

FREEMASONRY IN THE 21st 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 21st 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