

Address by Chesley R. Perry at Rotary Club of Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 1954  
"How Young is The Rotary Movement in 1954?"

The thoughts you have invited me to share with you are based on four words: altruism, freedom, democracy and participation.

We are about to celebrate Rotary's Golden year. In doing so we should not only historically review the past and proudly survey what Rotary is today but give serious consideration to what may be the Movement's future.

Each Rotary Club is an autonomous local unit but the Clubs all together are a social movement - a change of position, of direction, of thinking, in human society.

Social movements, like human beings, are conceived and born. Some of them grow to maturity and then they gradually slow down, begin to get hardening of the arteries, lose their vision, and grow senile, become something to belong to, to be identified with but not to be participated in. Like human beings social movements need check ups from time to time.

At a time when there were no chambers of commerce, no community chests, no Boy Scouts, no world wars - when business in the U.S. in general was a fierce competitive struggle with no holds barred and largely devoid of any civic or social consciousness in those days Paul Harris a young lawyer in Chicago was dreaming of men being friendly and helpful to one another and with that thought he founded a unique club.

Some Chicago people sneered at Paul's club as just a back-scratching group, and when I entered that original Rota Club 46 years ago, while Paul was its president, I found it was a back-scratching group but with a certain - a very important qualification.

For ages the saying had been: If you will scratch my back I'll scratch yours The Rotary Club qualification was: Don't ask the other fellow to scratch your back but scratch his and see what happens. In other words: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

If time permitted I could give you illustrative examples of how the emphasis in the first Club was not on swapping business, as some seem to think, but on being thoughtful of and helpful to someone.

From this early and crude conception of service first to fellow Rotarians, then later to others in the community, has developed the present day thousands of Rotary and other Service Clubs, and a general interest in the ideal of service.

Within a couple of years a dozen or so other Rotary Clubs came into being. They naturally felt the desire to unite into a closer fellowship and so their delegates met and formed the Clubs into the National Association of Rotary Clubs. In a couple of years it became the International Association and twenty years later adopted "Rotary International" as its corporate name.

Today the associated Clubs present a different picture from what the associated Clubs did 44

years ago but we should keep in mind that Rotary International is still an association of member clubs.

In the early years what a thrill we got out of participating in Rotary? What Rotary was and where it was going was in the thoughts of every Rotarian. All wanted to make their contribution.

Rotary once was a young movement. I want it again to be a youthful movement eagerly and enthusiastically looking forward to the achievement of the Movement's overall objective - the winning of all mankind to thoughtfulness of and helpfulness to others.

Has the Rotary Movement become so mature that we can no longer dream about its potentialities?

Has the Movement become so matured, so crystallized, so institutionalized, so centralized that it has lost its power to give Rotarians in general the thrill of participation in the Movement as a whole?

Is the Movement so big that each ordinary Rotarian and each member Club must be content to be merely an insignificant bit of the detail in a beautiful, magnificent tapestry?

I refuse to believe it. There must be opportunities for member Clubs to participate in planning the accomplishment of Rotary's overall objective and in carrying such plans into effect. There must be ways for individual Rotarians to make their contributions even tho they may never become part of the Movement's central Administration.

How young is the Rotary Movement in this year of 1954? How young or old will it be 10 or 20 years from now?

To me it is clear that the decision will rest with the younger men in our Clubs. It is also clear to me that we need more young men in our Clubs.

At the 1918 war time Convention in Kansas City, Rotary was declared to be a living force in human relations. To be that it must always have a majority membership of young men to whom the idealism of Rotary is not an established and an accepted fact but a revelation and an inspiration - a call to service in a great adventure, the making of understanding and good-will and constructive co-operation, so world-wide that there can be no more wars either hot or cold.

As fast as any of us have been in Rotary long enough we should transfer from ordinary Active Membership to Senior Active membership and, let young men join, with our former classifications.

You middle-aged and older men have had a wonderful 15 or 20 or 30 years in Rotary and you still love Rotary. Of course you do. Maybe being a Rotarian isn't quite as exciting as it was in your younger days but you are still able to run things and do it very well. Why shouldn't you - you've had the benefit of years of experience.

That's all true but something else is also true. The whole Rotary Movement must be rejuvenated and you are the boys that can do it. In fact you are the only ones that can do it. For the accomplishment of our overall objective we need a Movement full of pep and enthusiasm. That means its activities must be carried on by men young in years and their participation must begin in our Clubs.

Our Clubs must seek members in their late 20s and early 30e and as quickly as possible entrust them with the responsibilities which gave us a thrill years ago. They aren't going to be satisfied to sit on the bench and watch us perform. We have got to tell them to take off their sweaters and get into the game as committee chairmen, directors, officers, delegates to conferences and conventions.

This is a great opportunity for us older members to demonstrate that we believe in Service above Self and do it with a smile and a pat on the back to the chaps who are taking over from us.

I believe that in addition to all the splendid accomplishments in Community Service by so many Rotary Clubs in their home towns the Rotary Movement as a whole has an overall objective which is to persuade not only these who become members of Rotary Clubs but all mankind to accept and practice in all human relations the ideal of service - thoughtfulness of and helpfulness to others.

We also have, in the composition and operation of our Rotary Association, the opportunity of demonstrating that democracy is something that will work successfully, and that the world doesn't need to go totalitarian in human relations.

You probably know something about a recent "grass roots" activity in Rotary manifesting a renewal of interest among many Clubs with regard to the policies and procedures of the Association.

These Clubs have sensed a trend in the Movement away from democracy toward centralization and are apprehensive lest it may be going too far. They want to participate more in determining policies and procedures and be better informed about them.

In a recent issue of The Rotarian magazine, Mr. Stuart Chase told us that reasonable men always agree if they understand what they are talking about. Let me see if I can make you understand what I am now talking about.

Rotary began democratically in the Chicago and the other early Clubs - men of different occupations and social contacts sitting down in fellowship - all members participating in the Club programs.

When the original Clubs formed themselves into an Association they made it a democratic one with the duty of its member Clubs to participate at Conventions - the Association's annual business meetings. They set up a board of directors and committees to carry out policies and procedures established by the Clubs in their conventions.

I recall that in that first convention the Clubs had some apprehension lest in associating themselves together and setting up a central administration for the Movement they might be creating something which some day would take the control of the Movement away from its member Clubs. They even refused at first to authorize the publication of a magazine lest it become a medium for controlling the movement and the Clubs.

For some years the Convention continued to be the business meeting of the Associated Clubs and its program was principally Rotary business with a little time set aside for entertainment. In more recent years the Convention has been principally a Rotary fellowship rally with great name speakers, pageantry and entertainment with a little time set aside for business.

For a long time the Clubs continued in control and met their responsibilities but with the remarkable growth of the Movement there seemed to be a loss of interest in, and consequently a loss of control of, the Association by its member Clubs, and their delegates concurred in legislation which led to more and more concentration of responsibility and control in the Board of Directors, and as things went along in the depression period and during World War II an idea seemed to develop that the Board and its Committees were Rotary International - something apart from the Clubs.

Proposals from Clubs were not always received with sympathetic consideration by the Board, or even by the Convention under the control of the Board. Instructions from Conventions were not always carried into effect as intended. The Board went into action at Conventions to defeat proposals from Clubs.

Finally it developed that Clubs and Conferences were being discouraged from discussing or being interested in proposed legislation. It appeared that so-called controversial matters were not to be the concern of anyone other than the R.I. Board and the advisory Council on Legislation and the Voting Delegates in Convention but the arrangement of convention programs made it difficult for the Delegates to discuss and vote on legislative matters. All they were expected to do was to agree with the recommendations of the Council (controlled by the Board).

For several years there had been murmurings among the Clubs about the way things were developing but at the 1952 Convention in Mexico City it became quite clear that the idea of centralized control had progressed to an alarming extent.

The apparent determination of the R.I. Board of that year to control the Council on Legislation and the Convention itself caused considerable dissatisfaction among the Delegates there and subsequently among their Clubs at home.

The fears of the Clubs were intensified by the new Board's announcement shortly after the Delegates had left Mexico City that, at the 1953 Convention in Paris, France, the Board would propose legislation to take away from the Clubs all legislative power and make the Council on Legislation the supreme legislative body of the Association.

When this news came out some Clubs promptly protested against the proposal and against scheduling it for action without further consideration, but they were told that their protests were

out of order - that there could be no changes in the proposal and no delay in putting it into effect.

Then the Grass Roots activity got under way - hundreds of Clubs sent to the Board their protests. There were so many of them the Board decided it would not present its proposal at Paris but it used the publications of the Association to circulate a one-sided and unfair review of the situation and declined to print and circulate a reply to it. This naturally aggravated the situation and resulted in the first grassroots meeting at which over 50 Clubs were represented.

Happily the Council on Legislation and the Convention at Paris were conducted without evidence of centralized control over the Clubs which had been so evident at other Conventions.

However efforts to hush up the grass roots activity were unsuccessful. It persisted. And this year's Board appointed a special committee of past directors to look further into it. That Committee has done a fine job of analyzing the situation and making recommendations on it to the Board which in turn has taken several decisions which will be of great help in the situation.

To return to Mexico City for a moment - Bill Manier of Nashville, Tennessee, who was the President of Rotary International about 20 years ago came to the Convention very much concerned about the situation. He spoke in the Council and in the Convention pointing out a trend in Rotary from democracy toward centralization which he said was similar to the trend in the world toward totalitarianism in Governments. For his effort to awaken us to the situation he was denounced and accused of having ulterior selfish motives. Following the Convention he found himself engaged in a heavy correspondence on the subject while suffering from a severe flu attack which culminated in a heart attack. No doubt his life was shortened by his endeavor to make the Clubs realize how close they were to losing their democracy.

As I stood at Bill's grave in Nashville about a year ago I wondered if some one would pick up the torch he had lighted. I found that others were already doing so and I became interested in their work the grass roots movement.

As the result of some thinking on the subject my conclusion is that:

There is one fundamental conflict in the thinking of members of the human race everywhere.

It is the conflict between altruism and selfishness.

It isn't merely a conflict between the USA and Russia.

It is something that exists in the relations of all nations, and in every nation, every community, every family, every individual.

Rotary came into being as an effort to resolve the conflict on the side of altruism - at first within a club, later in wider fields.

In the present general world situation we can note three conflicting ideologies:

- First: Man's faith in God and love of his neighbor vs. Rejection of God and faith in and love of himself.  
And that's Altruism vs. Selfishness.
- Second: Spiritual, mental, physical, economic Freedom vs. Compulsion.
- Third: In the conduct of human relations  
Democracy vs Totalitarianism.

Rotary is altruistic, free and democratic and in its organizational set-up and in its operation the Rotary Movement should manifest and exemplify its steadfast adherence to Altruism, Freedom and Democracy for by doing so it will encourage the practice of these three things throughout the world.

You see my thinking took me out beyond simply a concern as to the relation of the Central Administration to the Clubs which may be all the grass roots fellows are presently concerned about. I too am concerned about that because it can be a contributing factor in achieving our overall objective. If we haven't in mind doing that it matters little how the Rotary Movement lives out its span of life.

Lest you think I am conjuring up a new objective for Rotary let me remind you that back in 1915 the Clubs in convention adopted a Code of Ethics (drafted in the Sioux City Club) and in that Code which still is Rotary's Code (altho possibly most of you do not realize that you accepted it in becoming a Rotarian) it is asserted that Rotary exists to educate all men and all institutions with regard to its high ideals. And back in the 20s there was published a list of seven fundamentals of Rotary, one of which was its "high ideal and obligation of service to humanity".

Organizing another 8,000 Rotary Clubs and having another 400,000 Rotarians (and we want them) will be a contribution to our overall objective but while we are doing this much how many millions of converts to communism will have been made? Think of that.

A program which will with greatest speed multiply tremendously the number of people in our country, and in all other countries, who accept and practice the ideal of service needs the constructive thinking of every one of our 400,000 Rotarians. I am not trying to say what or how they shall think but that they should be giving thought to such a program.

To get them thinking it is essential that the Central Administration give the Clubs a lead as to how to get their members to participate in studying and discussing the problem.

To get their Central Administration to do this the Clubs must take greater interest in the operation of the Central Administration.

That is what many Clubs are now doing and the reaction of the R. I. Board to this effort is most encouraging.

If you haven't done so by all means read Vice President Halsey Knapp's article in the March issue of The Rotarian and you'll see that the present Rotary International Board of Directors recognizes that the Clubs are Rotary International, and that the present members of the Board propose to administer things the way the Clubs want them administered. Halsey's article is in fact a message from the Board to the Clubs - an invitation for us to move on into Rotary's Golden Year with harmonious understanding and close cooperation between the Board and the Clubs.

It is now up to our Clubs to demonstrate not only that they want to participate in the advancement of the Rotary Movement but that they know how to do so. This may not be easy at first after being out of practice so long but they can find ways to do it.

My Club has set up a special committee of 31 members, some old members but most of them from our newer members of the past ten years - a sort of cross section of the Club as it is today - to study matters of R.I. administration and make suggestions to the Club as to matters on which the Club might make a proposal or offer as constructive comment or suggestion. This procedure might be a good idea for all the larger and medium size Clubs. The smaller Clubs probably can do the job in their regular meetings.

If the Clubs will participate and participate constructively that will settle all question of democracy vs. centralization. If the Clubs demonstrate an unwillingness or inability to participate we may have to forsake the idea of democracy in our Rotary Association and let centralization prevail no matter how far it may go or where it may lead.

Democracy is not found as a product of nature. It is created by like-minded men participating in a mutual endeavor.

There are Rotarians who sincerely believe that a centralized Rotary International is the proper or at least the necessary setup for the movement, just as there are Americans who think likewise in regard to the Government at Washington and its relation to the Member State, of the Union. Rotarians in some other countries, who have always lived under centralized Governments, may be inclined to similar thinking with regard to the Rotary movement.

There are of course those who definitely believe in democracy and would like to see more democratic participation by Rotary Clubs but can't believe it is workable. They don't think the Clubs want it.

Some Rotarians are convinced that our Association and its conventions have grown to enormous that the member Clubs can no longer participate in the control of them, and that the Clubs and their Conferences don't want to be bothered with the consideration of proposed legislation. I can't agree with their thinking. To me it is democratically pessimistic.

It is probably true that most North American Rotary luncheons are conducted as centers of good fellowship, periods of relaxation from business and professional strains, listening to an outside speaker, with some entertainment, and that is all the average Rotarian thinks he wants at his Club luncheons.

No doubt the great majority of Rotarians are not at present concerned about any overall objective or even the administration of the Rotary Movement. Their minds are preoccupied with other matters.

This means that Rotary Clubs are becoming just luncheon clubs. The situation could be changed. All Rotarians are competent to think about the Movement in general. The Rotarians will do more thinking and participating if the privilege of, and the responsibility for, doing so are clearly brought to their attention.

Better procedures can be devised. The Central Administration could report matters to the Clubs in an interest-arousing style. A Board or Convention decision could be accompanied by a brief review of the background of it and the reasoning that caused the decision. (To assume that Club officers and members always have such information in their minds is a mistake.)

Convention and Conference programs can be arranged so as to present Rotary business matters in a manner that will enable Delegates to understand them with sufficient time for action on them.

In Salesmanship getting an interview is not enough. Interest must be aroused. Desire must be created. It may take some definite salesmanship to present matters to the Clubs so that their interest in them will be aroused, and a desire to participate in them will be created.

The Rotarian and Revista Rotaria can present interest-arousing articles about Rotary's business matters with fairly stated differences of opinion among Clubs about them. Proposed legislation when notified to the Clubs can be accompanied by the background of the need for it and with the pros and cons so far as known in regard to it.

The Advisory Council on Legislation is a helpful agency of the Convention bringing together as it does points of view from all over the Rotary world, but its recommendations to the Voting Delegates should be accompanied by the Council's reasons for its recommendations and with information as to how the vote stood on them in the Council.

In the development of improved procedures we should not forget the need to think about our overall objective and how we can accomplish it.

I am not suggesting that every Club luncheon should be devoted to it but from time to time it could be a Club program, and there might be reminders about it in the Club bulletin.

It can be on the programs of the District Conferences and of the International Convention.

In the International Assembly the Governors can be guided and inspired to carry a message on the subject to their Clubs.

Also the Governors might be encouraged to discover opportunities to reach non-Rotarian audiences and get people generally to think about the acceptance of the ideal of service by everybody.



I have a suspicion that our older Clubs - probably the majority of our Clubs - are tired of being reminded year after year about established procedures for a Club's local activities, and told each year about the thrilling experience of sitting in an International Assembly with men from all parts of the world. That may be good vitamins for newly organized Clubs but the older ones need something else.

I believe they would like to know about the latest planning for effectively conveying the ideal of service to the millions of people who are not and never will be members of Rotary Clubs and the millions who have not even heard of Rotary.

I am convinced our whole Rotary Movement can be stirred to participation in the fulfillment of its destiny.

We live today in a restless world and while at the moment most of our Clubs may appear somewhat lacking in interest in a thing outside of themselves - others are infected with the general restlessness. They are not satisfied to vegetate in their home towns. They want to go somewhere. They want to participate in collective activity to implement more widely Rotary's Object (as stated or implied) in a world that needs a wide-spread international ideology that is neither communist nor fascist.

An intelligent, a wise, a dynamic leadership both at the top level and the District and Club levels will make our thousands of Clubs a real living force for a peaceful world - not a militant or aggressive force but a persuasive force in all countries of the world convincing peoples everywhere that WE ALL BENEFIT MOST WHEN WE ALL SERVE BEST.

That is Rotary's message, not a political one, not a theological one but the Golden rule, the God-loving and neighbor-loving, message which the world needs and which Rotary can deliver effectively if it will. But it will require a democratic Rotary to do it effectively.

Many years ago at the close of our convention in Salt Lake City an old man came into the lobby of the hotel carrying a bunch of garden flowers. Speaking to me he said: "Excuse me, but I've been reading in the papers about your Convention. You Rotarians have something so good, so lovely, something the world needs so much that I wanted to bring to the Convention these flowers from my garden. The Convention is over, they tell me, but will you accept them with my prayers for Rotary's success?"

Just an old man with a bunch of flowers from his garden to testify that 35 years ago the Rotarians had something the world needs. Do we still have it in 1954? Yes, but are we giving it to the world as we should? What do you think? Will you all do some thinking?

I conclude by reminding you that the booklet of 32 proposed Enactments and Resolutions for this year's Convention will be in the mails to us in about 10 days. Will your Club study them and decide which should be adopted, which rejected or tabled for further consideration before action?

Will your Club and my Club and other Clubs be prepared to present our thinking on the floor of

the next three Conventions at Seattle and Chicago and Philadelphia?

It has been said that we understand and appreciate best the things that we participate in.

At this year's Convention we are going to have a full day for the business of Rotary. Let's make good use of it.

Let's see if participation in the advancement of the Rotary Movement doesn't cause us to understand and appreciate Rotary as a call to service by a body of 400,000 men who can, if they will, contribute powerfully to the making of the world into a decent place for their grandchildren to live in.

Thank you for listening to me.