

## 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***