone who can read and who owns a dictionary can become an educated person. Hungry minds always become educated and sharpen their mental and emotional tools as they grow in life through experience. "

Education is a self-directed process, and if we are to build a useful edifice, we must have the "architectural" freedom to pursue our own designs. If it is not on the prescribed curriculum, who is to deny me the freedom to pursue the wisdom of the ancients, the antecedents of our craft and the philosophical truths upon which Masonry and other great systems of belief are based" Who is to deny me the right to pursue the Masonry in Mozart's Magic Flute? Who is to censor my Masonic discussions with my friends?

Gentlemen, I believe, and the sentiment I found concerning this resolution affirms, that it is not that professionally trained people directing all Masonic education ought not to be considered, but that upon consideration, it should be soundly rejected. Each of us, including myself, can come up with a thousand good reasons why, and in doing so we help clarify a policy direction for our Craft.

I wish to pass on to you with the thoughts of Ralph Waldo Emerson on education.

"There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn comes to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what it is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. "

Finally, I gave this talk a title based on what Euclid said because I thought it was appropriate for Masons and for Masonry. "There is no royal road to Geometry." If we are taught anything as Masons, it is that our labour on our edifice is honorable. But it must be our labour, chosen of our own free will. The building and even its direction cannot be done for us.

There is no "royal road" but at the end we become kings!