



Scientia Coronati Research Lodge No. 4 F&AM

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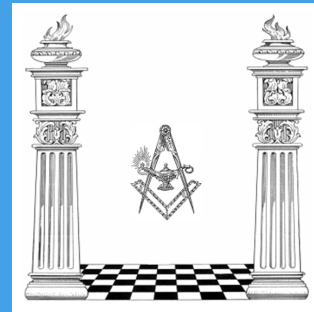
# Essays, Papers & Articles

**Masonic Topics**

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## And the Earth was without

form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and God said, 'Let there be light'



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## FREEMASONRY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AND... BEYOND? (PART I)

*“What Come You Here To Do?”<sup>1</sup>*

**THE DOORS TO THE TEMPLE HAVE BEEN FLUNG OPEN:** The survival of Freemasonry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has been a topic of discussion and concern and rightly so. The latest issue of *The Philalethes, Volume LIX, October 2006* has a great article that cuts straight to the heart of the matter. Presented by the Knights of the North, the feature reprints a series of 1960 articles by Dwight Smith, Past Grand Master and at the time Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Indiana.

I will use parts of it to highlight this extremely critical issue in this short article and the next.

Shrinking membership has been the bane of modern Freemasons and their lodges. Over the decade, Grand Lodges all over North America have tried to turn the tide with one-day classes, reduced proficiency requirements, cut rate deals on multiple degrees and many other similar efforts.

The huge numbers of men joining our fraternity in the 40's, 50's and 60's are gone forever, a statistical aberration that will never happen again (or will it?). The majority of men who have spent decades sending in their money to carry cards in their wallets for the York Rite, the Scottish Rite, the Shrine, the Grotto, and the OES aren't going to those places any more than they are attending their Blue Lodges. It is now our job as the next generation of leaders to decide where Freemasonry is headed and how to get there.

We are poised on a ledge, and can either fall into oblivion, or turn around and head in a direction different from the one we are going. The direction should not be to become just another service club, like the Lions or Kiwanis. And, certainly not to turn our lodges into bars and billiard halls.

Freemasonry today stands in the unenviable position of being forgotten by the next generation of men. Unlike our European brethren who constantly battle with Anti-Masons, the society in the United States has not turned against us or held us responsible for world domination. We have simply been ignored and cast aside on the heaps with Edsels, 8-Track tapes, and buggy whips.

After decades of throwing the doors open to anyone and everyone, diminishing our standards and allowing our Temples to crumble both literally and figuratively, what can we do to stop the downward spiral of mediocrity we seem to have embraced? How do we turn the tiller of the Craft? Are we deaf to the wake up call being sounded? How long are we going to be asleep at the wheel?

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<sup>1</sup> Knights of the North, *Laudable Pursuit*, The Philalethes, Vol. LIX, October 2006, Number 5,

The new generation of members want to associate with something ancient, something mythical, something legendary; with a group that has been the fraternity of the greatest of men for three centuries; with a fraternity that is world wide in its scope, and universal in its welcoming of all faiths and all races; with a local lodge that helps the family next door and the school down the street; with a group that once was at the forefront of issues that shaped this country and, arguably, was the crucible that gave birth to the American Revolution, because they were men of action and social conscience; with a fraternity that claims as its members the most imaginative minds and the most successful of men.

But what do we give them when they enter? Think about what they expect versus what they find. Given that disparity, how long do we suspect they will stay? Freemasonry is losing more men today to demits and non-payment of dues than to the death rate. In short, we are boring our members to death.

A tide is turning and more young men are rediscovering Freemasonry. They first learn of it through unlikely sources—The History Channel, popular books such as Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*, and *Solomon Key*, films like 'National Treasure' or unflattering ones like 'From Hell'. But instead of finding a relative or a neighbor who might be a Mason, they are turning to the internet for their information. It is certain that the first knock on our door will be an electronic one. Are we ready to answer that knock?

We now have hard choices to make, and a limited time in which to make them. It will be the Lodges and Masonic bodies that adapt and carry a vision forward that will survive.

For too long we as leaders and protectors of this noble institution have fled the battlefield.

My brothers, until the next article.

***George Weil***

## FREEMASONRY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AND... BEYOND? (PART II)

### *“Whither Are We Traveling?”<sup>1</sup>*

**HOW WELL ARE WE GUARDING THE WEST GATE?** The survival of Freemasonry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has been a topic of discussion and concern and rightly so. The latest issue of *The Philalethes, Volume LIX, October 2006* has a great article that cuts straight to the heart of the matter. Presented by the Knights of the North, the feature reprints a series of 1960 articles by Dwight Smith, Past Grand Master and at the time Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Indiana.

I will use parts of it to highlight this extremely critical issue within this short article and the next.

I would like to dive in and highlight chapter three in the writings of P.G.M. Smith. Chapter three is entitled “*Asleep at the West Gate.*” This chapter discusses: the investigation process and quality versus quantity of perspective petitioners. The chapter begins on how poor a job Masonic Lodges are doing in assigning the most important assignment ever made in a Lodge. That assignment being the proper choosing of an investigating committee. The assignment was being compared as follows: “It was being done with no more thought than would be given to who shall turn out the lights.”

Let’s face it. Thousands of men have become Masons who should never have passed the ballot. The result—the Craft is not looked upon with the same degree of respect it once enjoyed.

Maybe the Open Door Policy is not a selective policy; it is a come-one-come-all policy. Isn’t Freemasonry a selective organization? Where did the idea come from that a man—almost any man—has an inherent right to become a Freemason? Is this not a privilege to be conferred upon the worthy? It should be if Freemasonry is to avoid the fate of a score of fraternal groups whose names are well forgotten and faded with time.

We cannot escape the fact that men judge Freemasonry by what they see. And if what they see does not command their respect, then we need not expect them to seek our fellowship.

Are Lodges utilizing their most capable members for duty on investigating committees? Some argue no. In every Lodge there are brethren of high standards who love the Fraternity and want to see its good name protected, men who would really stand guard at the West Gate.

P.G.M. Smith continues to point out some very interesting views about letting our guard down when accepting petitions. He goes on to say the following... There is simply no substitute for quality. We are accepting too many petitioners who can pay the fee and little else. Too many men who have no conception of what Freemasonry is or what it seeks to do, and who don’t care one bit about increasing their moral stature; too many men who look upon the Craft with contempt and are interested in using it only as a springboard from which to gain a prestige symbol. Pretty powerful words from PGM Smith don’t you think? Are they true?

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<sup>1</sup> Dwight L. Smith, P.G.M., *Whither Are We Traveling*, pamphlet, 1962, Internet

Are there better and more thorough methods in helping us choose men of character? Here are further suggestions to consider for investigating petitioners:

1. Provide stronger guidelines to Lodges for meeting with potential candidates.
2. Meet him more than once and at least one time at his home.
3. Have him come to the Lodge and meet some of the brethren at a meeting prior to his petition being read.
4. Have him provide a written statement on why he seeks to be part of this organization. What he seeks to gain from this fraternity. How does he see Freemasonry improving his life?

Are these suggestions out of the question? What we must remember is that Masonry is a very serious subject. Ours is not a club, not a Rotary or Lions with aprons.

One of the conditions causing concern is the fact that successful young men are not petitioning for membership. True, they maybe busy getting ahead in this world or they my not have the money or they may not be interested. But consider this. Why should intelligent young leaders in the community petition a Lodge if they have little or nothing in common with its members?

If they cannot find Freemasonry a social, intellectual and cultural atmosphere that is comfortable; **they will find it elsewhere.**

My brothers, until the next article.

***Bro. George Weil***

## FREEMASONRY IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY AND... BEYOND? (PART III)

*“For Where Your Treasure Is, There Will Your Heart Be Also.”*

**IF IT IS EASY TO JOIN, IT IS EASY TO LEAVE.** The survival of Freemasonry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has been a topic of discussion and concern and rightly so. The latest issue of *The Philalethes, Volume LIX, October 2006* has a great article that cuts straight to the heart of the matter. Presented by the Knights of the North, the feature reprints a series of 1960 articles by Dwight Smith, Past Grand Master and at the time Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Indiana.

I will use parts of it to highlight this extremely critical issue within this short article and the next.

Let's begin this article with chapter four in the writings of P.G.M. Smith. Chapter four is entitled *“Pearl of Great Price?”* This chapter discusses: how Freemasonry is simply too easy to join and too cheap to belong to.

Before we are in a position to tackle some of the difficulties that beset us, we must reestablish the premise that Freemasonry is worth a great deal of effort and a great deal of sacrifice, a great deal of waiting to obtain, hence the title of the article Pearl of Great Price.

Let us consider that a century ago it was not uncommon for men to pay what amounted to a month's wages to become a Mason. We know without challenge that today's petitioners are paying a fee, which represent a very small investment. Have we placed such a cheap value on the basic degrees that it is no wonder newly raised Masons end up having little or no respect for their Symbolic Lodge? Has Freemasonry become too easy to obtain?

Arthur H. Strickland of Kansas wrote an article for *The Philalethes* entitled, *“Who Killed Cock Robin?”* Mr. Strickland's article was calling attention to the old saying, what is easy to get is not much appreciated. He further observed, “We have done everything that we can think of to cheapen Masonry...we have cheapened the Fraternity to the point that it is seriously reacting against us.”

Has money, speed and liberalization taken over as symptoms to this disease? Consider the following:

1. **Our fees for the degrees and for membership are too low.** An argument has been made that an investment in monetary value would accomplish more good than bad for the fraternity. What monetary value is our parent lodge worth? What do you expect to get back for your hard earned money? Do you get your money's worth now? Does raising the dues help identify the truly committed?

2. **Everything is geared to speed, as if a deadline had to be met.** Freemasonry is no longer worth waiting for, nor working for, nor sacrificing for. Too often it is only a badge of respectability, a prestige symbol, to be obtained with the same hurry-up zeal that would be assumed in acquiring a new car or new television. Comprehension of the philosophy of Freemasonry, its symbolism, ethics, and traditions, what it is and what it seeks to do are all lost in the shuffle. Is Freemasonry worth the trouble of waiting for? Would you have gone through all this trouble to be part of this fraternal organization?
  
3. **The liberalization of Freemasonry.** Have you heard the story of an incident in Montana where a brother Mason received his fifty-year button without ever having attended a meeting of his own Lodge? Are we becoming paper Masons? You know the type. These are brothers who wear the rings and talk a good talk but don't attend Lodge meetings or any type of Masonic meetings? Physical problems aside, how do they contribute to the betterment of Freemasonry? To the future survival of their parent Lodge? How do they make good men better men?

When we downgrade our Craft, submit it to all types of shortcuts, label it as something hardly worth mentioning, what can we expect if Master Masons no longer give to their Lodges their full measure of loyalty and devotion?

Please reflect on these words... "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

My brothers, until the next article.

***Bro. George Weil***

## FREEMASONRY IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY AND... BEYOND? (PART IV)

*“We are hard at work to make each lodge so large that it becomes an impersonal aggregation of strangers—a closed corporation.”*

*-- PGM Dwight Smith*

**LET’S GET BIGGER! YES, THE BIGGER THE BETTER.** The survival of Freemasonry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has been a topic of discussion and concern and rightly so. The latest issue of *The Philalethes, Volume LIX, December 2006* has a great article that cuts straight to the heart of the matter. Presented by the Knights of the North, the feature reprints a series of 1960 articles by Dwight Smith, Past Grand Master and at the time Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Indiana.

I will use parts of it to highlight this extremely critical issue within this short article and the next.

Let’s begin this article with chapter five in the writings of P.G.M. Smith. Chapter five is entitled *“The Closed Corporation.”* This chapter discusses: The development of the oversized, impersonal Lodge.

Let’s all start with this premise. The entire philosophy of Masonry revolves around the individual. All its symbolism is individual symbolism; all its tradition and practice is aimed at making individuals wiser, better, and consequently happier.

Then why do we worship at the altar of bigness? For one thing, we are Americans. We measure civilization in terms of automobiles, TV sets and other big material items. Is it not logical that we would compare large numbers of members with a sense of well being in the Lodge? Can we get past our foolish idea that in order to be an effective Lodge it must be large, and wealthy, in which 5 percent or less of its membership can huddle together on meeting nights.

What happens when we worship at the altar of bigness? Consider the following:

1. **Well, in the first place, our annual waste of leadership is nothing short of a sin.** Every year our Lodges welcome into Masonic membership hundreds of men with a great potential for inspired, dedicated leadership – and then we make certain they will have no opportunity to exercise it. Only one Master can serve in a given Lodge per year. Are we too shortsighted, too bound up in numbers and bank accounts to recognize the manpower going to waste?
2. **We provide too few opportunities for new members to use their talents, and then wonder why they lose interest and drift away.** Have you heard about new members who attend meetings once, twice, three times and then no more? But, why should they come when there is nothing for them to do except listen to the minutes and allow the bills? There is no place for them; worst of all, no one seems to care.



3. **The fellowship of Freemasonry does not thrive in the mass.** When will we learn that fellowship, one of the pillars of our Brotherhood, is an intimate thing not shared with great numbers? What must be the feeling of a newly raised member when he discovers that his Lodge, which promised him fellowship and intimate friendships, is but a huge, impersonal aggregation of strangers – a Closed Corporation!

**FINAL THOUGHTS:** What happens to an institution designed to be simple becomes complex, when units meant to be small become oversize and unwieldy, when work intended for many is restricted to a handful, when something that should be intimate becomes impersonal?

What happens? Look around. Exhibit A is all around us.

I think Freemasonry has more to offer the Twenty First Century than the Twenty first Century has to offer Freemasonry.

My brothers, until the next article.

***Bro. George Weil***

## FREEMASONRY IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY AND... BEYOND? (PART V)

**ARE WE AS FREEMASONS STILL RELEVANT?** This question is often brought up in Masonic forums and by non-Masons. This indicates that it is an issue of importance to many brethren. Furthermore, it is often raised when discussing the conditions in which our lodges presently are in or maybe from what seems to be the future of the Craft.

The Webster dictionary defines ‘relevant’ as follows:

“Etymology: Mediaeval latin *relevant-*, *relevans*, from Latin, present participle of *relavare* to raise up. **1.** Having significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand. **2.** Affording evidence tending to prove or disprove the matter at issue or under discussion <*relevant* testimony> **3.** Having social relevance. **4.** The quality or state of being relevant; pertinency; applicability.”

Let’s focus on the last two definitions. After all, we want to be sure that what we do is worth our efforts!

Let’s also deal with this issue mainly from the moral aspect. And, let me say that this article is a very, very small presentation to a subject that could fill bookshelves. So, I will try and distill this subject to a more manageable size and hopefully what remains is an effort to point out several possible angles of ‘relevancy’ thus leaving you to further develop these issues by discussion, research or personal reflection.

I agree with an article written by R.W. Daniel Doron from the Grand Lodge of Israel. He states in his paper that when discussing the ‘relevancy’ of our being Freemasons some questions should be considered. They are:

- a. Is Freemasonry relevant to my daily life?
- b. Do other people regard my being a Mason as affecting my attitudes and actions, which proves it relevance to me?
- c. Has Freemasonry as an organization any relevance to present societies in which it exists?
- d. Does society regard our Masonic body as relevant to solving the present or the future problems of human society?

Freemasonry is a system of morality, which helps us to re-shape ourselves in accordance with moral principles. It seems that in every modern society, Freemasonry can contribute to a better social atmosphere and a greater sensitivity to the needs of all members of our society. Especially the weak and needy. As Freemasons, we should be proud of this.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R.W. Daniel Doron, Reuven Lodge #1, The Grand Lodge of Israel, *Is Freemasonry Still Relevant?* Pietre-Stones, 2006, Internet

The strength and worth of a lodge does not depend upon numbers and popular attractions. It rests on the quality of the lodge membership and its educational programs. It depends on their united and consistent co-operation towards a common ideal. Lodges must do more than endlessly rehearse ceremonies. New Masons need a forum to discuss the working tools, the Tracing boards and other aspects of the Craft. In an open seminar you must be ready to argue your case. You may even have to change your view. If Freemasons fail to do this or fail to grow educationally our Order will lose the respect of the next generation.<sup>2</sup> New members may join but they will not stay, and Masonry will fade out of existence and go the way of the Dodo.

It seems to me that what other people think of us a Freemasons or our organization does not cause any doubts to our relevancy among brethren. Would you agree that it is ourselves that have to be convinced that our belonging to the Craft is of value to us as individuals?

This article really hasn't answered any questions for you. The intent was not to give you answers but to have you think about issues that affect you as a Mason and the future of the Craft.

Will our own lives become richer as a result of our being Freemasons in deeds and in thought? I leave this for each of you to consider.

This is the final part to "Freemasonry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." I hope that you found it helpful.

My brothers, until the next article.

***Bro. George Weil***

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Lomas, *Turning the Hiram Key*, Mass, 2005, p. 361-372