

Around the world



A New Paradigm For Masonry

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I want to take you back three centuries and more to the earliest period of Masonry in Europe. When Masonry began to spread in the 17th century, it consisted of a small number of men who endorsed and practised a number of ideas which were not the majority opinion, such as religious tolerance or the acceptance of scientific ideas. As such it attracted a number of members who were interested in being the engines of change. Throughout the eighteenth century, especially in continental Europe, it attracted men interested in intellectual change and the advancement of new ideas, people like Voltaire. It attracted people who wanted to change the established patterns of colonialism, like George Washington and Simon Bolivar. Into the nineteenth century it became part of the force that led men like Benito Juarez, Dr. José Rizal, and Giuseppe Garibaldi, on three completely different continents no less, to oppose the power of institutionalized religion in the political lives of their respective countries.

The paradigm used during this period was that of an organization which questioned the establishment and built up relationships between men one at a time creating a tightly bonded social group. It was this paradigm which was feared by the established order, especially where freedom of thought and lack of social conformity was harmful to that order's agenda.

But after the second world war, especially in the English-speaking world, that paradigm changed. Masonry became part of the establishment, not an élite dedicated to questioning it. Yes, we could celebrate the efforts of past Masons, but we defeated Hitler, didn't we, and everyone in the English-speaking world was endorsing all of those Masonic values our heroes fought for. Masons were mainstream. Masonry stopped being an élite which gave the example for social change and became the "organization of choice" for those who wanted to improve their social status. Membership skyrocket-

ed, but Masons stopped being leaders and became followers. So when McCarthyism reared its ugly head in the United States, it was not the Freemasons who fought it. They supported it.

And being followers meant adopting the paradigm of followers: bowing to social pressure, worrying about being the majority, and hence about numbers, and changing fundamental principles to conform with the majority opinion. The result is that we allowed the outside world to dictate to us, rather than dictating to ourselves.

And when you are followers, you cannot be ahead of the times; you must always be behind the times. Almost instantly, Masonry began to be an "old boys' club". In the 1960s, with a generation challenging the post-war establishment, Masonry was ridiculed as being pompous, old-fashioned and ineffectual. And within the Craft, there were also those who realized that something had gone wrong. In 1961 the Past Grand Master of Indiana, M.W. Bro. Dwight Smith, a journalist, wrote a series of articles, anthologized as "Whither Are We Travelling?" questioning the entire paradigm of American Masonry in his day. Sixty years later, his criticisms resonate; he has influenced many Indiana Masons, including Chris Hodapp. Smith criticized the Lodge for the automatic promotion of officers, lowered standards in examining candidates, cheap initiation fees, lodges so large they are "an impersonal aggregation of strangers", obsession with Masonic clubs and concordant bodies, impersonal institutionalized charity, joyless socializing, and lack of education. Sound familiar?

And because we are perpetuating the paradigm which led to all the problems Smith listed, these continue to be problems. "Renewal" programs and membership improvement programs dedicated to returning us to the way things were in 1955 fail because they strengthen rather than weaken the paradigm which is the source of our problems.

A change of paradigm is long overdue. Let's face the reality that our organization was never meant to have the number of members it once did. It was intended to be an élite, consisting only of men who were fired by the desire for fellowship, true gentlemanliness, and moral truth no matter what the establishment felt about it. It was intended to

consist of men who were intimately bonded with other men who were fired by the same desire.

Is there a need for such an organization? God, yes. Part of the problem with the paradigm we have been saddled with is that it focuses us on numbers, which means that keeping those massive numbers of men around we used to have is more important than getting a few newer and younger members. But members over 50 years of age (I include myself in this) are less important than the members under 50. In twenty years time, if there is to be Freemasonry at all, it will be these men who will be running it, not us. That is why I try my hardest to listen to what new candidates have to say and what they want. A few years ago a 25-year old Mason from Hamilton Ontario called Christopher Coome wrote about what Masonry had to offer to men of his age. Listen to this:

"As young men, we are part of a generation dominated by an addiction to video games and the lewder parts of the internet. We are a generation of men that has fallen so far behind our female counterparts in academia, that there are now councils being organized to see what is wrong. In sum, we are one of the most lost generations of men in Western history. . . . We as a generation, have so little to hold on to, and so little to understand. And how do we find our way out of this? Most of our generation, young men, would rather focus on their fleeting distractions than finding a way to transcend them. . . . When you see an entire family glued to their cellphones, rather than talking to each other, I offer you an institution where men meet the way they have for centuries, to talk, to fraternize, and to learn to be better. I offer you the very quintessence of human interaction, free from computer screens and the intoxicating buzzings of a million whining gadgets. I offer you an experience that will change your life."

What Coome finds in Masonry is an escape from video games, internet porn, being glued to cellphones, computer screens and electronic gadgets. It means freedom from the virtual world and encountering reality. Social distancing has been coming on for years, you know; COVID only

pushed it to ridiculous lengths, which people are prepared to accept because they were already half way there. If you want something, don't go to the store—buy it on Amazon. If you want something to eat, don't go to a restaurant—call Skip the Dishes. If you want to learn something, don't find a teacher—go to YouTube. If you want friendships, don't get to know anyone—subscribe to Facebook. If you want sex, don't go out to meet a partner—dial up a porn site. (Did you know that one reason given for Japan's plummeting birthrate is that Japanese young men in droves have internet sex partners?) All of these things keep people from leaving their houses and meeting any real people. If you are able to work from home, as it is predicted a larger number of people will do as time goes on since it is cheaper for businesses, then you can live your whole life without ever leaving your tiny little room, and many people do. I know someone who does. This is living in the Matrix, and he has taken the blue pill. But for those who want the red pill, the red pill is Freemasonry. Or it can be.

What will our new paradigm for Masonry look like? What will it have to offer the select few who know what they need and cannot find it elsewhere?

First, we need to discard the idea that bigger is better. Smaller is better. A meeting of a dozen people is a party; a meeting of a thousand people is a rally. In a rally the individual is swallowed up in a corporate identity. When Lodges are having meetings of more than a couple dozen people they should be thinking of creating a new Lodge.

This is not a new idea. T.M. Spence, Grand Master of Saskatchewan, said in 1966, over 50 years ago:

Masonry thrives best in a Lodge whose members form a small compact company in which compatibility and group consciousness are overriding considerations.

Once we accept that smaller is better, it is easier to focus on quality rather than quantity. Distilling wine into brandy reduces the amount you have but makes it more potent. If we adopt this paradigm we can learn to guard the west gate better, because we can accept that not every petitioner will make the cut. Some people are not cut out for Masonry.

We can also raise our expectations of the behaviour of our brethren. My favourite line from the movie *The Incredibles* is "if everyone is super, no-one is." We need our brothers to know that we

have chosen them, that their membership in the Lodge is a privilege and an honour which is not given indiscriminately, but conferred according to merit and ability. If the activities of your Lodge are special, the members will go out of their way to make them special, by putting on their best clothing, the clothing that they save for Lodge, (and this does not mean wearing clothing mandated for them by others), and by going out of their way to go the extra mile. When it is my turn to make lunch for the Lodge meeting I consider it my job to turn something out that the brethren will talk about when they get home.

And it also means making the time in your life for Masonry. I ask myself sometimes why young Masons sometimes claim that they have no time. After all, everyone has precisely 24 hours in every day and always have had. The lesson of the 24-inch gauge teaches us that those hours are to be allocated to their proper uses. We are inundated by gadgets, apps and services which are supposed to save time for us in order to spend less time on those things we do not want to, and yet people say that they have no time to do the things that they do want to, when people in the past always seemed to have plenty of time to do so. As a theory, I am going to suggest that these people may be unaware of what they are actually spending their time on, and that they are using time unproductively because they have not thought about how they are allocating it. (Hence the 24-inch gauge.)

Some also have no control over their time. Shift workers, for example, are tied to rhythms which do not correspond with those which govern Lodge meetings. Of course shift work is not new, but there seems to be a lot of it about and it seems to be more unpredictable. But shift workers still have some time under their control. People who are on call all the time have none at all. For some, this is the condition of their employment. For others, they have made it a condition of being self-employed. And in some cases their entire life is under the control of their boss, their shareholders, their demanding customers. They are not free to commit themselves to anything.

Freemasonry by definition requires us to be free and not be slaves. We have to be free to make promises and to keep them. Masons rarely think about how central to our system the idea of making promises is, but what is an obligation if not a promise? And what did Hiram Abiff teach us if not

that we should rather die than break our word? Yet society has been drifting along accepting more and more that we don't need to keep our promises, and because of the follower paradigm we have been drifting along with it. This goes hand in hand with surrendering control of your time, so that promising to do something or be somewhere at a particular time is always liable to be overruled by something else. Just imagine what we could accomplish if we adjusted our paradigm to one where we always keep our promises!

A Lodge meeting, as has often been noted, takes place in "a temple of peace, harmony and brotherly love", where "nothing is allowed to enter which has the remotest tendency to disturb the quietude of its pursuit"—a different world from the Matrix full of "the intoxicating buzzings of a million whining gadgets". We create that different world by sealing the Lodge room off both literally and symbolically. That is what tiling is all about. I cannot count the number of young men (not older ones, mind you) who have told me that they find joy in Lodge because of this feeling that we are in a different, more peaceful, less frenetic world than the one outside.

But this amazing and wonderful experience is being threatened by the paradigm that we need to be like everyone else in order to be the mainstream club we imagine we ought to be. Part of that paradigm is the idea that we need to be inclusive all the time. Therefore we have meetings where the door is not guarded at all, and anyone can walk in, because we do not want the Tyler to be excluded from the meeting. That is why I have been in a Lodge where a pizza deliveryman burst into the Lodge room in the middle of the meeting asking if anyone had ordered a pizza. It is also threatened by having members with electronic devices buzzing away in their pockets or other connections to electronic communication. I have seen Lodges open Zoom links during the Lodge meeting, so as to be more inclusive and include people who are not there. But in the process we not only open our meeting to anyone who can hack these easily hackable communication devices but damage or destroy the different world that a tiled Lodge represents.

This is not about new technology. A hundred years ago, they had the technology which would allow the interruption of a Lodge meeting to allow messages to come from the outside. They had the technology which would allow them to include in

some way the brothers that were not there. They only had to install a telephone in the Lodge room. They never did. They accepted that all communication with the outside should be mediated through a Tyler, and that if you could not be at the meeting physically, you could not partake in that special space which a Lodge creates.

There is a deep meaning for this, just as there is a deep meaning behind why we talk about and experience a special bond of friendship, and have traditions and rituals in which handshakes and getting into the personal space of other men feature prominently. "Hand to hand, I greet you like a brother"; the handshake is essential to the bond of brotherhood, and is one of the hallmarks of Masonry, one which has been imitated in other organizations—the scouting movement, for example. This is no coincidence. Physical contact with other people causes the release of a hormone called oxytocin. What does oxytocin do? Among other things, it is called the "trust hormone", and increases trust, bonding, empathy, generosity and social cohesion with the people you touch and share food with. The bond between parent and child so essential to the child's development, the bond between husband and wife, and the bond between Brothers are all strengthened by the release of this hormone.

Looking at pictures doesn't do it. You don't get a shot of oxytocin from watching TV, or Zoom meetings, or conferences over the internet. You need to touch other people. Handshakes are not a curious but dispensable part of our Craft. They are essential to its continued existence.

And they are essential in society generally, for two reasons. One is that the drift toward living in the Matrix has created a true and very dangerous pandemic of loneliness in our society. That loneliness, the lack of human contact, can and does bring on depression, drug and alcohol abuse, and in some cases insanity. There is a reason why the introduction of social distancing was followed by a massive increase in drug overdoses. There is a reason why that people who go on killing sprees usually turn out to be loners with no close friends.

The second reason is that handshakes cause oxytocin release and that makes you both more trusting and more trustworthy with the people you shake hands with. Dr. Eric Uslander of the University of Maryland says,

Trust as a moral resource leads us to look beyond our own kind. It means

that we downplay bad experiences and co-operate, even when we are not sure that others will oblige. . . . It leads people to take active roles in their community, to behave morally, and to compromise. People who trust others aren't quite so ready to dismiss ideas they disagree with.

Part of the drive towards inclusiveness is that in the past fifty years there has been a continuous social pressure to eliminate all-male organizations of all kinds. We are now at a point that the only place a man can enjoy the exclusive company of other men apart from a Masonic Lodge is in a men's sports league or in prison. At the same time, masculinity is characterized as toxic, violent, and cruel. Yet the vast majority of men are masculine and are not violent or cruel but kind, loving and helpful. Masonry provides a forum to discuss life from a masculine viewpoint and encourage us to live like a gentlemen, with courtesy and honour. With a new paradigm we will not feel that we can sacrifice this almost unique quality of our organization—its devotion to the masculine viewpoint—on the altar of following the crowd, or the hope that we can get more members by destroying who we are.

Following the paradigm of bigness led us to dilute all our principles. The very first man I raised asked me, "We don't really have to believe in all this morality shit, do we?", and I realized with horror the terrible mistake we made in not blackballing him. When my son was thinking about joining the Craft, but was unsure if he really could pass the requirement of a belief in a Supreme Being, an older Mason told him, "Oh, just say you do. It doesn't matter." This made him question whether he wanted to join an organization where he was encouraged to lie. Indeed, finding that there is a discrepancy between what is said and what is done is one of the most significant factors I have found in the disenchantment of some younger Masons with the Craft.

Even Charity, so fundamental a principle to Masons, becomes diluted when we expect it to be big. Many charitable initiatives were started many years ago with the thought that the huge membership would voluntarily contribute funds to support them, but as the membership dwindled, the cart has begun pulling the horse. Rather than letting our desire for charity drive us to create charitable

projects, the desire to maintain the charitable projects results in our doing anything to keep them going. So, we try to draw our funds from non-Masons, and make up for the lack of volunteers by hiring non-Masons to do our work, so that eventually Masons have very little to do with Masonic charities. Yet at the same time, I see groups of younger Masons starting new charitable initiatives which are small-scale, involve only Masons, and which are very satisfactory to donors and recipients both.

So, let's abandon the paradigm which has done so much harm to our organization. Before the twentieth century Masonry made no bones about being an élite organization which was not part of the mainstream. Masonry has not been a part of the mainstream of our society for fifty years and more, yet we continue to act on a paradigm that is based on the illusion that it is so. Let us adopt instead a paradigm where our Lodges consist of a small number of committed, active, younger members, where our charity is at a scale appropriate to our memberships, and rises from our perception of need, not our desire to preserve an institution. Let us focus on what Masonry has to offer to the world: unusual if not unique things which men can't get anywhere else, and are desperately desired by young men right now, if they only knew where to find them: a haven from the outside world, the closely bonded fellowship of brothers who are closer than mere friends and the pursuit of gentlemanliness and right conduct.

Ed' I am indebted to the JGW RWBro Uchman for contacting RWBro Jardine of the GL of Manitoba. This paper was presented at the Western Canada Conference, I am always waxing lyrical about how good well-researched papers should always see the light of day more than once. RWBro Jardine, I should like to invite you to furnish me with any other papers that you have done and also any other articles you will compile in the future.

Here is a definition of a word found within Masonic ritual that is not common outside of our Lodge rooms.

Assiduity. One might hear the word assiduity in great oratory: Thomas Jefferson and Winston Churchill have used it. Masons hear it during an annual ceremony, where it is part of an instruction. Assiduity is an obscure word with the several meanings of 'constant diligence', and 'close personal attention or care of a person'. These are traits we expect in those who lead us; that they will always focus on being a leader, and be aware of the needs of the Lodge. Learning from the example of the esteemed Brethren who have gone before us, and demonstrating those abilities to others, is how leadership in our Fraternity offers a path for good men to become better.

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Ed' WBro Kern, has been a staunch supplier of his word definitions for some time now and I look forward to many more in the future. It is brethren such as these who take the time to furnish publications like the AF that makes the work of an editor a pleasure. Thank you again Wbro Kern!

