

Brian R. Song

Queen City Lodge #761

Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Tennessee

Concept of Masonic Renewal- What does it mean to you now and in the future?

Freemasonry is, notwithstanding, one of the most ancient societies in the world, if not the most so. As time has flowed and the era has changed, so has the fraternity, in order to accommodate the present day, as the famous quote “adapt or die” dictates. I myself am a “greenhorn” in terms of Masonry. I was raised only this past December, and though I have limitless zeal for the Craft in all its aspects, I fully recognize that I am bereft of the wisdom of an experienced Brother or Past Master. That being said, my interpretation is from the perspective of the new generation, though mixed with tenets and input from brothers past.

The word “renewal” is frequently associated with resuming some activity after some duration of absence. Moving forward is an excellent way of adapting to the times, but it is not the only way. Reinventing the wheel has certainly made it to where Masonry has grown and flourished. However, some of the greatest assets to ensure an enduring future for the fraternity can be found in its long and rich history. Hence, in this case, my take on “renewal” means not to simply go forth in a trailblazing manner to befit the times, but to draw forth from the minds and methods of brethren past. Masonic renewal for me has meant taking the necessary measures to keep the fraternity up to present day, but taking note all the while not to compromise the tenets of the order since its inception.

The United Grand Lodge of England gave the foundation for how lodges were established and ran centuries ago, setting the precedent for many of the customs that North American Masonry possesses today. One of the most important concepts established was the idea of academic lodges, which have been implemented in some universities in North America, namely Harvard, George Mason, and Massachusetts

Institute of Technology. Going forth, it is likely that more and more members will be of a younger age group than their predecessors, probably around the 21-30ish age range. While it is important that means of recruitment are kept, there are already sufficient measures for that; such as DeMolay, familial lineage, and even just an inquiring mind who saw the square and compasses somewhere or heard of the fraternity at some point. While thinking about renewal, therefore, it is inevitable to discuss means of retention, which is invariably more important, one could argue. While it is important to have a sustainable amount of brethren, it is far more critical to have “retention”, or a number of dedicated and devoted brothers, who could provide leadership for the lodge (and their respective appendant bodies). This is more succinctly said as the concept of “quality over quantity”. While it is important to have renewal with zeal, it is equally paramount that we take the necessary measures as to prevent change to who we are fundamentally regarding our principles especially.

The academic lodges established by the UGLE gave an opportunity for brethren to dwell not only as a fraternity, but within an institution of learning. In the world of today, where there is an emphasis on higher education, lodges in a university setting (or in close proximity) can not only “demystify” the fraternity with public events on campus being held, but also synthesize the academic wants of students and faculty (both who are Masons and those who are interested), while shifting the fraternity back into its philosophical and intellectual origins. The lodges implemented in North America have done well for the fraternity, and I believe

taking the time to plant those same seeds through the continent would not only strengthen the institution, but lay down the foundation for its future as well.

The reason that caused me to take my first few steps in Masonry was an appreciation of the tenets of the Order, hearing about it from a few people at an oncology clinic I interned, and watching *National Treasure* as a child, becoming enamored with the fact of such an age-old society. Ever since joining, I have been elated to not only dwell with men of all walks of life, but to learn about history and philosophy. Ritual and degree work have also been a huge part of the fraternity for me, and it is also within those ceremonies that I feel like I learn a plethora about not only Masonry, but about myself and improve the state of my ashlar. Amongst my generation, many of us have a leaning towards the improvement of philosophical and esoteric knowledge, for both ritual and learning. That being said, an effort for renewal in the future (at least for me) would also include focus on Masonic education, which would greatly help the revitalization of Masonry. Masonic education in particular offers the opportunity to talk about pensive philosophical aspects of our order and its history, and more importantly, thinking about them critically as to how they are relevant to day-to-day life. Given the past, it is also important to note the role the Age of Enlightenment with respect to virtue and intellectual light. This is particularly important when talking about a time where virtue and philosophy are seen as trivial or only thought of in passing.

One of the main areas that renewal would affect would be the stated meeting. The prospect of sitting in lodge to conduct business and logistics is not always one that strikes mirth and excitement, and though it can be monotonous, the stated

meeting should not be a reason why brethren fall out of Masonry. The Masonic Renewal Committee reinvigorated the paradigm when it published its text on improving attendance in lodge, and going forth, those efforts can be continued with other means of promoting fellowship, although some activities will be contingent upon the lodge (based on their geographic distribution and the demographics of the brethren there). Nonetheless, some common ground that can be met falls within the prospect of a formal sharing of good news at the end of stated meetings, in order to cement that concept of being a society of friends and brothers, as well as to always end the meeting on a positive note. With regards to before the meeting, while brethren are mingling, an agenda could be distributed to inform the brethren of a structure for the minutes, which would catch them up to speed and give them notice of when the floor is open to input to make for a smoother and more effective meeting.

While Freemasonry is ancient, it does not mean it is incompatible with the march of time. Throughout the centuries, there have been efforts made to adapt the fraternity to the circumstances of that era, which is true even today. When the concept of renewal is brought up, it is crucial to think ahead, but while doing so, one must also take note that renewal can also be brought up by methodology from the past, as with the case on academic lodges and emphasis on Masonic education. Furthermore, the established principles of Freemasonry should never be compromised in order to fit with the times, otherwise, that defeats the purpose of going forward as age-old fraternity. Moreover, the purpose of renewal is to keep this

institution of ours alive and well, to fulfill its ultimate purpose of dedication to God and service to humanity.