

Everything Old Becomes New Again

While “old” issues and topics continue to be examined by members our Craft today in some circles as if they were “new” issues facing Freemasonry, we easily find that in 1963 the same issues existed. We see them addressed again at a Masonic education conference just seven years ago in 2007, and they continue to be written about and remain topics of discussions on many Internet sites and Masonic Podcasts.

This article looks at both instances and the many questions yet to be answered for the good of the order about membership, retention, Masonic education, practices straying from the “traditional path,” and the uniqueness of the Fraternity itself.

Especially Issues In Freemasonry

I had a wonderful couple of days at the 2007, [59th Session] Midwest Conference on Masonic Education in Evansville, Indiana this weekend. Grand Masters, Past Grand Masters, education officers and others interested in Masonic education throughout the region gathered for this annual program to discuss the nuts and bolts of programs used in their jurisdictions.



Christopher Hodapp

I was honored to be asked to participate in the afternoon session, moderated by brother Chad Simpson, Asst. Grand Secretary of Ohio. Because so-called Traditional Observance (TO) and European Concept I(EC) lodges are gaining in popularity across the country, Chad brought a group of us together who are involved in these lodges to explain and demystify them, as well as to debunk some of the misconceptions around them.

The others on the panel were:

- Dennis Chornenky of Academia Lodge No. 847 in California, spoke about Traditional Observance lodges and the Masonic Restoration Foundation (MRF). he also gave a brief explanation of California's Masonic Formation Certification program.

_ Robert Tomlinson, PGM of Kansas and Master of Inner Quest Lodge No.456 spoke about their strict interpretation of the T.O. concept.

- I explained the differences between Traditional Observance and European Concept lodges, and our desire at Lodge Vitruvian No. 767 in Indianapolis to create our own model of a formal lodge, with a greater concentration on the festive board and Masonic education, as opposed to the stricter T.O. formats and ceremonies.

- Joey Skyles of Kansas gave an outstanding presentation on generational trends and why the WWII generation, the Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y and the Millennials believe, say and do what they do.

- Mark Tabbert, Director of Collections for the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Museum in Alexandria, Virginia finished up the session with an historical overview that magically seemed to wrap up all of our presentations, even if we didn't all collaborate ahead of time.

There have been situations across the country when Grand Masters [and other brothers as well] have been unnerved, put off or downright spooked by the notion of TO/EC lodges, claiming them to be elitist, exclusive or otherwise discriminatory to the American customs of Freemasonry (Terry Tilton used the word "antithetical," which I disagree with).

Those who have attended them know this is far from the truth. But what is clear is that an admittedly small - but growing - population within the fraternity is looking for a more formal lodge and educational lodge experience, a more convivial festive board, slower degree advancement, realistic dues,

greater involvement of EAs and FCs. These lodges are smaller - intentionally so - but stress regular involvement instead of passive card-carrying members who never show up.

What I find interesting is that the Allied Masonic Degree chapters are patterned on just this kind of model. And the AMD is the fastest growing appendant body in the US. AMD is filling a need with its small chapter size and concentration on education, participation, and the feast.

Neither AMD nor TO/EC lodges are some magic bullet to "fix" Freemasonry. They are probably not the future of American Freemasonry. But they represent the 21st century inklings of what Masonry has done historically since its modern beginnings in 1717.

Masonry has changed like clockwork every 25-30 years to suit the needs and desires of the society in which it resides, and the men who join it - until 1970, when it stopped. Because Masonry froze in its post-WWII model and failed to make changes 30 years later, we now sit here suffering from six decades of hardening of the arteries. That's no one's fault - the WWII generation has kept this fraternity alive and running when the Vietnam-era men refused to join. We owe them our gratitude and respect. But we have to make twice as many changes today as evolution would have naturally done before.

These lodges are satisfying a growing niche that NEEDS to be satisfied, of men who are completely turned off by the 1950s model lodge of meeting for a bologna sandwich, opening, reading the minutes, paying the bills and going home by 8:00. These smaller lodges treat the whole evening as lodge night and their members want their evening to be special.

Freemasonry is supposed to be anything but ordinary, but the last five decades have concentrated on membership and the grinding out of the work to keep numbers up. The new men knocking on our lodge doors know more about us than most of our members do, and they are seeking the legendary lodges of our illustrious forefathers. If what we give them is a flat, dull experience and lodges that do not serve the needs of their active members, they won't be back. And they'll be the worst anti-Masonic salesmen ever created – not on mythical anti-religious grounds, but by warning off other men because Freemasonry wasted their time, their money and their enthusiasm.

As far as my experience is concerned, the biggest success of TO and EC lodges has not been a stream of enthusiastic members flooding into them. The biggest success has been visitors or just interested bystanders who have read about them taking the ideas from these lodges and making positive changes in their home lodges. These brethren are simply doing what every generation of Masons have done until the 1970s - they are remaking Masonry to suit their needs and desires.

The last Midwest Conference held in Indianapolis was in 1967. Dwight Smith, PGM addressed the group. In his talk, he asked a flurry of questions we still have not answered 40 years later:

- ✓ Why have Masons lost interest in Masonry? The way to find out is for a Mason who used to be disinterested to ask a Mason who still has no interest.
- ✓ What else can we learn if we have the courage to ask the questions?

- ✓ Whether newly raised Masons were solicited, directly or indirectly, to petition for the degrees.
- ✓ Why the disinterested Mason became disinterested.
- ✓ What the Brother expected and hoped to find in Masonry; whether he found it.
- ✓ Whether the Brother has been disappointed or disillusioned in his Masonic experience, and if so, in what manner.
- ✓ Whether the officers of the lodge "got through" to him when the degrees were conferred.
- ✓ Whether his intelligence was insulted by the manner in which the ritualistic work was presented.
- ✓ Whether the degrees of Symbolic Freemasonry impress him as challenging, or meaningless, or somewhere in between.
- ✓ Whether the officers and Brethren conferred the degrees upon him and then showed no further interest in him except at dues paying time.
- ✓ Whether he is bored by our ritualistic work or by the meetings of his lodge in general, and why.
- ✓ Does he feel that Freemasonry has become anachronistic; i.e., something that does not belong to the times in which we live?
- ✓ Has he ever been called upon to do anything for his lodge - anything that was really challenging, that is?
- ✓ Would he enjoy performing a service for his lodge? - What can his lodge do to regain his interest?
- ✓ What does he think about the quality of Masonic membership, particularly in his own lodge?

- ✓ What does he think of the quality of leadership in his lodge? - Does he feel comfortable when attending a meeting of his lodge?
- ✓ Does he have anything in common with the membership? - Does his lodge provide a source of fellowship that is satisfying?
- ✓ In his mind, what kind of image does Freemasonry have?
- ✓ What is the image of Freemasonry in the circle of his acquaintance?
- ✓ If the public image of Freemasonry in his circle of acquaintance is good, why is it good" If poor, why is it poor?
- ✓ What does Freemasonry mean to him? If it should cease to be of any force in his community and nation, would he miss it?
- ✓ Is he proud to be a Mason?

directing as a commercial filmmaker. He has written for corporate and non-profit programs, and his voice has appeared in many television and radio commercials. His newest book, "Deciphering the Lost Symbol," was published in 2010. He is a 33rd degree Scottish Rite Freemason, and he lives in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The time is long past for us to have answers to these questions and more. Maybe by the time it's in Indianapolis again, we will have some.

Source: Christopher Hodapp, Midwest Conference on Masonic Education 2007,
<http://freemasonsfordummies.blogspot.com/2007/04/midwest-conference-on-masonic-education.html>

WHO IS CHRISTOPHER HODAPP?

Christopher L. Hodapp is the former editor of the "Journal of The Masonic Society." He is the author of the best-selling "Freemasons For Dummies," and "Solomon's Builders: Freemasons, Founding Fathers and the Secrets of Washington D.C." He is the co-author with Alice Von Kannon of "The Templar Code For Dummies" and "Conspiracy Theories and Secret Societies For Dummies." He has appeared on the History and Discovery channels on the subject of Freemasonry, its role in the founding of the United States and the building of Washington D.C. Hodapp has spent more than twenty years editing, writing and

The Wisdom of

Dwight L. Smith



Dwight L. Smith

"The purpose of Freemasonry is the same as it has been since the day when the stones for King Solomon's Temple were hewn, squared and numbered in the quarries where they were raised. It is to take an individual- just one man at a time, mind you, and as good a man as possible-and try to make a better man out of him. That is all."

-Whither Are we Traveling? Dwight L. Smith, 1963.

Published in 1963, *From Whither Are we Traveling?* has become one of the most reprinted Masonic essays of the last decade.

Dwight Smith, known for his direct, sensible and level-headed approach to issues facing Freemasonry, offered several papers about the fraternity. It is this particular writing, however that has spanned the decades offering continued wisdom and truth of what was not only essential in the 1960s, but just as essential today for our Craft.

The following is taken from Chapter 1, Section III, *Self-Examination*:

"1. Let's face it! Can we expect Freemasonry to retain its past glory and prestige unless the level of leadership is raised above its present position? On many an occasion in the past 14 years, Masters and Secretaries have come into my office to ask my advice on what to do about lagging interest. Again and again I have said, "There is

nothing wrong with your Lodge, nor with Freemasonry, that good leadership will not cure." I believe that.

2. How well are we guarding the West Gate? Again, let's face it. We are permitting too many to pass who can pay the fee and little else. On every hand I hear the same whispered complaint, "We used to be getting petitions for the degrees from the good, substantial leaders in the community. Now we are getting..." Just what it is they are getting, you know as well as I.

3. Has Freemasonry become too easy to obtain? Fees for the degrees are ridiculously low; annual dues are far too low. Everything is geared to speed – getting through as fast as possible and on to something else. The Lodge demands little and gets little. It expects loyalty but does almost nothing to put a claim on a man's loyalty. When we ourselves place a cheap value on Masonic membership, how can we expect petitioners and new members to prize it?

4. Are we not worshipping at the altar of bigness? Look it in the face: too few Lodges, with those Lodges we do have much too large. Instead of devoting our thoughts and energies to ways whereby a new Master Mason may find a sphere of activity within his Lodge, we let him get lost in the shuffle. Then we nag and harangue at him because he does not come to meetings to wander around with nothing to do. We are hard at work to make each Lodge so large that it becomes an impersonal aggregation of strangers – a closed corporation.

5. What can we expect when we have permitted Freemasonry to become subdivided into a score of organizations? Look at it. Each organization dependent upon the parent body for its existence, yet each

jockeying for a position of supremacy, and each claiming to be the Pinnacle to which any Master Mason may aspire. We have spread ourselves thin, and Ancient Craft Masonry is the loser. Downgraded, the Symbolic Lodge is used only as a springboard. A shortsighted Craft we have been to create in our Fraternity a condition wherein the tail can, and may wag the dog.

6. Has the American passion for bigness and efficiency dulled the spirit of Masonic charity? The “Box of Fraternal Assistance” which once occupied the central position in every Lodge room has been replaced by an annual per capita tax. That benevolence which for ages was one of the sweetest by-products of the teaching of our gentle Craft has, I fear, ceased to be a gift from the heart and has become the writing of a check. And unless the personal element is there, clarity becomes as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.

7. Do we pay enough attention to the Festive Board? Should any reader have to ask what the Festive Board is, that in itself will serve to show how far we have strayed from the traditional path of Freemasonry. Certainly, the Festive Board is not the wolfing of ham sandwiches, pie and coffee at the conclusion of a degree. It is the Hour of Refreshment in all its beauty and dignity; an occasion for inspiration and fellowship; a time when the noble old traditions of the Craft are preserved.

8. What has become of that “course of moral instruction, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols,” that Freemasonry is supposed to be? If it is a course of instruction, then there should be teachers, and if ours is a progressive science, then the teaching of a Master Mason should not end

when he is raised. I am not talking about dry, professorial lectures or sermons – heavens no! That is the kind of thing that makes Masonic education an anathema. Where are the parables and allegories? Alas, they have descended into booklets and stunts. No winder interest is so hard to sustain.

9. Hasn’t the so-called Century of the Common Man contributed to making our Fraternity a little too common? We cannot expect to retain the prestige the Craft has enjoyed in the past if we continue without challenge to permit the standards of the picnic ground, the bowling alley, the private club and the golf links to be brought into the Lodge hall. Whether we like it or not, a general lowering of standards has left its mark on every Lodge in Indiana, large and small.

10. Are there not too many well-meaning Brethren who are working overtime to make Freemasonry something other than Freemasonry?

It was an unhappy day when some eager beaver conceived the idea that our Craft should adopt the methods of the service club, or the luncheon group, or the civic league, or the Playboy outfit. Whoever the eager beaver was, he lost sight of the fact that one of the reasons our Fraternity is prized so highly is that it does not operate like other organizations.

Well, that should be enough for one dose. The following pages elaborate on the ten points enumerated above.

Let me give you fair warning. In the following essays I shall call a spade a spade. Some of my readers are not going to like it. But what I have to say I believe our Craft needs to hear

and it is only for the “good of the Order” that it is said.

I shall propose no bright new ideas – not one. All I am going to advocate is that Freemasonry remain Freemasonry; and if we have strayed from the traditional path, we had better be moving back to the main line while there is yet time to restore the prestige and respect, the interest and loyalty and devotion that once was ours.”

Source: **The Masonic Leader**,
<http://www.masonicleader.com/the-wisdom-of-mwb-dwight-l-smith/>

Smith’s final sentence of *From Whither Are We Traveling* offers an additional consideration for reflection:

I come to the conclusion of this series of exploratory articles with my faith in the basic worth of our ancient Craft unshaken, convinced that the solution to Freemasonry’s problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?

For a full transcript of *From Whither Are we Traveling* visit:
<http://www.masonicleader.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/WhitherAreWeTraveling.pdf>

WHO WAS DWIGHT L. SMITH?

Dwight L. Smith was born on January 30, 1909, near Pennville, Jay County, Indiana. He graduated from Indiana University in 1931 and held several jobs in journalism prior to being hired in 1934 as news editor of the Salem Republican-Leader.

He was raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason in Pennville Lodge No. 212 in 1934. He transferred his membership to Salem Lodge No. 21 the same year and remained a member there until his death. He served as Worshipful Master of Salem Lodge in 1937 and as its Secretary for three years. He held honorary

membership in 54 Indiana Lodges and in three Lodges in other jurisdictions.

He was a member of the York Rite Bodies and the Valley of Indianapolis, Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite. In 1949 he was coroneted a Thirty-Third Degree, Honorary Member of the Supreme Council, A. A. S. R.

In 1941 he was appointed Junior Grand Deacon of the Grand Lodge of Indiana and became Grand Master on May 22, 1945. In 1947 he became Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Indiana, a position he held until 1979. He was Secretary/Treasurer of the Conference of Grand Secretaries of North America from 1954-1976, except for a one-year term as the Conference’s President, 1968-1969.

He was editor of *The Indiana Freemason* and in 1968 he wrote and presented to the Indiana Grand Lodge the history of Indiana Freemasonry, *Goodly Heritage*. Other Masonic writings include a history of Salem Lodge No. 21 and three Masonic plays.

He was also a member of the Royal Order of Scotland, Philalethes Society, and the Society of Blue Friars.

M. W. Brother Smith was the recipient of the Henry Price Medal (Massachusetts), the Josiah Hayden Drummond Medal (Maine), the Caleb B. Smith Medal of Honor (Indiana) and the Daniel Coxe Medal (New Jersey). He was awarded the James Royal Case Medal of Excellence by the Lodge of Research of Connecticut. He was Honorary Grand Master of six jurisdictions and Honorary Grand Secretary of another jurisdiction.

He was elected to full membership in Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076 in London.

He was called to the Lodge Eternal on March 27, 1993.

Source - **Dwight L. Smith Indian Lodge of Research**,
<http://www.indianalodgeofresearch.com/index.php/dwight-l-smith>